

may live to bear your part in her triumphs and songs of deliverance : It is an argument of the true publicness and tenderness of your spirits for the present, and as sweet a sign as can appear upon your souls, that you are reserved for better days.

3. Righteousness in doing, and meekness in suffering the will of God, is another mark or note, distinguishing and describing those persons whom God will preserve in the evil day. You have both these together in Zeph. ii. 3. "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, 1 Pet. iii. 12. If righteousness brings you into danger, the righteous God will take care of you in that danger, and bring you out of it. Oh! it is a singular comfort, when a man can say, It was not my sin, but my duty, that brought me into trouble; this affliction met me in the path and way of my duty; it is for thy sake, O Lord, that I am in trouble; as the martyr that held up the bible at the stake, saying, *This hath brought me hither.*

To conclude: Manage all your sufferings for Christ, with christian meekness: As righteousness must bring you into them, so meekness must carry you through them; if you avenge yourselves, you take the cause out of God's hand into your own; but the meek Christian leaves it to the Lord, and shall never have cause to repent of his so doing. If thou have an upright heart with God, a tender and mournful heart for sin, and thou suffer with meekness for righteousness sake, thou art one of those souls to whom that sweet voice is directed in my text,—

Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.



Π Α Α Ν Η Α Ο Γ Ι Α.

A succinet and seasonable Discourse of the Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth, and Remedies of MENTAL ERRORS.

THE reverend author of the ensuing treatises, having in them explained and defended several gospel-truths, unto which divers things in the writings of the reverend Dr. Crisp, deceased, do

seem very opposite ; whereas some of us, who subscribed a paper, the design whereof was only to testify, that we believed certain writings of the doctor's *never before published*, were faithfully transcribed by his son, the publisher of them, which paper is now, by the bookseller, prefixed to the whole volume ; containing a large preface which we never saw till after the publication, together with all the doctor's former works that were *published many years before* ; and are hereupon by some weak people misunderstood, as if, by that certificate, we intended an approbation of all that is contained in that volume. We declare we had no such intention : As the paper we subscribed hath no word in it that gives any such intimation : But we are well pleased these later writings are published (in reference whereto we only certified our belief, which we fixedly retain of the publisher's fidelity) as they contain many passages in them that may, in some measure, remedy the hard and hurtful construction that many expressions were more liable to *in the former* ; whereof the doctor seemed apprehensive himself, when, in the beginning of his discourse on Tit. ii. 11, 12. he speaks thus : " [Beloved, I am jealous of you with an holy jealousy," 1 Cor. xi. 2, 3. " Lest after the first wooing of you in Christ's name, that ye might be espoused unto him ; I say, I am jealous, and fear, lest as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtilty, namely, bewitching her to a presumptuous, licentious adventuring on God's gentleness, while she tasted the forbidden fruit ; so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in him, namely, by presuming too much upon him, and adventuring to continue in sin, in hope that grace may abound. For the preventing of which dangerous miscarriage, which hath been the dangerous lot of many thousands, I thought good to step in with this text, which I am persuaded will prove a seasonable warning to some at least."] And this pious caution of the author herein, lest he should be misunderstood, gives us some grounds to believe that he intended them not in the more exceptionable sense. It is best if an unwary reader receives hurt, that he receives his healing also from the same hand. And whereas a paper was printed upon this occasion soon after the publication of the doctor's works, we willingly adopt so much of it as is requisite to our present purpose ; which is to this effect :

‘ Some who subscribed this certificate, saw only the paper itself, to which subscription was desired ; never having perused the works of Dr. Crisp. The certificate only concerned the son, not the father ; and certified only concerning the son, That they who should subscribe it, believed him in this to deal truly ; that he was not a Falsarius ; that he would not say that was his fa-

‘ther’s, which was not so ; a paper so sober, so modest, was (*taken by itself*) scarce refusable by a friend.

‘The son’s preface, some that subscribed this certificate saw not, nor had any notice, or the least imagination of its contents ; otherwise, the part of a friend had certainly been done as well in advising against much of the preface, as in subscribing the certificate.

‘For the works of this reverend person themselves, as it no way concerned the subscribing this certificate, to know what they were ; so from the opinion that went of the author among many good men, that he was a learned, pious, good man, it was supposed they were likely to have in them, many good and useful things ; to which it was only needful to think them *his*, not *to think them perfect*.

‘We may, in some respect, judge of books as of men ; i. e. reckon, that though divers very valuable men have had remarkable failings, yet that, upon the whole, it is better they have lived, and been known in the world, than that they should not have lived, or have lived obscure.

‘The truth is (which we have often considered) that though the great doctrines of the christian religion do make a most coherent, comely scheme, which every one should labour to comprehend and digest in his mind ; yet when the gospel first becomes effectual for the changing men’s hearts, it is by God’s blessing this or that passage which drops : The most discern not the series and connection of truths at first, and too little afterwards.

‘Upon that view of Dr. Crisp’s writings we have had since the publication, we find there are many things said in them, with that good savour, quickness, and spirit, as to be very apt to make good impressions upon men’s hearts ; and do judge, that being greatly affected with the grace of God to sinners himself, his sermons did thereupon run much in that strain. All our minds are little and incomprehensive ; we cannot receive the weight and impression of all necessary things at once, but with some inequality ; so that when the seal goes deeper in some part, it is shallower in some others.

‘If some parts of Dr. Crisp’s works be more liable to exception, the danger of hurt thereby seems, in some measure, obviated in some other : As when he says, Pag. 46. Vol. I. *Sanctification of life, is an inseparable companion with the justification of a person by the free grace of Christ*. And Vol. IV. p. 93. *That in respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still ; or else we are lawless, to live every man as seems good in his own eyes, which I know no true Christian does so much as think*.

‘ In like manner, whereas, in Vol. II. Sermon. 15. *and perhaps elsewhere, the doctor seems to be against evidencing our justification and union to Christ, by our sanctification and new obedience ; we have the truth of God in this matter plainly delivered by him, Vol. IV. p. 36. when he teacheth, that our obedience is a comfortable evidence of our being in Christ ; and on that, as well as on many accounts, necessary.*

‘ The difference between him, and other good men, seems to lie not so much *in the things* which the one or the other of them believe, as about *their order and reference to one another* ; where, it is true, there may be very *material difference* : But we reckon, that notwithstanding what is more controvertible in these writings, there are much more *material things*, wherein they cannot but agree, and would have come much nearer each other, even in these things, if they did take some words or terms which come into use on the one or the other hand, *in the same sense* ; but when one uses a word in *one sense*, another uses the same word (or understands it, being used) in quite *another sense*, here seems a vast disagreement, which proves, at length, to be verbal only, and really none at all : As let by *condition*, be meant a *deserving cause*, (in which case it is well known *civilians* are wont to take it) and the one side would never use it, concerning any good act that can be done by us, or good habit that is wrought in us, in order to our present acceptance with God, or final salvation. Let be meant by it somewhat, that, by the constitution of the gospel-covenant, and in the nature of the thing, is *requisite* to our present and eternal well-being, without the least notion of the desert, but utmost abhorrence of any such notion in this case ; and the other side would as little refuse it. But what need is there for contending at all about a *law-term*, about the proper or present use whereof, there is so little agreement between *them it seems best to serve*, and *them it offends*. Let it go, and they will well enough understand one another. Again, let *justification* be taken for that which is complete, entire, and full, as it results at last from all its causes and concurrents ; and, on the one hand, it would never be denied, that Christ’s righteousness justifies us at the bar of God in the day of judgment, *as the only deserving cause* ; or affirmed, that our faith, repentance, sincerity, do justify us there, *as any cause at all*. Let justification be meant only of being justified in *this or that particular respect* ; as for instance, against *this particular accusation*, of never having been a believer : And the honest mistaken *prefacer* would never have said, O horrid ! upon its being said, Christ’s righteousness doth not justify us in this case : For he very well knows, Christ’s righteousness will justify no man that *never was a believer*. But that which must immediately justify him *against this particular accusation*, must

‘ be proving, that he did sincerely believe ; which shews his interest
 ‘ in Christ’s righteousness, which then is the only deserving cause
 ‘ of his full and entire justification.

‘ There is an expression in Vol. I. p. 46. *That salvation is not
 ‘ the end of any good work we do*, which is like that of another ; *we
 ‘ are to act from life, not for life*. Neither of which are to be
 ‘ rigidly taken, as it is likely they were never meant in the strict
 ‘ sense. For the former, this reverend author gives us himself the
 ‘ handle for a gentle interpretation, in what he presently subjoins ;
 ‘ where he makes the *end of our good works to be the manifestation
 ‘ of our obedience and subjection ; the setting forth the praise of the
 ‘ glory of the grace of God* ; which seem to imply, that he meant
 ‘ the foregoing negation in a comparative, not in an absolute sense ;
 ‘ understanding the glory of God to be *more principal* ; and so,
 ‘ that by *end*, he meant the very *ultimate end* : So for the other, it
 ‘ is likely it was meant, that we should not act or work *for life only*,
 ‘ without aiming and endeavouring that we might come to work
 ‘ *from life also*.

‘ For it is not with any tolerable charity supposable, that one
 ‘ would *deliberately say* the *one* or the *other* of these in the rigid
 ‘ sense of the words ; or that he would not, upon consideration,
 ‘ presently unsay it, being calmly reasoned with. For it were, in
 ‘ effect to *abandon human nature*, and to sin against a very funda-
 ‘ mental law of our creation, not to intend our own felicity : it were
 ‘ to make our first and most deeply fundamental duty, in one great
 ‘ essential branch of it, our sin, viz. *To take the Lord for our God* :
 ‘ For *to take him for our God* most essentially includes our taking
 ‘ him for our *supreme good* ; which we all know is included in the
 ‘ notion of the *last end* ; it were to make it unlawful to strive against
 ‘ all sin, and particularly against sinful aversion from God ; wherein
 ‘ lies the very death of the soul, or the sum of its misery ; or to
 ‘ strive after perfect conformity to God in holiness, and the full
 ‘ fruition of him ; wherein its final blessedness doth principally
 ‘ consist.

‘ It were to teach us to violate the great precepts of the gospel ;
 ‘ *Repent that your sins may be blotted out.—Strive to enter in at the
 ‘ strait gate.—Work out your salvation with fear and trembling* :
 ‘ To obliterate the patterns and precedents set before us in the
 ‘ gospel. *We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be jus-
 ‘ tified.—I bear down my body, lest I should be a cast-away.—That
 ‘ thou mayest save thyself, and them that hear thee*.

‘ It were to suppose us bound to do more for the salvation of
 ‘ others, than our own salvation. We are required to save others
 ‘ with fear, plucking them out of the fire. Nay, we were not
 ‘ (by this rule strictly understood) so much as to pray for our own

‘salvation; (which is a doing of somewhat) when no doubt, we are
 ‘to pray for the success of the gospel, to this purpose, on behalf of
 ‘other men.

‘It were to make all the threatenings of eternal death, and pro-
 ‘mises of eternal life we find in the gospel of our blessed Lord,
 ‘useless; as motives to shun the one, and obtain the other: for
 ‘they can be motives no way, but as the escaping of the former,
 ‘and the attainment of the other, have, with us, the place and con-
 ‘sideration of an end.

‘It makes what is mentioned in the scripture, as the character
 ‘and commendation of the most eminent saints, a fault; as of
 ‘Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, &c. That *they sought the better and*
 ‘*heavenly country; and declared plainly*, that they did so; which
 ‘necessarily implies their making it their end.

‘But let none be so harsh as to think of any good man, that he
 ‘intended any thing of all this; if every passage that falls from us
 ‘be stretched and tortured with the utmost severity, we shall find
 ‘little to do besides accusing others, and defending ourselves, as
 ‘long as we live.’

A spirit of meekness and love will do more to our common peace,
 than all the disputations in the world.

Upon the whole, we are so well assured of the peaceful, healing
 temper of the present author of these treatises, that we are per-
 suaded he designed such a course of managing the controversies
 wherein he hath concerned himself, as to prevent, on the one hand
 injury to the memory of the dead; and on the other, any hurt or
 danger to the living.

Nor do we say thus much of him, as if he sought, or did need
 any letters of recommendation from us; but as counting this testi-
 mony to truth, and this expression of respect to him, a debt; to
 the spontaneous payment whereof, nothing more was requisite, be-
 sides such a fair occasion as the providence of God hath now laid
 before us, inviting us hereunto.

John Howe,
Fin. Alsop,
Nath. Mather,
Increase Mather,

John Turner,
Rich. Bures,
Tho. Powel.

AN EPISTLE TO THE READER.

CANDID READER,

CENSURE not this treatise of errors, as an error in my prudentials, in sending it forth at such an improper time as this. I should never spontaneously have awakened sleeping controversies, after God's severe castigation of his people for them, and in the most proper and hopeful season for their redintegration.

And beside what I have formerly said, I think fit here to add, That if the attack had been general, and not so immediately and particularly upon that post or quarter I was set to defend, I should, with Elihu, have modestly waited till some abler and more skilful hand had undertaken the defence of this cause.

If ever I felt a temptation to envy the happiness of my brethren, it hath been whilst I saw them quietly feeding their flocks, and myself forced to spend some part of my precious and most useful time (devoted to the same service) in combating with unquiet and erring brethren; but I see I must not be my own chuser. Notwithstanding I hope, and am in some measure persuaded, that public benefit will redound to the church from this irksome labour of mine. And that this strife will spread no farther, but the malady be cured by an antidote growing in the very place where it began: and that the Christian camp will not take a general alarm from such a single duel.

The book now in thy hands consisteth of four parts, viz. 1. A general discourse of *the causes and cures of errors*, very necessary at all times (especially at this time) for the reduction and establishment of seduced and staggering Christians; and nothing of that nature having occurred to my observation among the manifold polemical tracts that are extant, I thought it might be of some use to the churches of Christ, in such a virtiginous age as we live in, if the blessing of the Lord go forth with it for benefit and establishment.

2. Next, thou hast here the controversies moved by my antagonist; *first*, about the *Mosaic law*, complexly taken, which he boldly pronounces to be an Adam's covenant of works: And *secondly*, about God's covenant with Abraham, Gen. xvii. which he also makes the same with that which God made with Adam in paradise; and affirms circumcision (expressly called a seal of the righteousness of faith) to be the seal of the said covenant of works first made with Adam.

3. Finding my adversary, in the pursuit of his design, running into many Antinomian delirations, to the reproach and damage

of the cause he contends for, I thought it necessary to take the principal errors of Antinomianism into examination, especially at such a time as this, when they seem to spring afresh, to the hazard of God's truth, and the church's peace; wherein I have dealt with becoming modesty and plainness, if happily I might be any way instrumental in my plain and home-way of argumentation, to detect the falsity and dangerous nature of those notions which some good men have vented, and preserve the sounder part of the church from so dangerous a contagion.

4. In the next place, I think it necessary to advertise the reader, That whereas, in my first appendix under that head of the conditionality of the new covenant, I have asserted faith to be the condition of it, and do acknowledge, that the word *condition* is variously used among Jurists; yet I do not use it in any sense, which implies or insinuates, that there is any such condition in the new covenant, as that in Adam's covenant was, consisting in perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience; or any thing in its own nature, meritorious of the benefits promised, or capable to be performed by us in our own strength; but plainly, that it be an act of ours (though done in God's strength) which must be necessarily done before we can be actually justified or saved; and so there is found in it the true suspending nature of a condition; which is the thing I contend for, when I affirm, faith is the condition of the new covenant*.

How many senses soever may be given of this word *condition*, this is the determinate sense in which I use it throughout this controversy. And whosoever denies the suspending nature of faith, with respect to actual justification, pleads (according to my understanding) for the actual justification of infidels. And thus I find a condition defined by *Navar. Johan. Baptist. Petrus de Perus, &c. Conditio est suspensio alicujus dispositionis tantisper dum aliquid futurum fiat*. Condition is the suspension of a grant until something future be done. And again, *Conditio est quidam futurus eventus, in quem dispositio suspenditur*. A condition is some future event in which the fulfilling of a grant is suspended.

Once more, my reader possibly may be stumbled at my calling faith sometimes the instrument, and sometimes the condition of our justification, when there is so go great a controversy depending among learned men, with respect to the use of both those terms.

* It seems to be more proper, as well as more safe, to use the term *instrument*. Faith is unquestionably the appropriate *mean* by which the sinner becomes interested in the covenant of grace; but when the *date*, the parties, and the stipulations in that covenant are duly considered, it appears absurd in the extreme to assign to that heavenly grace the honour of being the condition of that eternal transaction. The righteousness of its Divine Surety alone deserves and challenges that dignity as its own.
Editor.

I therefore desire the reader to take notice, that I dive not into that controversy here, much less presume to determine it; but finding both these notions equally opposed by our Antinomians, who reject our actual justification by faith either way, and allow to faith no other use in our actual justification, but only to manifest to us what was done from eternity; I do therefore use both those terms, viz. the conditionality and instrumentality of faith, with respect unto our justification, and shew in what sense those terms are useful in this controversy, and are accommodate enough to the design and purpose for which I use them; how repugnant soever they are in that particular, wherein the learned contend about the use and application of them.

To be plain, when I say faith justifieth us as an *organ* or *instrument*; my only meaning is, that it receives, or apprehends the righteousness of Christ, by which we are justified; and so speaking to the *quomodo*, or manner of our justification, I say, with the general suffrage of Divines, we are justified instrumentally by faith.

But in our controversy with the Antinomians where another different question is moved about the *quando*, or time of our actual justification; there I affirm that we are actually justified at the time of our believing, and not before; and this being the act upon which our justification is suspended, I call *faith* the *condition* of our justification.

This I desire may be observed, lest, in my use of both these terms, my reader should think either that I am not aware of the controversy depending about those terms; or, that I do herein manifest the vacillancy of my judgment, as if I leaned sometimes to one side and sometime to another. I speak not here *ad idem*, as they do in that contest; but when I call it a *condition* of justification, my meaning is, that no man is justified until he believe. And when I call it an *instrument*, my meaning is, that it is the righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith, which doth justify us when we believe. And so I find the generality of our divines calling *faith* sometimes a *condition*, and sometimes an *instrument* of our justification, as here I do.

And if there be any expression my reader shall meet with, which is less accurate, and may be capable of another sense, I crave that candour from him, that he interpret it according to this my declared intention.

5. *Lastly*, I have added to the former a short, plain, practical sermon, to promote the peace and unity of the churches of Christ, and to prevent their relapse into past follies.

In all the parts of this discourse, I have sincerely aimed at the purity and peace of the church of God; and he greatly mistakes

that takes me for a man of contention. It is true, I am here contending with my brethren, but pure necessity brought me in, and an unpleasing irksomeness hath attended me through it, and an hearty desire and serious motion for peace amongst all the professed members of Christ, shall close and finish it. Let all litigations of this nature (at least in this critical juncture) be suspended by common consent, since they waste our time, hinder our communion, imbitter our spirits, impoverish practical godliness, grieve the Spirit of God and good men, make sport for our common enemies, who warm their own fingers at the fire of our contentions; and place more trust in our dividing lusts than they do in their own feeble arguments, or castrated penal laws to effect our ruin.

It is my grief (the Lord knows) to see the delightful communion the saints once enjoyed, whilst they walked together under the same ordinances of God, now dissolved in such a sad and scandalous degree, by the impressions of erroneous opinions, made both upon their heads and hearts. I do therefore heartily join with Budæus in his pious wish *, “That God would give his people as much constancy in retaining the truths they once received, as they had joy and comfort at their first reception of them.” I must, on this occasion, declare my just jealousy that the non-improvement of our baptismal covenant unto the great and solemn ends thereof, in our mortification, vivification, and regular communion with the church of Christ, into which society we are matriculated by it, is, at this day, punished upon professors in those fiery heats and fierce oppositions, unto which God seemeth to have penally delivered us at this day.

For my own part, it is my fixed resolution to provoke no good man if I can help it. But if their own intemperate zeal shall provoke them in pursuit of their errors, to destroy the very nature of God’s covenant of grace with Abraham and his seed, and I have a plain call (as here I had) at once to defend God’s truths, and my people’s souls against them, I will earnestly contend in the cause of truth, whilst I can move my tongue, or make use of the pen of the scribe.

Reader, I shall appeal to thee, if thou be wise and impartial, Whether any man that understands the covenant of God renewed with Abraham, (which is the grand charter, by which we and our children hold and enjoy the most invaluable privileges) can endure to see it dissolved and utterly destroyed, by making it an abolished Adam’s covenant of works; and stand by as an unconcerned

* *Utinam tam consertis manibus compertam comprehensamque veritatem semel retinere possemus quam protinus agnitam festivis oculis hilares exosculabamur.*

ed spectator, when challenged and provoked to speak in defence thereof.

Is there any thing found in God's covenant with Abraham, Gen. xvii. to make it an abolished covenant of works, which doth not as injuriously bear upon, and strike at the very life of the covenant of grace, in the last and best edition of it, under which the whole church of God now stands? What is that thing (I would fain know) in God's covenant with Abraham? Is it the promissory part of it, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee?" Gen. xvii. 7. God forbid: for the essential and sweetest part of the new covenant is contained in that promise, Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. viii. 10. Yet thou wilt find my Antagonist here forced to assert, God may become a people's God in a special manner, by virtue of the abolished covenant of works; and such he makes this covenant to be.

Or does the restipulation Abraham and his were here required to make unto God, even *to walk before him, and be perfect*; doth this make it an Adam's covenant of works? Sureiy, no. For as God there requires perfection of Abraham, so Christ requires the same perfection of all new-covenant federates now, Matth. v. 48. "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" which is altogether as much as ever God required of Abraham and his, in Gen. xvii. 1. Take perfection in what sense you will, either for a *positive* perfection, consisting in truth and sincerity; or a *comparative* perfection, consisting in the growth and more eminent degrees of grace; or a *superlative* perfection, which all new-covenant federates strive after here, Phil. iii. 12, 13. and shall certainly attain in heaven, Heb. xii. 23. In this also the covenant with Abraham, and with us, are truly and substantially one and the same.

Or doth my mistaken friend imagine, that God required this perfection of Abraham and his, as in the first covenant he required it from Adam and all his? *viz.* to be performed and maintained in his own strength, under penalty of the curse. But now, though Christ command perfection, yet what duty lies in any command, answerable strength for it lies in the promise? Very well, and was it not so then? Compare the command, Deut. x. 16. "Circumcise therefore the fore-skins of your hearts," with the answerable gracious promise to enable them so to do, Deut. xxx. 6. "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God."

Or lastly, Did circumcision, the sign and seal added to Abraham's covenant, make it an Adam's covenant of works? That is equally impossible with the former: for no man but such a daring man as I am concerned with, will dare to say, that *a seal of the*

righteousness of faith (as circumcision was, Rom. iv. 11.) can make the covenant to which it is affixed (and which I have shewn in all the other substantial parts, the very same with that we are now under) to become an Adam's covenant of works.

These things I have here super-added, to leave as little as possible behind me to be an occasion of further trouble and contention. Let all strife therefore, in so plain a case, be ended: contentious spirits are not the most excellent spirits among Christians. Fire (and so contention) is more apt to catch in low-built thatcht cottages, than in high-built castles and princely palaces: the higher we go, still the more peace. The highest region is most sedate and calm. Stars have the strongest influence when in conjunction. Angels (though legions) have no wars among them; and as willingly go down as up the ladder without justling each other. And the most high God is the God of peace; let us also be the children of peace. And I do assure the persons with whom I contend, that whilst they hold the Head, and are tender of the church's peace, I can live in charity with them here, and hope to live in glory with them hereafter.

I remain, reader, thine and

the truth's friend,

JOHN FLAVEL.

THE INTRODUCTION.

FINDING, by sad experience, what I before justly feared, that *errors* would be apt to spring up with liberty, (though the restraint of just liberty being a practical error in rulers, can never be the cure of *mental errors* in the subjects;) I judged it necessary, at this season, to give a succinct account of the rise, causes, and remedies of several mistakes and errors, under which, even the reformed churches among us, as well as others, do groan at this day.

I will not stay my reader long upon the etymology and derivations of the word. We all know that etymologies are no definitions: yet because they cast some light upon the nature of the thing we enquire after, it will not be lost labour to observe, that this word **ERROR** derives itself from three roots in the Hebrew language.

(1.) The first * “ word primitively signifies to deviate or decline

* חטא *Chatah*, a *Scopo aberravit*.

“from the true scope or path,” as unskilful marksmen, or ignorant and inadvertent travellers use to do. The least variation or turning aside from the true rule and line, though it be but an hair’s breadth, presently becomes an error. We read, Judg. xx. 16. of seven hundred Benjamites, who could every one sling *stones* at an hair’s breadth, and not miss, ולא ידחטא Heb. *and not err*. This, by a *metaphor*, is applied to the mind or judgment of man; and denotes the warpings thereof from the straight, perfect, divine law or rule, and is usually translated by the word *sin*.

(2.) It is derived from another word also, which signifies to wander in variable and uncertain motions: You find it * in the title of the 7th Psalm, Shiggaion of David, a wandering song, or a song of variable notes and tunes, higher and lower, sharper and flatter. In both the former derivations it seems to note simple error, through mere weakness and ignorance. But then,

(3.) In its derivation from a third root †, it signifies not only to err, but to cause others to err also; and so signifies a seducer, or one that is active in leading others into a wrong way; and is applied in that sense to the prophets in Israel, who seduced the people, Ezek. xiii. 10. The Greek verb *πλαναω*, takes in both these senses, both to go astray, and, when put transitively, to lead or cause others to go astray with us. Hence is the word *πλανηται*, planets, or wandering stars; the title given by the apostle Jude, ver. 13. to the false teachers and seducers of his time.

An error then is any departure or deviation in our opinions or judgments from the perfect rule of the Divine law; and to this, all men, by nature, are not only liable, but inclinable. Indeed man, by nature, can do nothing else but err; Psal. lvii. 3. *He goeth astray as soon as born*; makes not one true step till renewed by grace, and many false ones after his renovation. The life of the holiest man is a book with many errata’s; but the whole edition of a wicked man’s life, is but one continued error; he that thinks he cannot err, manifestly errs in so thinking. The Pope’s supposed and pretended infallibility hath made him the great deceiver of the world. A good man may err, but is willing to know his error; and will not obstinately maintain it, when he once plainly discerns it.

Error and heresy, among other things differ in this: heresy is accompanied with pertinacy, and therefore the heretic is *αποκατακρίσιος*, self-condemned; his own conscience condemns him, whilst men labour in vain to convince him. He doth not formally, and in terms, condemn himself; but he doth so equivalently, whilst he continues to own and maintain doctrines and opinions which he

* שגה *Shagah*.

† טעה *Tagnah* in Hiph.

finds himself unable to defend against the evidence of truth. Human frailty may lead a man into the first, but devilish pride fixes him in the last.

The word of God, which is our rule, must therefore be the only test and touchstone to try and discover errors; for *regula est index sui & obliqui*. It is not enough to convince a man of error, that his judgment differs from other men's; you must bring it to the word, and try how it agrees or disagrees therewith; else he that charges another with error, may be found in as great or greater an error himself. None are more disposed easily to receive, and tenaciously to defend errors, than those who are the *Antesignani*, heads or leaders of erroneous sects; especially after they have fought in the defence of bad causes, and deeply engaged their reputation.

The following discourse justly entitles itself, A BLOW AT THE ROOT. And though you will here find the roots of many errors laid bare and open, which, comparatively, are of far different degrees of danger and malignity; which I here mention together, many of them springing from the same root: Yet I am far from censuring them alike; nor would I have any that are concerned in lesser errors to be exasperated, because their lesser mistakes are mentioned with greater and more pernicious ones; this candour I not only intreat, but justly challenge from my reader.

And because there are many general and very useful observations about errors, which will not so conveniently come under the laws of that method which governs the main part of this discourse, viz. CAUSES and CURES of error: I have therefore sorted them by themselves, and premised them to the following part in twenty observations next ensuing.



Twenty general OBSERVATIONS about the Rise and Increase of the ERRORS of the Times.

First Observation.

TRUTH is the proper object, the natural and pleasant food of the understanding, Job xii. 11. *Doth not the ear (that is, the understanding by the ear) try words, as the mouth tasteth meat?* Knowledge is the assimilation of the understanding to the truths received by it. Nothing is more natural to man, than a desire to know: knowledge never cloyes the mind, as food doth the natural appetite; but as the one increaseth, the other is proportionably sharpened and provoked. The minds of all (that are not wholly

immersed in sensuality) spend their strength in the laborious search and pursuit of truth: sometimes climbing up from the effects to the causes, and then descending again from the causes to the effects; and all to discover truth. Fervent prayer, sedulous study, fixed meditations, are the labours of inquisitive souls after truth. All the objections and counter-arguments the mind meets in its way, are but the pauses and hesitations of a bivious soul, not able to determine whether truth lies upon this side, or upon that.

Answerable to the sharpness of the mind's appetite, is the fine edge of pleasure and delight it feels in the discovery and acquisition of truth. When it hath racked and tortured itself upon knotty problems, and at last discovered the truth it sought for, with what joy doth the soul dilate itself, and run (as it were with open arms) to clasp and welcome it?

The understanding of man, at first, was perspicacious and clear; all truths lay obvious in their comely order and ravishing beauty before it: *God made man upright*, Eccl. vii. 29. This rectitude of his mind consisted in light and knowledge, as appears by the prescribed method of his recovery, Col. iii. 10. *Renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.* Truth in the mind, or the mind's union with truth, being part of the Divine image in man, discovers to us the sin and mischief of error, which is a defacing (so far as it prevails) of the image of God.

No sooner was man created but by the exercise of knowledge he soon discovered God's image in him; and by his ambition after more, lost what he had. So that now there is an haziness or cloud spread over truth by ignorance and error, the sad effects of the fall.

Observ. 2. Of knowledge there are divers sorts and kinds: some is *human* and some *divine*; some *speculative*, and some *practical*; some *ingrafted* as the notions of *morality*, and some *acquired* by painful search and study: but of all knowledge, none like that Divine and supernatural knowledge of saving truths revealed by Christ in the scriptures. Hence ariseth the different degrees both of the sinfulness and danger of errors, those errors being always the worst, which are committed against the most important truths revealed in the gospel.

These truths lie enfolded either in the plain words, or in the evident and necessary consequences from the words of the Holy Scripture; scripture-consequences are of great use for the refutation of errors: it was by a scripture-consequence that Christ successfully proved the resurrection against the Sadducees, Mat. xxii. The Arians, and other heretics, rejected consequential proofs, and required the express words of Scripture only; hoping that way to defend and

secure their errors against the arguments and assaults of the orthodox.

Some think that reason and natural light is abundantly sufficient for the direction of life ; but certainly nothing is more necessary to us for that end than the written word ; for though the remains of natural light have their place and use in directing us about natural and earthly things, yet they are utterly insufficient to guide us in spiritual and heavenly things, 1 Cor. ii. 14. "The natural man receiveth not the things of God," &c. Eph. v. 8. "Once were ye darkness, *οὐκ ἦτε φῶς ἐν καρίᾳ*, now are ye light in the Lord ;" i. e. by a beam of heavenly light shining from the Spirit of Christ through the written word, into your minds or understandings.

It is the written word which shines upon the path of our duty, Psal. cxix. 105. The scriptures of the Old and New Testament do jointly make the solid foundation of a Christian's faith. Hence, Eph. ii. 20. we are said to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We are bound therefore to honour Old-Testament scriptures as well as New, they being part of the Divine canon ; and must not scruple to admit them as sufficient and authentic proofs for the confirmation of truths, and refutation of errors. Christ referred the people to them, John v. 39. and Paul preached and disputed from them, Acts xxvi. 22.

Observ. 3. *Unto the attainment of Divine knowledge out of the scriptures, some things are naturally, yet less principally requisite in the subject ; and something absolutely and principally necessary.*

The natural qualifications desirable in the subject are clearness of apprehension, solidity of judgment, and fidelity of retention. These are desirable requisites to make the understanding susceptible of knowledge ; but the irradiation of the mind, by the Spirit of God, is principally necessary, John xvi. 13. "He shall guide you into all truth : " The clearest and most comfortable light he giveth to men is in the way of sanctification, called the teachings of the anointing, 1 John ii. 27.

When this spiritual sanctifying light shines upon a mind, naturally enriched and qualified with the three fore-mentioned requisites, that mind excels others in the riches of knowledge. And yet the teachings of the Spirit, in the way of sanctification, do very much supply and recompense the defects and weaknesses of the fore-mentioned qualifications. Whence two things are highly remarkable :

1. That men of great abilities of nature, clear apprehensions in natural things, strong judgments and tenacious memories, do not only frequently fall into gross errors and damnable *heresies* them-

selves, but become *Heresiarchs*, or heads of erroneous factions, drawing multitudes into the same sin and misery with themselves; as Arius, Socinus, Pelagius, Bellarmine, and multitudes of others have done.

And secondly, It is no less remarkable, that men of weaker parts, but babes in comparison, through the sanctification and direction of the Spirit, for which they have humbly waited at his feet in prayer, have not only been directed and guided by him into the truth, but so confirmed and fixed therein, that they have been kept sound in their judgments in times of abounding errors; and firm in their adherence to it in days of fiercest persecution. How men of excellent natural parts have been blinded, and men of weak natural parts illuminated; see 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. Mat. xi. 25.

Observ. 4. Among the manifold impediments to the obtaining of true knowledge, and settling the mind in the truth and faith of the gospel, these three are of special remark and consideration; viz. ignorance, curiosity, and error.

Ignorance slights it, or despairs of attaining it. Truth falls into contempt among the ignorant, from sluggishness and apprehension of the difficulties that lie in the way to it, Prov. xxiv. 7. *Wisdom is too high for a fool.* Curiosity runs beside or beyond it. This pride and wantonness of the mind puffs it up with a vain conceit, that it is not only able to penetrate the deepest mysteries revealed in the scriptures, but even unrevealed secrets also; Col. ii. 18. "Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." But error militates directly against it, contradicts and opposeth truth, especially when an error is maintained by pride against inward convictions, or means of better information. It is bad to maintain an error for want of light; but abundantly worse to maintain it against light. This is such an affront to the Spirit of God as he usually punishes with penal ignorance, and gives them up to a spirit of error.

Observ. 5. Error is binding upon the conscience as well as truth; and altogether as much, and sometimes more influential upon the affections and passions as truth is:

For it presents not itself to the soul in its own name and nature as error; but in the name and dress of truth, and under that notion binds the conscience, and vigorously influences the passions and affections; and then being more indulgent to lust than truth is, it is, for that, so much the more embraced and hugged by the

deceived soul, Acts xxii. 4, 5. The heat that error puts the soul into differs from religious zeal, as a feverish doth from a natural heat ; which is not indeed so benign and agreeable, but much more fervent and scorching. A mind under the power of error is restless and impatient to propagate its errors to others, and these heats prey upon, and eat up the vital spirits and powers of religion.

Observ. 6. *It is exceeding difficult to get out error, when once it is imbibed, and hath rooted itself by an open profession.*

Errors, like some sorts of weeds, having once seeded in a field or garden, it is scarce possible to subdue and destroy them ; especially if they be hereditary errors, or have grown up with us from our youth ; *a teneris assuescere multum est*, saith Seneca ; it is a great advantage to truth or error to have an early and long possession of the mind. The Pharisees held many erroneous opinions about the law, as appears by their corruptive commentaries upon it, refuted by Christ, Mat. 5. But did he root them out of their heads and hearts thereby ? No, no ; they sooner rid him out of the world. The Sadducees held a most dangerous error about the resurrection ; Christ disputed with them to the admiration of others, and proved it clearly against them ; and yet we find the error remaining long after Christ's death, 2 Tim. ii. 18. The apostles themselves had their minds tinctured with this error, that Christ should be outwardly great and magnificent in the world, and raise his followers to great honours and preferments amongst men. Christ plainly told them it was their mistake and error ; “ for the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister ; yet this did not rid their minds of the error ; it stuck fast in them, even till his ascension to heaven. O how hard is it to clear the heart of a good man once leavened with error ! and much more hard to separate it from a wicked man*.

Some have chosen rather to die than to part with their darling errors and soul-damning heresies. I have read (saith Mr. Bridges) of a great Atheist who was burnt at Paris for blaspheming Christ, held fast his atheistical opinions till he came to the very stake ; boasted to the priests and friars that followed him, how much more confidently he went to sacrifice his life in the strength of reason, under which he suffered, than Christ himself did ; but when he

* I am persuaded (saith Mr. Gurnal) some men take more pains to furnish themselves with arguments to defend some error they have taken up, than they do for the most saving truths in the Bible. Austin said, when he was a Manichæan, *Non tu eras, sed error meus erat Deus meus* : Thou, O Lord, wert not, but my error was my God. *Gurnal's Christian Armour*, part 2. p. 56.

began to feel torments indeed, then he roared and raged to the purpose. *Vidi ego hominem*, saith the author : In his life he was loose, in his imprisonments sullen ; and at his death mad with the horrors of conscience.

Some, indeed, have recovered the soundness of their judgments after deep corruptions by dangerous errors. Austin was a Manichee, and fully recovered from it. So have many more ; and yet multitudes hold them fast even to death, and nothing but the fire can reveal their work, and discover what is gold, and what is straw and stubble.

Observ. 7. It deserves a remark, *That men are not so circumspect and jealous of the corruption of their minds by errors, as they are of their bodies in times of contagion ; or of their lives with respect to gross immoralities.*

Spiritual dangers affect us less than corporal ; and intellectual evils less than moral. Whether this be the effect of hypocrisy, the errors of the mind being more secret and invisible than those of the conversation, God only knows, man cannot positively determine.

Or whether it be the effect of ignorance, that men think there is less sin and danger in the one than in the other ; not considering that an apoplexy seizing the head, is every way as mortal as a sword piercing the body : And that a vertigo will as much unfit a man for service as an ague or fever. The apostle, in 2 Pet. ii. 1. calls them *αιρεσεις απωλειας*, damnable heresies, or heresies of destruction. An error in the mind may be as damning and destructive to the soul as an error of immorality or profaneness in the life.

Or whether it may come to pass from some remains of fear and tenderness in the conscience, which forbid men to reduce their erroneous principles into practice ; there lying under many confident errors in the mind, a secret jealousy, which we call *formido oppositi*, which will not suffer them to act to the full height of their professed opinions. Austin gives this character even of Pelagius himself, *Retract. lib. II. cap. 33. Nomen Pelagii non sine laude aliqua posui, quia vita ejus a multis prædicabatur* : I have not mentioned (saith he) the name of that man without some praise, because his life was famed by many. And of Swinkfeldius it is said, *Caput regulatum illi diffuit, cor bonum non defuit* : His heart was much more regular than his head. Yet this falls out but rarely in the world ; for loose principles naturally run into loose practices : and the errors of the head into the immoralities of life.

Observ. 8. *It is a great judgment of God to be given over to an erroneous mind.*

For the understanding being the leading faculty, as that guides, the other powers and affections of the soul follow, as horses in a team follow the fore-horse. Now, how sad and dangerous a thing is this, for Satan to ride the fore-horse, and guide that which is to guide the life of man? That is a dreadful, spiritual, judicial stroke of God which we read of, Rom. i. 26. *παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ Θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας*: God, by a penal tradition, suffered them to run into the dregs of immorality, and pollutions of life; and that, because they abused their light, and became vain in their imaginations, ver. 21.

Wild whimsies and fancies in the head usually mislead men into the puddle and mire of profaneness, and then it is commonly observed God sets some visible mark of his displeasure upon them; especially the Heresiarchs, or ring-leaders in error. Nestorius' tongue was consumed by worms. Cerenthus' brains knocked out by the fall of an house. Montanus hanged himself: It were easy to instance in multitudes of others, whom the visible hand of God hath marked for a warning to others; but usually the spiritual errors of the mind are followed with a consumption and decay of religion in the soul. If grace be in the heart, where error sways its sceptre in the head, yet usually there it languishes and withers. They may mistake their dropsy for growth and flourishing; and think themselves to be more spiritual, because more airy and notional; but if men would judge themselves impartially, they will certainly find that the seeds of grace thrive not in the heart, when shaded and over-dropt by an erroneous head.

Observ. 9. *It is a pernicious evil, to advance a mere opinion into the place and seat of an article of faith; and to lay as great a stress upon it, as they ought to do upon the most clear and fundamental point. To be as much concerned for a tile upon the roof, as for the corner-stone, which unites the walls, and sustains the building.*

Opinion (as one truly saith) is but reason's projector, and the spy of truth; it makes, in its fullest discovery, no more than the dawning and twilight of knowledge; and yet I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, that this idol of the mind holds such a sway and empire over all we hold, as if it were all the day we had. Matters of mere opinion, are every way cried up by some errorists, for mathematical demonstration, and articles of faith written with a sun-beam; worshipping the fancies and creatures of

their own minds, more than God ; and putting more trust in their ill founded opinions, than in the surer word of prophecy. Much like the Humorist that would not trust day-light, but kept his candle still burning by him ; because, saith he, this is not subject to eclipses, as the sun is.

And what more frequent, when controversies grow fervent, than for those that maintain the error, to boast every silly argument to be a demonstration ; to upbraid and pity the blindness and dulness of their opposers as men that shut their eyes against sun-beams ; yea, sometimes, to draw their presumptuous censures through the very hearts of their opposers, and to insinuate, that they must needs hold the truths of God in unrighteousness, sin against their knowledge, and that nothing keeps them from coming over to them, but pride, shame, or some worldly interest ? What a complicated evil is here ! Here is a proud exalting of our own opinions, and an immodest imposing on the minds of others, more clear and sound than our own, and a dangerous usurpation of God's prerogative in judging the hearts and ends of our brethren.

Observ. 10. Error being conscious to itself of its own weakness, and the strong assaults that will be made upon it, evermore labours to defend and secure itself under the wings of antiquity, reason, scripture, and high pretensions to reformation and piety.

Antiquity is a venerable word, but ill used, when made a cloak for error. Truth must needs be elder than error ; as the rule must necessarily be, before the aberration from it. The grey hairs of opinions are then only beauty, and a crown, when found in the way of righteousness. *Copper* (saith learned Du Moulin) will never become gold by age. A lie will be a lie, let it be never so ancient. We dispute not by years, but by reasons drawn from scripture. That which is now called an ancient opinion, if it be not a true opinion, was once but a new error. When you can tell us how many years are required to turn an error into truth, then we will give more heed to antiquity, when pressed into the service of error, than we now think due to it.

If antiquity will not do, reason shall be pressed to serve error's turn at a dead-lift ; and, indeed, the pencil of reason can lay curious colours upon rotten timber, and varnish over erroneous principles with fair and plausible pretences. What expert artists have the Socinians proved themselves in this matter ? But because men are bound to submit human authority and reason to Divine revelation, both must give way, and strike sail to the written Word.

Hence it comes to pass, that the great patrons and factors for error, do above all things labour to gain countenance to their errors from the written word; and, to this end, they manifestly wrest and rack the scriptures to make them subservient to their opinions; not impartially studying the scriptures first, and forming their notions and opinions according to them. But they bring their erroneous opinions to the scriptures, and then, with all imaginable art and sophistry, wire-draw and force the scriptures to countenance and legitimate their opinions*.

But because pretences of piety and reformation † are the strokes that gave life to the face of this idol, and gave it the nearest resemblance unto truth, these therefore never fail to be made use of, and zealously professed in the favour of error, though there be little of either many times to be found in their persons, and nothing at all in the doctrines that lay claim to it.

Observ. 11. *God, in all ages, in his tender care for his churches and truths, hath still qualified and excited his servants for the defence of his precious truths, against the errors and heresies that have successively assaulted them.*

As Providence is observed in every climate and island of the world to have provided antidotes against the poisonous plants and animals of the country, and the one is never far from the other: So is the care of his providence much more conspicuous in the case now before us. When, or wheresoever, venomous errors, and deadly heresies do arise, he hath his servants at hand with antidotes against them.

When Arius, that cunning and deadly enemy to the Deity of Christ, struck at the very heart of our religion, faith, and comfort; a man of subtle parts and blameless life, which made his heresy much the more spreading and taking; the Lord had his well-furnished Athanasius in a readiness to resist and confound him. And as he had his Athanasius to defend the Deity of Christ, so he wanted not his Basil to defend the doctrine of the Holy Spirit against Macedonius.

So when Pelagius was busily advancing *free-will*, into the throne of *free-grace*, providence wanted not its mallet in learned and in-

* Every heresy has the devil for the parent of its invention, and is obnoxious to the shame of so odious a name. It professes the Saviour's name, which is most excellent and transcends all, and is disguised under scripture expressions. *Athanasius against Arius.*

† Take heed, saith one, that when zeal for reformation knocks at the door, some new errors step not in with it, which will as much need an after-reformation.

genious Augustine, to break him and his idol to pieces. And it is highly remarkable, (as the learned Dr. Hill observes) that Augustine was born in Africa, the same day that Pelagius was born in Britain.

When Gotteschalcus published his dangerous doctrine about predestination, the Lord drew forth Hincmarus to detect and confute that error, by evincing clearly, that God's predestination forces no man to sin.

So, from the beginning and first rise of Popery, that centre and sink of errors, we have a large catalogue of the learned and famous witnesses, which, in all ages, have faithfully resisted and opposed it; and, when, notwithstanding all, it had even over-run Europe like a rapid torrent, or rather inundation of the ocean, and Germany was brought to that pass, that if the Pope had but commanded it, they would have eaten grass or hay, *more pecudum*; then did the Lord bring forth invincible Luther, and with him a troop of learned champions, into the field against him; since which time, the cause of Popery is become desperate.

Thus the care of providence, in all ages, hath been as much displayed in protecting the church against the dangers that arose from false brethren within it, as from avowed, persecuting enemies without it; and had it not been so, the rank weeds of heresies and errors had long since over-topt and choaked the corn, and made the church a barren field.

Observ. 12. *The want of a modest suspicion, and just reflection, gives both confidence and growth to erroneous opinions.*

If matters of mere opinion were kept in their proper place, under the careful guard of suspicion, they would not make that bustle and confusion in the churches they have done, and do at this day.

It is confessed, that all truths are not matters of mere opinion; neither are all opinions of equal weight and value; and therefore not to be left hanging in an *equipendious scepticism*. And yet it is as true, that matters of opinion ought carefully to be sorted from matters of faith, and to be kept in their own rank and class, as things doubtful, *quibus potest subesse falsum*: whilst matters of faith clearly revealed, are to stand upon their own sure and firm basis. The former, *viz.* matters of mere opinion, we are so to hold, as upon clearer light to be ready to part with them, and give them up into the hands of truth. The other, *viz.* matters of faith, we are to hold with resolutions to live and die by them.

What is opinion, but the wavering of the understanding betwixt probable arguments, for and against a point of doctrine? So that

it is rather an inclination than an assertion, as being accompanied with fear, floating and inconstancy. In such cases, there should be a due concession and allowance of other men's opinions to them; and why not, whilst they offer as fair for the truth as we? and haply their parts, helps, and industries are not inferior to ours; it may be beyond them; and we may discern in them as much tenderness of conscience, and fear of sin, as in ourselves. In this case, a little more modest suspicion in our opinions, would do the church a great deal of right; and that which should prevail with all modest persons to exercise it, is the just reflection they may make upon their own former confident mistakes.

Observ. 13. *There is a remarkable involution or concatenation of errors, one linking in, and drawing another after it.*

Amongst all erroneous sects, there is still some *πρωτον ψευδος*, some Helena, for whose sake the war against truth is commenced; and the other lesser errors are pressed for the sake and service of this leading darling error. As we see the whole * troop of *indulgences, bulls, masses, pilgrimages, purgatory*, with multitudes more, flow from, and are pressed into the service of the Pope's supremacy and infallibility; so, in other sects, men are forced to entertain many other errors, which, in themselves considered, they have no great kindness for; but they are necessitated to entertain them in defence of that great, leading, darling opinion they first espoused.

Those that cry up, and trumpet abroad the sovereign power of *free-will*, even without the preventing grace of God, enabling men to supernatural works, as if the *will* alone had escaped all damage by the fall, and Adam had not sinned in that noble virgin-faculty. To defend this idol, which is the *πρωτον ψευδος*, they are forced to oppugn and deny several other great and weighty truths, as particular, eternal election, the certainty of the saints perseverance, the necessity of preventing grace in conversion: which errors are but the out-works raised in defence of that idol.

So in the baptismal controversy, men would never have adventured to deny God's covenant with Abraham, to be a covenant of grace; or to assert the ceremonial law, so full of Christ, to be an Adam's covenant of works; and circumcision, expressly called *the seal of the righteousness of faith*, to be the condition of Adam's covenant. Much less would they place all the elect of God in Israel,

* *Πρωτον ψευδος*. The leading error of the church of Rome is, That all things must be subjected to the supreme judgment and tribunal of the church over which the Pope presides. Thence it is concluded, That all the traditions of the Romish church, and all their tenets and decrees, whether of the Popes or their councils, are to be steadfastly maintained. *Fred. Span. Elench. Controv. p. 51.*

at one and the same time, under the severest curse and rigour of the law, and under the pure covenant of grace, were they not forced into these errors and absurdities by dint of argument, in defence of their darling opinion.

Observ. 14. *Errors abound most, and spring fastest, in the times of the church's peace, liberty, and outward prosperity, under indulgent rulers. Arianism sprung up under Constantine's mild government*.*

Christian, benevolent rulers are choice mercies and blessings to the church. Such as rule over men in the fear of God, are to the church, as well as civil state, "like the light of the morning, "when the sun ariseth; even a morning without clouds, as the "tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after "rain," 2 Sam. xxiii. 4.

But this, as well as other mercies, is liable to abuse; and under the influences of indulgent governors, error, as well as truth, springs up, flowers and seeds. Persecution gives check to the wantonness of men's opinions, and finds them other and better work to do. Caterpillars and locusts are swept away by the bitter east winds, but swarm in *halecyon* days, and fall upon every green thing. So that the church rides, in this respect, more safely in the stormy sea, than in the calm harbour. Peace and prosperity is apt to cast its watchmen into a sleep; and whilst they sleep, the envious *one* soweth tares, Matth. xiii. 25.

It was under Constantine's benign government, that poison was poured out into the churches. The abuse of such an excellent mercy provokes the Lord to cut it short, and cause the clouds to gather again after the rain. We have found it so once and again (alas, that I must say again!) in this wanton and foolish nation. Professors could live quietly together, converse, fast, and pray in a Christian manner together, under common calamities and dangers: differences in opinion are suspended by consent. But no sooner do we feel a warm, sun-blast of liberty and peace, but it revives and heats our dividing lusts and corruptions, instead of our graces. The sheep of Christ fight with each other, though their furious pushing one at another is known to presage a change of weather.

* Eusebius records, That Arius Alexandrinus began to vent his distracted heresy at Alexandria, in the year of our Lord 324, and in the fifteenth year of the reign of Constantine.

Observ. 15. *Errors, in the tender bud, and first spring of them, are comparatively shy and modest, to what they prove afterwards, when they have spread and rooted themselves in the minds of multitudes, and when their Authors think it time to set up and jostle for themselves in the world*.*

They usually begin in modest scruples, conscientious doubts and queries. But having once gotten many abettors, and, amongst them, some that have subtilty and ability to plead and dispute their cause, they ruffle it out at another rate; glory in their numbers, piety and ability of their party; boast and glory in the conceited victories they atchieved over their opposers. The mask drops off its face, and it appears with a brow of brass, becomes insolent and turbulent, both in church and state. Of which it is easy to give many pregnant instances, in the Arians of old, and more recent errors, which I shall not at present be concerned with, lest I exasperate, whilst I seek to heal the wound.

† Should a man hear the sermons or private discourses of errorists, whilst the design is but forming and projecting, he should meet with little to raise his jealousy. They speak in generals, and guard their discourses with political reserves. You shall not see, though you seem to see the tendency of their discourses. Hence the apostle saith, 2 Pet. ii. 1. *παρεισάξουσιν, They shall privily [or covertly] bring in damnable heresies*: As the boy in Plutarch, being asked by a stranger, What is that you carry so closely under your cloak? wittily answered, You may well know, that I intend you shall not know it, by my so carrying it.

Observ. 16. *Nothing gives more countenance and increase to error than a weak or feeble defence of the truth against it†.*

The strength of error lies much in the weakness of the advocates

* Eunomius, by advice of Eudoxus, for some time spread his heresy secretly, intricately, and ambiguously; but at length taking courage, he openly avowed in public assemblies what he heretically maintained. *Theodore, book 3. c. 29.*

† The Donatists, in Augustine's time, modestly moved, That men might not be compelled to live holy. *Coacta et invita pietas*, they mentioned it with dislike; but when grown in power, *facti insolentes orthodoxis inferebant*, insomuch that Dulcitius the tribune was fain to defend the orthodox against them with an army.

‡ Some not being sufficiently instructed in heavenly knowledge could not answer the opposers of truth, who objected, that it is a thing either impossible or incongruous that God should inclose himself within the womb of a woman, &c. by all which things, when they had not sufficient capacity or learning to defend truth and refute error, (for they had not thorough insight into the import and reason of such things) they were misled from the right way, corrupted heavenly knowledge, and composed to themselves a new system of doctrine, that had no root or stability. *Lactan. book 4. chap. 50. concerning Heresies.*

and defendants of truth. Every friend of truth is not fit to make a champion for it. Many love it, and pray for it, that cannot defend and dispute for it. *I can die for the truth, (saith the martyr) but I cannot dispute for it.* Zuinglius blamed Carolostadius for undertaking the controversy of that age, because (said he) *non habuit satis humerorum,—his shoulders were too weak for the burthen.*

It can be said of few, as Cicero speaks of one, *Nullam unquam in disputationibus rem defendit, quam non probarit? nullum oppugnavit, quem non everterit*; i. e. He undertook no cause in disputation, which he could not defend; he opposed no adversary, whom he could not overthrow. He is a rare and happy disputant, who can clear and carry every point of truth, of which he undertakes the defence. It were happy for the church, if the abilities and prudence of all her friends were commensurate and equal to their love and zeal. Every little foil, every weak or impertinent answer of a friend to truth, is quickly turned into a weapon to wound it the deeper.

Observ. 17. *Errors of judgment are not cured by compulsion and external force, but by rational conviction, and proper spiritual remedies.*

Bodily sufferings rather spread than cure intellectual errors. I deny not but fundamental heresies, breaking forth into open blasphemies against God, and seditions in the civil state, ought to be restrained. It is no way fit men should be permitted to go up and down the world with plague-sores running upon them. Nor do I understand why men should be more cautious to preserve their bodies than their souls. But I speak here of such errors as may consist with the foundations of the Christian faith, and are not destructive of civil government. They take the ready way to spread and perpetuate them that think to root them out of the world by such improper and unwarrantable means as external force and violence. The wind never causes an earthquake till it be pent in and restrained from motion.

We neither find, nor can imagine, that those church or state Exorcists should ever be able to affect their end, who think to confine all the spirits of error within the circle of a severe uniformity. Fires, prisons, pillories, stigmatizings, mutilations, whippings, banishments, &c. are the Popish *topics* to confute errors. It is highly remarkable that the world, long ago, consented for the avoiding of dissent in judgment, to enslave themselves and their posterity to the most fatal and destructive heresy that ever it groaned under.

It is a rational and proper observation, long since made by Lac-

tantius, *Quis mihi imponat necessitatem credendi quod nolim, vel non credendi, quod velim?* i. e. Who can force me to believe what I will not, or not to believe what I will? The rational and gentle spirit of the gospel is the only proper and effectual method to cure the diseases of the mind.

Observ. 18. *Erroneous doctrines producing divisions and fierce contentions amongst Christians, prove a fatal stumbling-block to the world, fix their prejudices, and obstruct their conversion to Christ*.*

They dissolve the lovely union of the saints, and thereby scare off the world from coming into the church. This is evidently implied in that prayer of Christ, John xvii. "That all his people might be one, that the world might believe the Father had sent him." There is indeed no just cause for any to take offence at the Christian reformed religion, because so many errors and heresies spring up among the professors of it, and divide them into so many sects and parties; for, in all this we find no more than what was predicted from the beginning, 1 Cor. xi. 18, 19. "I hear there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it: for there must be also heresies among you," &c. And again, Acts xx. 30. "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them †."

The very same things strongly confirm the Christian religion, which wicked men improve to the reproach and prejudice of it. When Celsus objected to the Christians the variety and contrariety of their opinions, saying, *Were we willing to turn Christians, we know not of what party to be, seeing you all pretend to Christ, and yet differ so much from one another.* Tertullian, the Christian Apologist, made him this wise and pertinent reply, "We are not troubled that heresies are come, seeing it was predicted that they must come ‡" These things destroy not the credibility of the Christian religion, but increase and confirm it, by evidencing to the world the truth and certainty of Christ's predictions (which were quite beyond all human foresight) that as soon as his doctrine should be propagated, and a church raised by it, errors and here-

* Many enemies to Christianity, from hatred to the Christians for their abolishing the Gentile superstition, flocked to the Nicene synod that they might find some whom they might mock. *Say the Centurists.*

† Above all things it is proper for us to know that Christ himself and his ambassadors have foretold that many sects and heresies should arise, which would break the peace of his sacred body, and have admonished us to watch with the greatest prudence, lest at any time we should fall into the nets and snares of that adversary of ours, with whom God requires us to contend. *Lactan. book 4. chap. 30.*

‡ *Hereses non dolemus venisse, quia novimus esse prædictas.*

sies should spring up among them, for the trial of their faith and constancy.

Nevertheless, this no way excuses the sinfulness of errors and divisions in the church. Christ's prediction neither infuses nor excuses the evil predicted by him: for what he elsewhere speaks of scandals is as true in this case of errors; "These things must come to pass, but wo be to that man by whom they come."

Observ. 19. *How specious and taking soever the pretences of error be, and how long soever they maintain themselves in esteem among men, they are sure to end in the loss and shame of their authors and abettors at last*.*

Truth is a rock that the waves of error dash against, and evermore return in froth and foam: Yea, they foam out their own shame, saith the apostle, Jude 13. What Tacitus spake of crafty counsels I may as truly apply to crafty errors: "They are pleasant in their beginning, difficult in their management, and sad in their event and issue †."

Suppose a man have union with Christ, yet his errors are but as so much hay, wood, straw, stubble, built, or rather endeavoured to be built upon a foundation of gold; this the fiery trial burns up; the author of them suffers loss; and though himself may be saved, yet so as by fire, 1 Cor. iii. 12, 13, 14, 15. the meaning is, he makes a narrow escape. As a man that leaps out of an house on fire from a window or battlement, with great difficulty saves his life; just so *errorists* shall be glad to quit their erroneous opinions which they have taken so much pains to build, and draw others into: and then, O what a shame must it be for a good man to think how many days and nights have I worse than wasted to defend and propagate an error, which might have been employed in a closer study of Christ, and mine own heart! Keckerman relates a story of a *vocal statue*, which was thirty years a making by a cunning artist, which by the motion of its tongue with little wheels, wires, &c. could articulate the sound, and pronounce an entire sentence. This *statue* saluting Aquinas, surprized him, and at one stroke he utterly destroyed the curious *machine*, which exceedingly troubled the fond owner of it, and made him say with much concernment, "Thou hast at one stroke destroyed the study and labour of thirty years ‡."

* Athanasius writes, that after the shameful death of Arius, very many of those who had been deceived by him returned to soundness in the faith.

† *Consilia callida prima specie læta, tractatu dura, eventu tristia.*

‡ Keck. Phys. p. 16. Albertus Magnus. *Uno ictu opus triginta annorum destruxisti.*

Beside, what shame and trouble must it be to the zealous promoters of errors, not only to cast away so vainly and unprofitably their own time and strength, which is bad enough, but also to ensnare and allure the souls of others into the same, or worse mischief: for though God may save and recover you, those that have been misled by you may perish.

Observ. 20. *If ever errors be cured, and the peace and unity of the church established, men must be convinced of, and acquainted with the occasions and causes both within and without themselves, from whence their errors do proceed; and must both know and apply the proper rules and remedies for the prevention or cure of them.*

There is much difference betwixt an occasion and a proper cause; these two are heedfully to be distinguished. Critical and exact historians, as Polybius and Tacitus, distinguish betwixt the *αρχη*, and the *αίτια*, the *beginning occasions* and the *real causes* of a war: and so we ought, in this case of errors, carefully to distinguish them. The most excellent and innocent things in the world, such as the Scriptures of truth, the liberty of Christians, the tranquillity and peace of the church (as you will hear anon) may, by the subtilty of Satan working in conjunction with the corruptions of men's hearts, become the *occasions*, but can never be the proper culpable *causes* of errors.

Accordingly, having made these twenty remarks upon the nature and growth of errors (which cannot so well be brought within the following rules of method) I shall, in the next place, proceed in the discovery both of the mere occasions, as also the proper culpable causes of errors, together with the proper preventives, and the most effectual remedies, placed together in the following order.

The occasion. The holy God, who is a God of truth, Deut. xxxii. 4. and hateth errors, Rev. ii. 6. the God of order, and hates confusions and schisms in his church, 1 Cor. xiv. 33. is yet pleased to permit errors and heresies to arise, without whose permission they could never spring. And this he doth for the trial of his people's faith and constancy, and for a spiritual punishment upon some men for the abuse of his known truths; and by the permission of these evils, he advanceth his own glory, and the good of his church and people. Augustine answers that question, Why doth not God, since he hates errors, sweep them out of the world? Because (saith he) it is an act of greater power to bring good out of evil, than not to suffer evils to be at all.

Satan's design in errors, is to cloud and darken God's name and

precious truths ; to destroy the beauty, strength, and order of the church. But God's ends in permitting and sending errors, are, (1.) To plague and punish men for their abuse of light, 2 Thes. ii. 11. "For this cause shall God send them strong delusions," &c. (2.) To prove and try the sincerity and constancy of our hearts, Deut. xiii. 1, 3. 1 Cor. xi. 19. and lastly, By these things the saints are awakened to a more diligent search of the Scriptures, which are the more critically read and examined upon the trial of spirits and doctrines by them, 1 John iv. 1. "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits." And Rev. ii. 2. "Thou hast tried them that say they are apostles," &c.

The prevention. Though heresies and errors must (for the reasons assigned) break forth into the world, and God will turn them eventually unto his own glory, and the benefit of his church ; yet it is a dreadful judgment to be delivered over to a spirit of error, to be the authors and abettors of them. This is a judicial stroke of God, and as ever we hope to escape, and stand clear out of the way of it, let us carefully shun these three following causes and provocations thereof.

(1.) Want of love to the truth, which God hath made to shine about us in the means, or into us, by actual illumination, under the means of knowledge. 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. "Because they received not the love of the truth, God gave them up to strong delusions." They are justly plagued with error, that slight truth. False doctrines are fit plagues for false hearts.

(2.) Beware of pride and wantonness of mind. It is not so much the weakness as the wantonness of the mind, which provokes God to inflict this judgment. None likelier to make seducers than boasters, Jude 16. Arius gloried, that God had revealed some things to him which were hidden from the apostles themselves. Simon Magus boasted himself to be the mighty power of God. The erroneous Pharisees loved the praises of men. When the Papist reproached Luther that he affected to have his disciples called Lutherans, he replied*, "He disdained that the children of Christ should be called by so vile a name as his."

(3.) Beware you neglect not prayer, to be kept sound in your judgments, and guided by the Spirit into all truth, Psal. cxix. 10. "With my whole heart have I sought thee ; O let me not wander, or err, from thy commandments." This do, and you are safe from such a judicial tradition.

The first cause. We shall next speak of the causes of error found in the evil dispositions of the subjects, which prepare and incline them to receive erroneous doctrines and opinions, and even catch

* Luther said, Not so, O fool, not so, for I desire that my name be concealed.

at the occasions, and least sparks of temptation, as dry tinder: and amongst these is found,

(1.) A perverse wrangling humour at the pretended *obscurity* of the Scriptures. The Romish party snatch at this occasion, and make it the proper cause, when, indeed, it is but a picked occasion of the errors and mistakes among men. They tell us, the Scriptures are so difficult, obscure, and perplexed, that if private men will trust to them as their only guide, they will inevitably run into errors, and their only relief is to give up their souls to the conduct of their church; whereas, indeed, the true cause of error is not so much in the obscurity of the word, as in the corruption of the mind, 1 Tim. vi. 5. 2 Tim. iii. 8.

We do acknowledge there are in the Scriptures, *τινα δυσνοητα, και τινα δυσεξημενευτα*, some things hard to be understood, 2 Pet. iii. 16. the sublime and mysterious nature of the matter rendering it so; and some things hard to be interpreted, from the manner of expression: as indeed all mystical parts of Scripture, and prophetic predictions are and ought to be delivered. The Spirit of God this way designedly casts a veil over them, till the proper season of their revelation and accomplishment be come. Besides (as the learned Glassius observes) in Paul's style, there are found some peculiar words, and forms of speech, of which ordinary rules of grammar take no notice, nor give any parallel examples of: as *to be buried with Christ*; *to be baptized into his death*; to which I may add, *to be circumcised in him*, &c. There are also multitudes of words found in Scripture, of various and vastly different significations: and accordingly there is a diversity, and sometimes a contrariety of senses, given of them by expositors; which to an humourist, or quarrelsome wit, give an occasion to vent his errors with a plausible appearance of Scripture-consent. And indeed Tertullian saith * “The Scriptures are so disposed that heretics “may pick occasions;” and those that will not be satisfied may be hardened. See Mark iv. 11, 12.

But all this notwithstanding, the great and necessary things to our salvation are so perspicuously and plainly revealed in the Scriptures, that even babes in Christ do apprehend and understand them, Matth. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 27, 28, 29. And though there be difficulties in other points more remote from the foundation; yet the Spirit of God is not to be accused, but rather his wisdom to be admired herein. For (1.) this serves to excite our most intense study and diligence, which, by this difficulty is made necessary, Prov. ii. 3, 4, 5. The very prophets, yea, the very an-

* *Non periclitor dicere ipsas scripturas ita dispositas esse, ut materiam subministrarent hæreticis.*

gels search into these things, 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. (2.) Hereby a standing ministry in the church is made necessary, Neh. viii. 8. Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13. So that to pretend obscurity of Scripture to be the culpable cause of error, (when, indeed, the fault is in ourselves) this is too much like our father Adam, who would implicitly accuse God, to excuse himself; he laid it upon the woman which God gave him, and we upon the Scriptures which God hath given us.

The Remedies.

The proper *remedies* and *preventives* in this case, are an heedful attendance to, and practice of these *rules*.

Rule I. Let all obscure and difficult texts of Scripture be constantly examined and expounded according to the analogy or proportion of faith, which is St. Paul's own rule, Rom. xii. 6. "Let him that prophesieth (i. e. expoundeth the Scriptures in the church) do it according to the proportion of faith." The analogy or proportion of faith, is what is taught plainly and uniformly in the whole Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as the rule of our faith and obedience. Whilst we carefully and sincerely attend hereunto, we are secured from sinfully corrupting the word of God. Admit of no sense which interfereth with this proportion of faith. If men have no regard to this, but take liberty to rend off a single text from the body of truth to which it belongs, and put a peculiar interpretation upon it, which is absonous and discordant to other Scriptures, what woful work will they quickly make?

Give but a Papist liberty to take that scripture, James ii. 24. out of the frame of scripture, "A man is justified by works, and not by faith only;" and expound it without regard to the tenor of the gospel-doctrine of justification in Paul's epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and a gross error starts up immediately. Give but a Socinian the like liberty to practise upon, John xiv. 28. and a gross heresy shall presently look with an orthodox face.

Rule II. Never put a new sense upon words of scripture, in favour of your pre-conceived notions and opinions, nor wrest it from its general and common use and sense. This is not to interpret, but to rack the scriptures, as that word *εξηλασιν* signifies, 2 Pet. iii. 16. as * Hieron against Ruff speaks. We are not to make the scripture speak what we think, but what the prophet or apostle thought, whom we interpret. In 1 Cor. v. 11, 14. we meet with

* It is the part of an interpreter to explain what the author thought whom he interprets, and not what he himself thinks.

the word [*holy*] applied to the children of believers: That word is above five hundred times used for a state of separation to God; therefore to make it signify, in that place, nothing but legitimacy, is a bold and daring practising upon the scripture.

Rule III. Whenever you meet with an obscure place of scripture, let the context of that scripture be diligently and thoroughly searched; for it is usual with God to set up some light there, to guide us through the obscurity of a particular text. And there is much truth in the observation of the Rabbins *, “There is no scruple or objection in the law, but it hath a solution at the side of it.”

Rule IV. Let one Testament freely cast its light upon the other; and let not men undervalue or reject an Old-Testament text, as no way useful to clear and establish a New-Testament point of faith or duty. Each Testament reflects light upon the other. The Jews reject the New Testament, and many among us sinfully slight the Old: but without the help of both, we can never understand the mind of God in either. It is a good rule in the Civil Law, † “We must inspect the whole law, to know the sense of any particular law.”

Rule V. Have a due regard to that sense given of obscure places of scripture, which hath not only the current sense of learned expositors, but also naturally agrees with the scope of the place. A careless neglect and disregard to this, is justly blamed by the apostle, 1 Tim. i. 7.

Cause 2. A second evil temper in the subject, disposing and inclining men to receive and suck in erroneous doctrines and opinions, is the abuse of that just and due *Christian Liberty* ‡ allowed by Christ to all his people, to read, examine, and judge the sense of scriptures with a private judgment of discretion.

This is a glorious acquisition, and blessed fruit of reformation, to vindicate and recover that just right, and gracious grant made to us by Christ and the apostles, out of the injurious hands of our Popish enemies, who had usurped and invaded it. The exercise of this *liberty*, is, at once, a duty commanded by Christ, and commended in scripture. It is commanded by Christ, John v. 39. *Search the scriptures*, saith Christ to the people, 1 Cor. x. 15. “I speak as to wise men: judge you what I say.” And the exercise of this private judgment of discretion by the people is highly commended by St. Paul in the Bereans, Acts xvii. 11. “These were

* *Nulla est objectio in lege, quæ non habet solutionem in latere.*

† *Turpe est de lege judicare, tota lege nondum inspecta.*

‡ The Anabaptist controversy sprung up in the last age in many places in Europe, from Montzero a Saxon with his followers in the year 1521, through occasion of a book wrote by Luther on Christian Liberty. *Fred. Spanh. Elench. Contr. p. 95.*

“ more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” This liberty is not allowed in that latitude in any religion, as it is in the Christian religion; nor enjoyed in its fulness as it is in the reformed religion; whose glory it is, that it allows its principles and doctrines to be critically examined and tried of all men, by the rule of the word, as well-knowing, the more it is sifted and searched by its professors, the more they will be still confirmed and satisfied in the truth of it.

But yet this gracious and just liberty of Christians suffers a double abuse; one from the Popish enemies, who injuriously restrain and deny it to the people: Another by Protestants themselves, who sinfully stretch and extend it beyond the just degree and measure in which Christ allows it to them.

The Pope injuriously restrains it, discerning the danger that must necessarily follow the concession of such a liberty to the people, to compare his superstitious and erroneous doctrines with the rule of the word.

St. Peter, in 2 Pet. i. 19. tells the people they have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto they do well that they take heed. Certainly the Pope forgot either that he was Peter's successor, or that ever St. Peter told the people they did well to make use of that liberty which he denies them. Mr. Pool tells us of a Spaniard who used this expression to an English merchant. *You people of England (saith he) are happy; you have liberty to see with your own eyes, and to examine the doctrines delivered to you, upon which your everlasting life depends; but we dare not say our souls are our own, but are commanded to believe whatever our teachers tell us, be it never so unreasonable or ridiculous.* This is a most injurious and sinful restraint upon it on the one side:

And then Secondly, It is too frequently abused, by stretching it beyond Christ's allowance and intendment upon the other side; when every ignorant and confident person shall, under pretence of liberty granted by Christ, rudely break in upon the sacred text, distort, violate, and abuse the scriptures at pleasure, by putting such strange and foreign senses upon them, as the Spirit of God never meant or intended *.

How often have I heard that scripture, Micah iv. 10. “ They shall be brought even to Babylon,” confidently interpreted for almost, but not full home to *Babylon*, against the very grammar of the text, and the truth of the history? And so again, that place, Isa. lviii. 8. “ The glory of the Lord shall be thy re-reward,”

* Prov. viii. 22. Which words, Epiphanius writes, gave the first occasion to Arius to form his heresy against the Son of God.

through ignorance of the word, read *re-reward*, that is, a double reward to his people? But these are small matters, compared with those grosser abuses of scripture by the ignorant and unlearned, which prejudice truth, and too much countenance Popish reproaches.

The Remedies.

The proper way to prevent and remedy this mischief, is not by depriving any man of his just liberty, either to read or judge for himself what God speaks in his word, and think that way to cure errors; that were the same thing as to cut off the head to cure an head-ach. Leave that sinful policy with the false religion; let those only that know they do evil be afraid of coming to the light: But the proper course of preventing the mischiefs that come this way, is by labouring to bound and contain Christians within those limits Christ himself hath set unto this liberty which he hath granted them. And these are such as follow.

Limitation I. Though Christ hath indulged to the meanest and weakest Christian, a liberty to read and judge of the scriptures for himself; yet he hath neither thereby nor therewith granted him a liberty publicly to expound and preach the word to others: That is quite another thing.

Every man that can read the scriptures, and judge of their sense, is not thereby presently made Christ's commission-officer, publicly and authoritatively to preach and inculcate the same to others: Two things are requisite to such an employment, *viz. Proper qualifications*, 2 Tim. iii. *And a solemn call or designation*, Rom. x. 14, 15. The ministry is a distinct office, Acts xx. 17, 28. 1 Thess. v. 12. and none but qualified and ordained persons can authoritatively preach the word, 2 Tim. i. 6. 1 Tim. iv. 14. and v. 22.

Christians may privately edify one another by reading the scriptures, communicating their sense one to another of them, admonishing, counselling, reproving one another in a private, fraternal way, at seasons wherein they interfere not with more public duties: But for every one that hath confidence enough (and the ignorant usually are best stocked with it) to assume a liberty without due qualification or call to expound and give the sense of scripture, and pour forth his crude and unstudied notions, as the pure sense and meaning of God's spirit in the scriptures; this is what Christ never allowed, and through this flood-gate errors have broken in, and over-flowed the church of God, to the great scandal of religion, and confirmation of Popish enemies.

Limitation II. Though there be no part of scripture shut up or restrained from the knowledge or use of any Christian, yet Jesus

Christ hath recommended to Christians of different abilities, the study of some parts of scripture rather than others, as more proper and agreeable to their age and stature in religion.

Christians are by the apostle ranked into three classes, *fathers, young men, and little children*, 1 John ii. 13. and accordingly the wisdom of Christ hath directed to that sort of food which is proper for either: For there is in the word all sorts of food suitable to all ages in Christ; there is both *milk* for *babes*, and *strong meat* for *grown Christians*, Heb. v. 13, 14. Those that are unskilful in the word of righteousness, should feed upon *milk*, that is, the easy, plain, but most nutritive and pleasant practical doctrines of the gospel. But *strong meat* (saith he) that is, the more abstruse, deep, and mysterious truths belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil; that is, *truth* and *error*. To the same purpose he speaks, 1 Cor. iii. 2. "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it."

Art thou a weak unstudied Christian? a babe in Christ? Then the easier and more nutritive milk of plain gospel doctrine is fitter for thee, and will do thee more good than the stronger meat of profound and more mysterious points; or the bones of controversy, which are too hard for thee to deal with.

God hath blessed this age with great variety of sound and allowed expositors in our own language, by the diligent study of which, and prayer for the illumination and guidance of the Spirit, you may not only attain unto the true sense and meaning of the more plain and obvious, but also unto greater knowledge and clearer insight into the more obscure and controverted parts of scripture.

Cause III. There is also another evil disposition in the subject, rendering it easily receptive of errors, and that is spiritual *slothfulness* and carelessness in a due and serious search of the whole scripture, with a sedate and rational consideration of every part and particle therein; which may give us any, though the least light, to understand the mind of God in those obscure and difficult points we search after the knowledge of.

Truth lies deep, as the rich veins of gold do, Prov. ii. If we will get the treasure, we must not only *beg*, as he directs, ver. 3. but *dig* also, ver. 4. else, as he speaks, Prov. xiv. 23. "The talk of the lips tends only to poverty." We are not to take up with that which lies uppermost, and next at hand upon the surface of the text; but to search with the most sedate and considerative mind into all parts of the written word, examining every text which hath any respect to the truth we are searching for, heedfully to observe the scope, antecedents, and consequents, and to value every *apex*,

tittle, and *iota* ; for each of these are of Divine authority, Matth. v. 18. and sometimes greater weight is laid upon a small word, yea upon the addition or change of a letter in a word, as appears in the names Abram and Sarai.

It will require some strength of mind, and great sedulity to lay all parts of scripture before us, and to compare words with words and things with things, as the apostle speaks, 1 Cor. ii. 13. “Comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” And though it be true that some important doctrines, as that of justification by faith, are methodically disposed, and thoroughly cleared and settled in one and the same context ; yet it is as true that very many other points of faith and duty are not so digested, but are delivered *sparsim*, here a little, and there a little, as he speaks, Isa. xxviii. 10. You must not think to find all that belongs to one head or point of faith, or duty, laid together in a system or common place in scripture ; but scattered abroad in several places, some in the Old Testament, and some in the New, at a great distance from one another.

Now, in our searches and enquiries after the full and satisfying knowledge of the will of God in such points, it is necessary that the whole word of God be thoroughly searched, and all those parcels brought together to an interview. *Ex. Gr.*

If a man would see the entire discovery that was made of Christ to the fathers under the Old Testament, he shall not find it laid together in any one prophet ; but shall find that one speaks to one part of it, and another to another.

Moses gives the first general hint of it, Gen. iii. 15. “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” But then, if you would know more particularly of whose seed, according to the flesh, he should come, you must turn to Gen. xxii. 18. “In thy seed (saith God to Abraham) shall all nations of the earth be blessed.” And if you yet doubt what seed God means there, you must go the apostle, Gal. iii. 16. *To thy seed*, which is Christ. If you would further know the place of his nativity, the prophet Micah must inform you of that, Mic. v. 2. it should be Bethlehem Ephrata. If you enquire of the quality of his parent, another prophet gives you that, Isa. vii. 14. “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel.” If the time of his birth be inquired after, Moses and Daniel must inform you of that, Gen. xlix. 10. Dan. iv. 24.

So under the New Testament, If a man enquire about the change of the sabbath, he must not expect to find a formal repeal of the seventh day, and an express institution of the first day in its room ; but he is to consider,

First, What the Evangelist speaks, Mark ii. 28. That Christ is

Lord of the Sabbath, and so had power not only to dispense with it, but to change it.

Secondly, That on the first day of the week Christ rose from the dead, Mat. xxviii. 1, 2. And that this is that great day, foretold to be the day to be solemnized upon that account, P'sal. cxviii. 24.

Thirdly, That, accordingly, the first day of the week is emphatically stiled the Lord's day, Rev. i. 10. where you find his own name written upon it.

Fourthly, You shall find this was the day on which the apostles and primitive Christians assembled together for the stated and solemn performance of public worship, John xx. 19. and other public church-acts and duties, 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. And so by putting together, and considering all these particulars, we draw a just conclusion, That it is the will of God, that since the resurrection of Christ, the first day of the week should be observed as the Christian-sabbath.

In like manner, as for the baptizing of believers' infants; we are not to expect it in the express words of a New-Testament institution or command, that infants, under the gospel, should be baptized; but God hath left us to gather satisfaction about his will and our duty in that point, by comparing and considering the several scriptures of the Old and New Testament which relate to that matter; which, if we be impartial and considerative, we may do,

First, By considering, that by God's express command, Gen. xvii. 9, 10. the infant-seed of his people were taken into covenant with their parents, and the then sign of that covenant commanded to be applied to them.

Secondly, That though the sign be altered, the promise and covenant is still the same, and runs as it did before to believers and their children, Acts ii. 38, 39.

Thirdly, That the fœderal holiness of our children is plainly asserted under the New Testament, 1 Cor. vii. 14. Rom. xi. 16.

Fourthly, We shall further find, that baptism succeeds in the room of circumcision; and that, by an argument drawn from the completeness of our privileges under the New Testament no way inferior, but rather more extensive than those of the Jews, Col. ii. 10, 11, 12.

Fifthly, We shall find that upon the conversion of any master or parent, the whole household were baptized. By putting all these things, with some others together, we may arrive to the desired satisfaction about the will of God in this matter.

But some men want abilities, and others are too sluggish and lazy to gather together, compare and weigh all these, and many

more hints and discoveries of the mind of God, which would give much light unto this point; but they take an easier and cheaper way to satisfy themselves with what lies uppermost upon the surface of scripture, and so as it were by consent, let go and lose their own, and their children's blessed and invaluable privileges, for want of a little labour and patience to search the scriptures: A folly which few would be guilty of, if but a small earthly inheritance were concerned therein.

The Remedies.

To cure this spiritual sluggishness, and awaken us to the most serious and diligent search after the will of God in such controversial and doubtful points, that we may not neglect the smallest hint given us about it, the following considerations will be found of great use and weight.

Consideration 1. The most sedate, impartial, and diligent inquiries after the will of God revealed in his word, is a duty expressly enjoined by his sovereign command, which immediately and indispensibly binds the conscience of every Christian to the practice of it.

Remarkable is that text to this purpose, Rom. xii. 2. "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Here you find this duty, not only associated with, but made the very end of our non-conformity to the world, and renovation of our minds, the very things which constitute a Christian.

And to sweeten our pains in this work, that will of God, for the discovery whereof we search, is presented to us under three illustrious and alluring properties: viz. *good, acceptable, and perfect.* *Good* it must needs be, because the will and essence of God, the chief good, are not two things, but one and the same. And *perfect* it must needs be, because it is the beam and standard by which the actions of all reasonable creatures ought to be weighed and tried as to the moral good and evil of them. And being both good and perfect, how can it chuse but, upon both accounts, be highly *acceptable* and grateful to an upright soul, as that *epithet* *εὐαγεστος*, there imports. *Search the scriptures*, saith Christ, John v. 39. *To the law, and to the testimony*, saith the prophet, Isa. viii. 20. This is not matter of mere Christian liberty, but commanded duty; and at our peril be it, if we neglect it.

Consider. 2. No acts of ours can be good and acceptable to the Lord, further than it is agreeable to his will revealed in the word.

No man can be a rule to himself. He can be no more his own

rule than his own end. One man cannot be a rule to another. The best of men, and their actions and examples, are only so far a rule of imitation to us, as they themselves are ruled by the Divine revealed will, 1 Cor. xi. 1. uncommanded acts of worship are abominable to God, and highly dangerous to ourselves; they kindle the fire of his jealousy, to the ruin and destruction of the presumptuous sinner, Lev. x. 1, 2. So that if the beauty and excellency of the will of God be not enough to allure us, the danger of acting without the knowledge of it, may justly terrify us.

Consid. 3. In this duty we tread in the footsteps of the wisest and holiest men that ever went to heaven before us.

It is not only the characteristic note of a good man, Psal. i. 2. but it has been the constant practice of the most eminent believers in all ages. The greatest prophets, who had this advantage of us, that they were the organs, or inspired instruments of discovering the will of God to others, yet were not excused from, neither did they neglect to search it diligently themselves, 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. Daniel, that great favourite of heaven, who had the visions and revelations of God; yet he himself diligently searched the written word, in order to the discovery of the mind of God, Dan. ix. 2.

Consid. 4. Every discovery of the will of God by fervent prayer, diligent, and impartial search of the scriptures, and all other allowed helps, gives the highest pleasure the mind of man is capable of in this world.

If Archimedes, upon the discovery of a mathematical truth was so transported and ravished, that he cried out, *εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα, I have found it, I have found it*; what pleasure then must the investigation and discovery of a Divine truth give to a sanctified soul! "Thy words were found of me (saith Jeremiah) and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart," Jer. xv. 16. as pleasant food to a famishing man; for now conscience is quieted, comforted, and cheered in the way of duty. A man walks not at adventure with God, as that word signifies, Lev. xxvi. 40, 41. but hath the pleasant directive light of the word and will of God, shining sweetly upon the path of his duty.

Consid. 5. By this means you shall find your faith greatly confirmed in the truth of the scriptures.

The sweet consent and beautiful harmony of all the parts of the written word is a great argument of its Divinity; and this you will clearly discern, when by a due search, you shall find things that lie at the remotest distance, to conspire and consent in one, and one part casting light, as well as adding strength to another.

Thus you shall find, *Vetus testamentum in novo revelatum, et novum in vetere velatum*; the New Testament veiled in the Old, and the Old revealed in the New: and that such a consent of things, so distant in time and place, can never be the project and invention of man.

Consid. 6. The diligent and impartial search and inquiry after the will of God, out of no other design than to please him in the whole course of our duties, will turn to us for a testimony of the integrity and sincerity of our hearts.

Thy word (said David) *have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.* And God will not hide his will from those that thus seek to know it. If men would apply themselves to search the word by frequent prayer and fixed meditations, upon so pure a design, not bringing their prejudiced or prepossessed minds unto it; the Spirit of the Lord would guide them into all truth, and keep them out of dangerous and destructive errors.

Cause 4. Besides the slothfulness of the mind, there is found in many persons another evil disposition preparing them easily to receive erroneous impressions; namely, the INSTABILITY and fickleness of the judgment, and unsettledness of mind about the truth of the gospel.

Of this the apostle warns us, Eph. iv. 14. "That we henceforth be
"no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every
"wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness
"whereby they lie in wait to deceive." None are so constant and steady in the profession of the truth, as those that are fully convinced of, and well satisfied with the grounds of it. Every professor, like every ship at sea, should have an *ἰδιὰ ἐγκρίμω*, a ballast and steadiness of his own, 2 Pet. iii. 17. ready, and prepared to render a reason of the hope that is in him, 1 Pet. iii. 15. able upon all occasions to give an account of those inward motives which constrained his assent to the truth.

He that professeth a truth ignorantly, cannot be rationally supposed to adhere to it constantly. He that is but half convinced of a truth, when he engages in the profession of it, must needs be *διψυχὸς αἰνῆς*, a double-minded man, as the apostle calls him, James i. 8. half the mind hangs one way, and half another, and so it is easily moveable this way or that, with the least breath of temptation. And hence it comes to pass they are so often at a loss about their duty and their practice; for, *Animi volutatio pendentem reddit vitam*; i. e. a doubtful mind must needs make a staggering and uncertain practice.

Erroneous teachers are called wandering *stars*, Jude 13. which keep no certain course, as the fixed *stars* do, but are sometimes nearer, and sometimes remoter one from another. Thus *errorists*,

first imbibe unsettled opinions, and then discover them in their inconstant practices. Bertius wrote a book, *de Apostasia Sanctorum*, and soon after turned Papist. The Socinians and Libertines teach, that a man of any persuasion in religion, may be saved, so that he walk not contrary to his own light: such doctrine directly tends to scepticism in religion.

And this instability of the judgment proceeds either from *hypocrisy* or *weakness*. Sometimes from *hypocrisy*: All hypocrites are double-minded men. James iv. 8. "The double-minded man" (that is, the *hypocrite*) is unstable in all his ways:" one of that number was not ashamed to say, *Se duas habere animas in eodem corpore, unam Deo dicatam, alteram unicuique qui illam vellet*; i. e. That he had two souls in one body, one for God, and another for whosoever would have it.

Sometimes instability of the mind is the effect only of weakness in the judgment, proceeding merely from want of age and growth in Christ, not having as yet attained senses exercised to discern both good and evil, Heb. v. 14. they are but children in Christ, and children are easy and credulous creatures, Eph. iv. 14. presently taken with a new toy, and as soon weary of it; such a wavering and unstable temper invites temptation, and falls an easy prey into its hands.

I confess some cases may happen where the pretences on both sides may be so fair as to put a judicious Christian to a stand what to choose; but then their deliberation will be answerable, and then they will not change their opinions every month as Sceptics do. Wherever error finds such a mutable disposition, its work is half done before it makes one assault. How many wavering professors at this day lie in temptation's way? and how great a harvest have errorists and heretics had among them? There is not a *mountebank* comes upon the stage, but he shall find ten times more customers for his *drugs* than the most learned and experienced *physician*. The giddy-headed multitude have more regard to novelty than truth.

The remedies.

How necessary and desirable are some effectual *rules* and *remedies* in this case! O what a mercy would it be to the professors of these days to have their minds fixed, and their judgments settled in the truths of Christ? Happy is that man whose judgment is so guarded, that no dangerous error or heresy can commit a rape upon it. To this end I shall here commend the four following *rules*, to prevent this vertiginous malady in the heads of Christians.

Rule 1. Look warily to it, that you get a real inward *implantation* into Christ, and lay the foundation deep and firm in a due

and serious deliberation of religion, whenever you engage in the public profession of it.

To this sense are the apostle's words, Col. ii. 6, 7. "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him : rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as you have been taught." *Fertility and stability* in Christ, a pair of inestimable blessings, depend upon a good rooting of the soul in him at first. He that thrusts a dead stick into the ground may easily pull it up again, but so he cannot do by a well-rooted tree. A colour raised by violent action, or a great fire, soon dies away ; but that which is natural or constitutional will hold : every thing is as its foundation is ; it was want of a good root, and due depth of earth, which soon turned the green corn into dry stubble, Matth. xiii. 21.

Rule 2. Labour after an inward, experimental taste of all those truths which you profess.

This will preserve your minds from wavering and hesitation about the certainty and reality of them. We will not easily part with those truths, which have sensibly shed down those sweet influences upon our hearts, Heb. x. 34. No sophister can easily persuade a man that hath tasted the sweetness of honey, that it is a bitter and unpleasant thing ; *Non est disputandum de gusti* : You cannot easily persuade a man out of his senses.

Rule 3. Study hard and pray earnestly for satisfaction in the present truths, 2 Pet. i. 12. "That you may be established *ἐν τῇ παρῶν ἀληθείᾳ*, in the truth that now is under opposition and "controversy." Be not ignorant of the truths that lie in present hazard.

Antiquated opinions that are more abstracted from our present interest are no trials of the soundness of our judgments and integrity of our hearts, as the controversies and conflicts of the present times are. Every truth hath its time to come upon the stage, and enter the lists ; some in one age, and some in another ; but Providence seems to have cast the lot of your nativity for the honour and defence of those truths with which error is struggling and conflicting in your time.

Rule 4. Lastly, Be thoroughly sensible of the benefit and good of establishment, and of the evil and danger of a wavering mind and judgment.

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, (saith "the apostle,) for it is a good thing that the heart be established," &c. Heb. xiii. 9. Established souls are the honour of the truth. It was the honour of religion in the primitive days, that when the Heathens would proverbially express an impossibility, they used to say, You may as soon turn a Christian from Christ as do it.

The sickness of professors is a stumbling-block to the world. They will say as Cato of the civil wars betwixt Cæsar and Pompey, *Quem fugiam, video, quem sequar, non video*: they know whom to avoid, but not whom to follow. And as the honour of truth, so the flourishing of your own souls depend upon it. A tree, often removed from one soil to another, can never be expected to be fruitful; it is well if it makes a shift to live.

Cause 5. Another inward cause, disposing men to receive erroneous impressions, is an unreasonable eagerness to snatch at any doctrine or opinion that promiseth ease to an anxious conscience.

Men that are under the frights and terrors of conscience are willing to listen to any thing that offers present relief. Of all the troubles in the world those of the mind and conscience are most intolerable: and those that are in pain are glad of ease, and readily catch at any thing that seems to offer it.

This seems to be the thing which led those poor distressed wretches, intimated Micah vi. 6. into their gross mistakes and errors about the method of the remission of their sins. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" They were ready to purchase inward peace, and buy out their pardon at any rate. Nothing but the twinges of conscience could have extorted these things from them. Great is the efficacy and torment of a guilty conscience.

Satan, who feels more of this in himself than any other creature in the world, and knows how ready poor ignorant, but distressed sinners are to catch at any thing that looks like ease or comfort, and being jealous what these troubles of conscience may issue into, prepares for them such erroneous doctrines and opinions, under the names of *anodines* and quieting *recipes*, by swallowing of which they feel some present ease; but their disease is thereby made so much the more incurable.

* It is upon this account he hath found such vent in the world for his *penances*, *pilgrimages*, and *indulgences* among the Papists. But seeing this ware will not go off among the reformed and more enlightened professors of Christianity, he changeth his hand, and fitteth other doses under other names to quiet sick and distressed souls, before ever their frights of conscience come to settle into true

* Mr. Gataker, in his book against Saltmarsh, p. 27. tells us of one that had taken ill courses, and being under much trouble of mind, could not be quiet till he turned Papist, and had been shrieved and absolved by a priest.

repentance and faith in the blood of Christ, by dressing up, and presenting to them such opinions as these, viz.

That they may boldly apply to themselves all the promises of pardon and peace, without any respect at all to repentance or faith in themselves; that it is not at all needful, nay, that it is illegal and sinful to have any respect to these things, forasmuch as their sins were pardoned, and they justified from eternity; and that the covenant of grace is in all respects absolute, and is made to sinners as sinners, without any regard to their faith or repentance; and whatever sins there be in them, God sees them not*.

To such a charm of troubles as this, how earnestly doth the ear of a distressed conscience listen? how greedily doth it suck in such pleasing words? Are all sins that are pardoned, pardoned before they are committed? and, Does the covenant of grace require neither repentance nor faith antecedently to the application of the promises? How groundless then are all my fears and troubles? This, like a dose of opium, quiets, or rather stupifies the raging conscience; for, even an error in judgment, till it be detected and discovered to be so, quiets and comforts the heart as well as principles of truth; but whenever the fallacy shall be detected, whether here or hereafter, the anguish of conscience must be increased, or (which is worse) left desperate.

The remedies.

To prevent and cure this mistake and error in the soul, by which it is fitted and prepared to catch any erroneous principle (which is but plausible) for its present relief and ease, I shall desire my reader seriously to ponder and consider the following *queries* upon this case.

Query 1. Whether by the vote of the whole rational world, a good trouble be not better than a false peace? Present ease is desirable, but eternal safety is much more so: and if these two cannot consist under the present circumstances of the soul, Whether it be not better to endure for a time those painful pangs, than feel more acute and eternal ones, by quieting conscience with false remedies before the time?

It is bad to lie tossing a few days under a laborious fever; but far worse to have that fever turned into a lethargy, or fatal apoplexy. Erroneous principles may rid the soul of its present pain and eternal hopes and safety together. Acute pains are better than a senseless stupidity. Though the present rage of conscience be

* Saltmarsh, in the title-page of his book called *Free-grace*, shews you the sovereign virtue of Antinomian principles, to quiet troubles of conscience of twelve years growth.

not a right and kindly conviction, yet it may lead to it, and terminate in faith and union with Christ at last, if Satan do not this way practise upon it, and quench it before its time.

Query 2. Bethink yourselves seriously, whether troubles so quieted and laid asleep, will not revive and turn again upon thee with a double force as soon as the virtue of the drug (I mean the erroneous principle) hath spent itself?

The efficacy of truth is eternal, and will maintain the peace it gives for ever; but all delusions must vanish, and the troubles which they damned up for a time, break out with a greater force. Satan employs two sorts of witches, some to torment the bodies of men with grievous pain and anguish: but then he hath his white witches at hand to relieve and ease them. And have these poor wretches any great cause, think you, to boast of the cure, who are eased of their pains at the price of their souls?

Much like unto this, are the cures of inward troubles by erroneous principles. I lament the case of blinded Papists, who by pilgrimages and offerings to the shrines of titular saints, attempt the cure of a lesser sin by committing a greater; is it because there is not a God in Israel, who is able in due season to pacify conscience with proper and durable gospel-remedies, that we suffer our troubles thus to precipitate us into the snares of Satan, for the sake of present ease?

Query 3. Read the scriptures, and enquire, Whether God's people, who have lain long under sharp inward terrors, have not at last found settlement and inward peace, by those very methods which the principles that quiet you do utterly exclude!

If you will fetch your peace from a groundless notion, that your sins were pardoned, and your persons justified from all eternity, and therefore you may apply boldly and confidently to yourselves the choicest promises and privileges in the gospel, without any regard to faith or repentance wrought by the Spirit in your souls. I am sure holy David took another course for the settlement of his conscience, Psal. li. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. And it hath been the constant practice of the saints in all ages, to clear their title to the righteousness of Christ wrought without them, by the works of his Spirit wrought within them.

Cause 6. The next evil temper in the subject, preparing and disposing it for error, is an easy CREDULITY, or sequacious humour in men, rendering them apt to receive things upon trust from others, without due and thorough examination of the grounds and reasons of them themselves.

This is a disposition fitted to receive any impression seducers please to make upon them; they are said to deceive the hearts of the simple, *απαταιν*, i. e. credulous, but well-meaning people that

suspect no harm. It is said, Prov. xiv. 15. "The simple believeth every word." Through this sluice, or flood-gate, what a multitude of errors in Popery have overflowed the people! They are told, they are not able to judge for themselves, but must take the matters of their salvation upon trust from their spiritual guides; and so the silly people are easily seduced, and made easily receptive of the grossest absurdities their ignorant leaders please to impose upon them.

And it were to be wished, that those two points, viz. *Ministorum muta officia, et populi cæca obsequia*, the dumb services of their ministers, and the blind obedience of the people had staid within the Popish confines. But, alas! how many simple Protestants be there, who may be said to carry their brains in other men's heads; and like silly sheep, follow the next in the track before them; especially if their leaders have but wit and art enough to hide their errors under specious and plausible pretensions. How many poisonous drugs hath Satan put off under the gilded titles of *antiquity, zeal for God, higher attainments in godliness, new lights, &c.* How natural is it for men to follow in the track, and be tenacious of the principles and practices of their progenitors? Multitudes seem to hold their opinions *jure hæreditario*, by an hereditary right, as if their faith descended to them the same way their estates do.

The emperor of Morocco told King John's ambassador, that he had lately read St. Paul's epistles; 'And truly (said he) were I now to chuse my religion, I would embrace Christianity before any religion in the world; but every man ought to die in that religion he received from his ancestors.'

Many honest, well-meaning, but weak Christians, are also easily beguiled by specious pretences of new light, and higher attainments in reformation. This makes the weaker sort of Christians pliable to many dangerous errors, cunningly insinuated under such taking titles. What are most of the erroneous opinions now vogue in the world but old errors under new names and titles?

The remedies.

The remedies and preventions in this case, are such as follow:

Remedy 1. It is beneath a man to profess any opinion to be his own, whilst the grounds and reasons of it are in other men's keeping and wholly unknown to himself.

If a man may tell gold after his father, then sure he may, and ought to try and examine doctrines and points of faith after him. We are commanded to be ready to give an account of the hope that is in us, and not to say, This or that is my judgment or opinion, but let others give an account of the ground and reason of it.

I confess, if he that leads me into an error were alone exposed to the hazard, and I quit and free, whatever become of him, it were quite another thing: but when our Saviour tells us, Mat. xv. 14. that *both* (that is, the follower as well as the leader) *fall into the ditch*; at my peril be it, if I follow without eyes of my own: that is but a weak building that is shored up by a prop from a neighbour's wall. How many men have ruined their estates by suretiship for others? but of all suretiship, none so dangerous as spiritual suretiship. 'We neither ought (as a late Worthy speaks) *defy* the judgment of the weakest, nor yet, on the other side, *to defy* the judgment of the strongest Christian.' He that pins his faith upon another man's sleeve, knows not whither he will carry it.

Remedy 2. As you ought not to abuse your Christian privilege and liberty, to try all things, 1 Thes. v. 21. so neither on the other side to undervalue or part with it. See the things that so much concern your eternal peace with your own eyes.

I shewed you before, that this liberty is abused by extending it too far; and under the notion of improving all things, many embolden themselves to innovate and entertain any thing? yet, beware of bartering such a precious privilege for the fairest promises others can make in lieu of it. I would not slight nor undervalue the piety and learning of others, nor yet put out my own eyes to see by theirs.

Remedy 3. Before you adventure to espouse the opinions of others, diligently observe and mark the fruits and consequences of those opinions in the lives of the zealous abettors and propagators of them: *By their fruits* (saith Christ) *ye shall know them*.

When the opinion or doctrine naturally tends to looseness, or when it sucks and draws away all a man's zeal, to maintain and diffuse it, and practical religion thereby visibly languishes in their conversations, it is time for you to make a pause, before you advance one step farther towards it.

Cause 7. The next evil disposition that I shall note in the subject, is a vain CURIOSITY of mind, or an itching desire to pry into things unrevealed, at least, above our ability to search out and discover.

It is an observation, as true as ancient, *Pruritus aurium, scabies ecclesiarum*, itching ears come to a scab upon the face of the church. The itch of novelty produceth the scab of error. Of this disease the apostle warns us, 2 Tim. iv. 3. "For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching

“ears.” Nothing will please them but new notions, and new modes of language, method, tone and gesture.

Sound doctrine is the only substantial and solid food that nourishes and strengthens the heart of the new creature; but vain Sceptics nauseate and despise this as trite, vulgar, cheap, and low. Nothing humours them but novelties and rarities; their unsettled brains must be wheeled about, διδαχαις ποικιλαις καὶ ξεναις, with *diverse and strange doctrines*, Heb. xiii. 9. Novelty and variety are the only properties that commend doctrines to wanton palates: Hence it is they so boldly intrude into things they have not seen, Col. ii. 18. These Cyril fitly calls των τολμηρον κυριότηλα, the domineerings, or darings of bold spirits.

The schoolmen have filled the world with a thousand ungrounded fancies, as the distinct offices and orders of angels; and higher flights of fancy than these, which seem to be invented for no other end or use, but to please the itching ears of the curious.

There is not only a *vesana temeritas Genethliacorum*, a wild and daring rashness of *astrologers*, presuming to foretel futurities, and the fates of kingdoms, as well as particular persons, from the conjunctions and influences of the stars; but there is also found as high a presumption and boldness among men in matters of religion.

Satan is well aware of this humour in men, and how exceeding serviceable it is to his design: and therefore, having the very knack of clawing and pleasing itching ears with taking novelties, he is never wanting to feed their minds with a pleasing variety, and fresh succession of them; new opinions are still invented, and minted, in which the dangerous hooks of error are hid: if men were once cured of this spiritual itch, and their minds reduced to that temper and sobriety, as to be pleased with, and bless God for the plain revealed truths of the gospel, Satan would drive but a poor trade, and find but few customers for his erroneous novelties.

The remedies.

The proper remedies to cure this itch after novelty, or dangerous curiosity of the mind are,

Remedy 1. Due reflection upon the manifold mischiefs that have entered into the world this way.

It was this curiosity and desire to know, that overthrew our first parents, Gen. iii. 6. “When the woman saw that the tree “was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eye, and a “tree to be desired to make one wise; she took of the fruit “thereof.” The very same way by which he let in the first error, he hath let thousands into the world since that day. Nothing is more common in the world, than for an old error to obtain afresh under the name of new light. Satan hath the very art of turning

stale errors after the mode of the present times, and make them current and passable as new discoveries, and rare novelties.

Thus he puts off Libertinism, the old sin of the world, under the title of *Christian Liberty*. What a troop of Pagan idolatrous rites were by this means introduced among the Papists? A great part of popery is but *Ethnicismus redivivus*, Heathenism revived. The Pagans *Pontifex maximus*, was revived under the new title of Pope. The *Gentiles Lustrations* in the Popish *holy water*. Their *novendiale sacrum*, or *sacrifice* nine days after the burial of the party, in the Popish Masses for the dead. Their *Alvarium Fratrum*, in cloisters of Monks and Friars; their *Enchanters*, in Popish Exorcists? their *Asyla*, in Popish Sanctuaries; with multitudes more of Pagan rites, quite out of date in Christendom, introduced again under new names in Popery; as was intimated, Rev. xi. 2. and Rev. xiii. 15.

Remedy 2. Be satisfied that God hath not left his people to seek their salvation, or spiritual substance among curious, abstruse and doubtful notions; but in the great, solid, and plainly revealed truths of the gospel*, John xvii. 3. "This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." *In facili et absoluto stat æternitas*: the great concerns of our salvation are plain and easy to be understood.

Remedy 3. Vain curiosity is a dangerous snare of Satan: By such trifles as these, he devours our time, eats up our strength, and diverts our minds from the necessary and most important business of religion. Whilst we immerse our thoughts in these pleasing, but barren contemplations, heart-work, closet-work, family-work, lie by neglected. Whilst we are employed in garnishing the dish with flowers, and curious figures, the cunning cheat takes away the meat our souls should subsist by.

Cause 8. Pride and arrogancy of human reason is another evil disposition, moulding and preparing the mind for errors. When men are once conceited of the strength and prespicacity of their own carnal reasons and apprehensions, nothing is more usual than for such men to run mad with reason into a thousand mistakes and errors. To this cause Ecclesiastical historians ascribe the errors that infest the church†.

* What we may be ignorant of without a fault, we should not pry into with danger.

† Philosophy or the wisdom of human reason, which always hath done very much hurt to religion, hath produced of itself not a few Heresies; for at that time philosophical studies chiefly flourished; and men by their own subtleties, or (as they thought) demonstrations, were so confirmed in their opinions, that they thought nothing true which differed from their preconceived opinions. *Magdeb in. Cent. 2. cap. 5. p. 59.*

Reason, indeed, is the highest natural excellency of man ; it exalts him above all earthly creatures, and, in its primitive perfection, almost equalized him with angels, Heb. ii. 7. The pleasures which result from its exercises and experiments, transcend all the delights and pleasures of sense. How common is it for men to dote upon their own intellectual beauty, and glory in their victories over weaker understandings ? And though the reason of fallen men is greatly wounded and weakened by sin ; yet it conceits itself to be as strong and clear as ever ; and, with Samson, when his locks were shorn, goes forth as before time ; being neither sensible of its own weakness, or of the mysterious and unsearchable depths of scripture.

Reason is our arbiter, and guide, by the institution and law of nature, in civil and natural affairs : It is the beam, and standard, at which we weigh them : It is an home-born judge, and king in the soul : Faith comes in as a stranger to nature, and so it is dealt with, even as an intruder into reason's province, just as the Sodomites dealt with Lot : It refuseth to be an underling to faith. Out of this arrogance of carnal reason, as from Pandora's Box, swarms of errors are flown abroad into the world.

By this means Socinianism first started, and hath since propagated itself. They look upon it as a ridiculous, and unaccountable thing to reason, that the Son should be co-equal, and co-eternal with the Father : That God should forgive sins freely, and yet forgive none but upon full satisfaction. That Christ should make that satisfaction by his sufferings, and yet be *pars læsa*, the party offended, and so make satisfaction to himself ; with many more of the like stamp.

Yea Atheism, as well as Socinianism, are births from this womb. It is proud and carnal reason, which quarrels at the creation of the world, and seems to triumph in its uncontrollable maxim, *Ex nihilo nihil fit* : *Out of nothing, comes nothing*. It looks upon the doctrine of the resurrection with a deriding smile, as a thing incredible. It thinks it hard and harsh, that God should command men to turn themselves to him, and threaten them with damnation, in case of refusal ; and yet, at the same time, man should not have in himself a sufficient power, and a free will to do this, without the supernatural, and preventing grace of God. It thinks it a ridiculous thing for such a great and solemn ordinance of God as baptism is, to pass upon such a subject as an infant of a week old, which is not capable to understand the ends and uses of it. Hence it is, some over-heated zealots have not stuck to say, That we have as good warrant, and reason to * baptize *cats, dogs,*

and *horses*, as we have to baptize infants. Oh the madness of carnal reason!

The remedies.

To take down the arrogance, and prevent the mischief of carnal reasonings, let us be convinced,

Remedy 1. That it is the will of God that reason in all believers should resign to faith, and all ratiocination submit to revelation.

Reason is no better than an usurper when it presumes to arbitrate matters belonging to faith and revelation.* Reason's proper place is to sit at the feet of faith, and instead of searching the secret grounds and reasons, to adore and admire the great and unsearchable mysteries of the gospel. None of God's works are unreasonable, but many of them are above reason. It was as truly, as ingenuously said by one; *Never doth reason shew itself more reasonable than when it ceaseth to reason about things that are above reason.* "Where is the wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God; it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe," 1 Cor. i. 20, 21. It is not reason, but faith that must save us.

The wisdom of God in the gospel is wisdom in a mystery, even hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, 1 Cor. ii. 7. Such wisdom as the most eagle-eyed rationalists, and famed Philosophers of the world understood not. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit, *ibid.* ver. 9, 10.

Remedy 2. Be convinced of the weakness and deep corruption of natural reason; and this will restrain its arrogance, and make it modest and wary.

A convinced and renewed soul is conscious to itself of its own weakness and blindness; and therefore dares not pry audaciously into the *arcana cæli*, nor summon the great God to its bar: it finds itself posed by the mysteries of nature, and therefore concludes itself an incompetent judge of the mysteries of faith.

The arrogance of reason is the reigning sin of the unregenerate; though it be a disease with which the regenerate themselves are infected. When conviction shall do its work upon the soul, the

* Man having sinned by pride, the wisdom of God humbles him at the very root of the tree of knowledge, and makes him deny his own understanding, and submit to faith; or else for ever to lose his desired felicity. *Laud. against Fisher*, p. 5.

plumes of spiritual pride quickly fall; and it saith with Job, "Once have I spoken, but I will speak no more; yea, twice, but "I will proceed no further," q. d. I have done, father, I have done; "I have uttered things that I understand not," Job xlii. 3. Spiritual illumination cures this ambition.

Remedy 3. Consider the manifold mischiefs and evils flowing from the pride of reason.

It doth not only fill the world with errors and distractions, but it also invades the rights of heaven, and casts a vile reflection upon the wisdom, sovereignty, and veracity of God. It lifts up itself against his wisdom, not considering that "the foolishness of God "is wiser than men," 1 Cor. i. 25. It spurns at his glorious sovereignty, not considering that "he giveth no account of his matters," Job xxxiii. 13. It questions his veracity, in saying with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" John iii. 9.

Cause 9. The last evil disposition I shall here take notice of in the subject, is rash and ignorant *zeal*; a temper preparing the mind both to propagate furiously, and receive easily, erroneous doctrines and opinions.

When there is in the soul more heat than light, when a fervent spirit is governed by a weak head; such a temper of spirit Satan desires and singles out as fittest for his purpose, especially when the heart is graceless, as well as the understanding weak. A blind horse, of an high mettle, will carry the rider into any pit, and venture over the most dangerous precipices.

Such were the superstitious Jewish Zealots; they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. This *κακοζήλια*, *blind zeal*, St. Paul charges justly upon the *Jewish bigots*, Rom. x. 2. as the proper cause of their dangerous errors about the great point of justification; and surely no man understood the evil of it more than he, who, in his unregenerate state, was transported by it to the most furious persecution of the saints, Acts xxvi. 11. and even to dotage, and extreme fondness upon the erroneous traditions of his fathers, Gal. i. 14.

Blind zeal is a sword in a madman's hand. No persecutor like a conscientious one, whose erroneous conscience offers up the blood of the saints to the glory of God, John xvi. 2. The blind but zealous Pharisees would compass sea and land to make one proselyte, Matt. xxiii. 15. as our modern Pharisees, the Jesuits, have since done, who have mingled themselves with the remotest and most barbarous nations, to draw them to the Romish errors. Of the same temper was the false teachers taxed by the apostle, Gal. iv. 17. they zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you (viz. from our society and ordinances) that you might affect them.

And as it is the great instrument by which Satan propagates errors, so it makes a fit temper in the souls of the people to receive them: For, by this means error gains the possession of the affections, without passing a previous and due test by the understanding, and so gains the soul by the advantage of a surprize. Every thing, by how much the more weak and ignoble it is, by so much the more it watcheth upon surprisals and advantages. Error cares not to endure the due examination and test of reason; and therefore seeks to gain by surprisal what it despairs of ever gaining by a plain and fair trial.

There be few Errorists in the world of Alexander's mind, who would *rather lose the day than steal the victory*. Hence it comes to pass, that the greatest number of those they lead captives are silly women, as the apostle speaks, who are the most affectionate, but least judicious sex.

From this blind zeal it is that they cunningly wind their erroneous opinions into all their discourses where they have any hope to prevail. A rational and modest contradiction puts them into a flame, it breaks the nearest bonds of friendship and society.

Rabshakeh in 2 Kings xviii. would not treat with Hezekiah's counsellors of state, but with the common people upon the wall: And error cares not to treat with sound reason, able to sift it through the scripture-search, but with the affections; as well knowing, it is in vain to make war in reason's territories without first gaining a party among the affections.

The remedies.

The best *defensatives* against erroneous contagions, in this case, are to be found in the following particulars.

First Defensative. Reflect seriously and sadly upon the manifold mischiefs occasioned every where, and in all ages of the world, by rash zeal.

Revolve church-histories and you shall find, that scarce any cruel persecution hath flamed in the world, which hath not been kindled by blind zeal. Turn over all the records, both of Pagan and Popish persecutions, and you shall still find these two observations confirmed and verified.

First, That ignorant zeal hath kindled the fires of persecution; and, *Secondly,* That the more zealous any have been for the ways of error and falsehood, still the more implacably fierce and cruel they have been to the sincere servants of God. None like a superstitious *devoto* to manage the devil's work of persecution thoroughly, and to purpose. They will rush violently and head-long into the blood of their dearest relations, or most eminent saints, to whose sides the devil sets this sharp spur. Superstitious zeal draws all

the strength and power of the soul into that one design; and wo to him that stands in the way of such a man, if God interpose not betwixt him and the stroke. It was a rational wish of him that said, *Liberet me Deus ab homine unius tantum negotii*, God deliver me from a man of one only design.

Now consider, reader, if thy judgment be weak, and thy affections warm, how much thou liest exposed, not only to errors which may ruin thyself, but also to tongue and hand-persecution, wherein Satan may manage thy zeal for the injury or ruin of those that are better than thyself: And withal, consider how many dreadful threatenings are found in scripture against the instruments of persecution, so employed and managed by Satan.

Certainly, reader, it were better for thee to stand with thy naked breast before the mouth of a discharging cannon, than that thy soul should stand under this guilt, before such a scripture-threatening as that, Psal. vii. 13. "He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors." And none more likely to become such than those of thine own temper and complexion; especially if grace be wanting in the heart, whilst zeal for erroneous principles eats up the affections.

Second Defensative. Consider what mischief zeal for an error will do to thine own soul as well as others.

It will wholly ingross thy time, thoughts, and strength: so that if there be any gracious principle in thee, it shall not be able to thrive and prosper. For look as a fever takes off the natural appetite from food, so will erroneous zeal take off thy spiritual appetite from meditation, prayer, heart-examination, and all other the most necessary and nourishing duties of religion, by reason whereof thy grace must languish.

When thy soul, with David's, should be filled and feasted as with marrow and fatness, by delightful meditations of God upon thy bed, thou wilt be rolling in thy mind thy barren and insipid notions which yield no food or spiritual strength to thy soul; thou wilt lie musing how to dissolve the arguments and objections against thine errors, when thou shouldest rather be employed in solving the just and weighty objections that lie against thy sincerity and interest in Christ, which were time far better improved.

Third Defensative. Consider how baneful this inordinate zeal hath been to Christian society, lamentably defacing, and almost dissolving it every where, to the unspeakable detriment of the churches.

We read, Mal. iii. 16. of a blessed time, when they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for

them that feared the Lord and thought upon his name. Oh happy time! Halcyon days! I myself remember the time when the zeal of the saints spent itself in provoking one another to love and good works in joint and fervent prayer, in inward, experimental, and edifying communion; my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is cast down within me: for alas! alas! how do I see every where Christian communion turned into vain ganglings? Churches and families into mere cockpits? Men's discoursings falling as naturally into contentions about trifles as they were wont to do into heavenly and experimental subjects, to the unspeakable disgrace and damage of religion.

Fourth Defensative. That opinion is justly to be suspected for erroneous which comes in at the postern-door of the affections; and not openly and fairly at the right gate of an enlightened and well-satisfied judgment. It is a thief that cometh in at the back-door, at least strongly to be suspected for one. Truth courts the mistress, makes its first and fairest addresses to the understanding. Error bribes the handmaid, and labours first to win the affections, that by their influence it may corrupt the judgment.

And thus you see, besides the innocent occasion, viz. *God's permission of errors* in the world for the trial of his people, nine proper causes of errors found in the evil dispositions of the minds of men, which prepare them to receive erroneous doctrines and impressions, viz.

1. A wrangling humour, at the pretended obscurity of Scripture.
2. The abuse of that Christian liberty purchased by Christ.
3. Slothfulness in searching the whole word of God.
4. Fickleness and instability of judgment.
5. Eagerness after anodines, to ease a distressed conscience.
6. An easy credulity, in following the judgments and examples of others.
7. Vain curiosity, and prying into unrevealed secrets.
8. The pride and arrogancy of human reason.
9. Blind zeal, which spurs on the soul, and runs it upon dangerous precipices.

We next come to consider the principal, impulsive cause, by which errors are propagated and disseminated in the world.

Cause 10. Come we next, in the proper order, to consider the principal, impulsive cause of errors; which is SATAN, working upon the pre-disposed matter he finds in the corrupt nature of man.

* The centurists, speaking of the strange and sudden growth of

* Which thing indeed doth abundantly show that the malice of Satan is dread-

errors and heresies immediately after the planting of the gospel by Christ and the apostles, ascribe it to Satan.

Satan was a liar from the beginning, and abode not in the truth : * He hates it with deadly hatred, and all the children and friends of truth. And this hatred he manifesteth sometimes by raising furious storms of persecution against the sincere professors of it, Rev. iii. 10. and sometimes by clouds of heresies and errors with design to darken it. In the former he acts as a roaring lion ; in the latter as a subtle serpent, 2 Cor. xi. 5. “ I fear, lest as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty ; so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

He is exceedingly skilful and dexterous in citing and wrestling the scriptures to serve his vile designs and purposes ; and as impudently daring as he is crafty and cunning ; as appears in the history of Christ's temptation in the desert, Matth. iv. 6. where he cites one part of that promise, Psal. xci. 11. and suppresseth the rest ; shews the encouragement, viz. *He shall give his angels charge over thee* ; but clips off the limitation of it, viz. *to keep thee in all thy ways : In viis, non in precipitiis*, In our lawful ways, not in rash and dangerous precipices ; as Bernard well glosseth.

And it is worth observation, that he introduceth multitudes of errors into the world under the unsuspected notions of admirable prophylactics, and approved preservatives from all mischiefs and dangers from himself. Under this notion he hath neatly and covertly slid into the world, holy-water crossings, reliques of saints, and almost innumerable other superstitious rites.

Erroneous teachers are the ministers of Satan, however they transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, 2 Cor. xi. 15. and the subtle, dangerous errors they broach, are fitly stiled by the Spirit of God, *τα βάθη τοῦ Σατανᾶ*, *the depths of Satan*, Rev. ii. 24. The corrupt teachers, the Gnostics, &c. called them depths, i. e. great mysteries, high and marvellous attainments in knowledge ; but the Spirit of God fits a very proper epithet to them. They are satanical depths and mysteries of iniquity. Now the level and design of Satan herein is double.

First, He aims at the ruin and damnation of those that vent and

ful, who being conquered and overthrown by Christ, hath nevertheless attempted to sully, rent, and almost overturn his word and the whole frame of religion by horrible opinions and blasphemies. But we should have in view these monstrous inventions of this malignant spirit, and, as it were, these first springs of many heresies which afterwards increased in a wonderful manner, like rivers receiving others in them, &c. *Hist. Magdeb. cent. 1. lib. 2. cap. 5. p. 568.*

* When Swinkfield sent his books to Luther, he told the messenger the devil was the author of them : and the Lord rebuke thee, Satan, was the answer he returned to them.

propagate them; upon which account the apostle calls them αἰρεσεις ἀπωλείας, 2 Pet. ii. 1. destructive, or (as we render it) damnable heresies. And because God will preserve the souls of his own from this moral contagion, therefore,

Secondly, He endeavours, by lessor errors, to busy the minds, and check the growth of grace in the souls of the saints, by employing them about things so foreign to true godliness, and the power thereof, Heb. xiii. 9.

The remedies.

The *rules* for prevention and recovery are these that follow:

Rule 1. Pray earnestly, for a thorough change of the state and temper of thy soul, by sound conversion and regeneration.

Conversion turns us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, Acts xxvi. 18. They are his own slaves and vassals that are taken captive by him at his will, 2 Tim. ii. 16. A sanctified heart is a sovereign defensive against erroneous doctrines; it furnishes the soul with spiritual eyes, judicious ears, and a distinguishing taste, by which it may discern both good and evil, truth and error, Heb. v. 14. yea it puts the soul at once under the conduct of the Spirit, and protection of the promise, John xvi. 13. and though this doth not secure a man from all lesser mistakes, yet it effectually secures him from greater ones, which are inconsistent with Christ and salvation.

Rule 2. Acquaint yourselves with the wiles and methods of Satan, and be not ignorant of his devices, 2 Cor. ii. 11.

When once you understand the wash and paint with which he sets off the ugly face of error, you will not easily be enamoured with it. Pretences of devotion upon one side, and of purity, zeal, and reformation upon the other; though they be pleasant sounds to both ears, yet the wary soul will examine, before it receive, and admit doctrinal points under these gilded titles. Those that have made their observations upon the stratagems of Satan will heedfully observe both the tendency of doctrines, and the lives of their teachers; and if they find looseness, pride, wantonness in them, it is not a glorious title, or magnificent name that shall charm them. They know Satan can transform himself into an angel of light; and no wonder if his ministers also be transformed into ministers of righteousness, 2 Cor. xi. 14, 15.

Rule 3. Resign your minds and judgments in fervent prayer to the government of Christ, and conduct of the Spirit; and in all your addresses to God pray that he would keep them chaste and pure, and not suffer Satan to commit a rape upon them: Plead with

God that part of Christ's prayer, John xvii. 17. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth;"

Rule 4. Live in the conscientious and constant practice of all those truths and duties God hath already manifested to you.

This will bring you under that blessed promise of Christ, John vii. 17. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Satan's greatest successes are among idle, notional, and vain professors; not humble, serious, and practical Christians.

Cause 11. Having considered and dispatched the several internal causes of error, found in the evil dispositions of the seduced, as also the impulsive cause, viz Satan, who fits suitable baits to all these sinful humours and evil tempers of the heart; we come next to consider the instrumental cause, employed by Satan in this work, viz. the false teacher, whom Satan makes use of as his seeds-man, to disseminate and scatter erroneous doctrines and principles into the minds of men, ploughed up and prepared by those evil tempers before-mentioned, as a fit soil to receive them.

The choice of instruments is a principal part of Satan's policy. Every one is not fit to be employed in such a service as this. All are not fit to be of the council of war, who yet take their places of service in the field. A *rustic* carried out of the field, on board a ship at sea, though he never learned his compass, nor saw a ship before, can, by another's direction, tug lustily at a rope; but he had need be an expert artist that sits at the helm and steers the course. The worst causes need the smoothest orators; and bad ware, a cunning merchant to put it off*.

Deep-pated men are coveted by Satan, to manage this design: None like an eloquent Tertullus to confront a Paul, Acts xxiv. 1. A subtle Eccius to enter the list, in defence of the Popish cause, against the learned and zealous reformers. When the duke of Buckingham undertook to plead the bad cause of Richard the third, the Londoners said, *They never thought it had been possible for any man to deliver so much bad matter, in such good words and quaint phrases* †.

The first instrument chosen by Satan to deceive man, was the serpent; because that creature was more subtle than any beast of the field. There is not a man of eminent parts, but Satan courts and solicits them for his service. St. Austin told an ingenious, but un-

* That the impostures of Montanus were subtle and cunning, and such as might easily impose on some by a fair show, is plain from this, that he admitted almost the whole scripture, and, as Epiphanius writes, taught the same things concerning God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, which the church of Christ did teach. *Mogdeb. Cent. 2. cap. 5. p. 77.*

† Continuation of Daniel's History, p. 233.

sanctified scholar, *Cupit abs te ornari diabolus*, The devil courts thy parts to adorn his cause. He surveys the world, and wherever he finds more than ordinary strength of reason, pregnancy of wit, depth of learning, and elegance of language, that is the man he looks for.

These are the men that can almost indiscernably sprinkle their errors among many precious truths, and wrap up their poisonous drugs in leaf-gold or sugar. * Maresius notes of Crellius and his accomplices, That by the power of their eloquence, and sophistry of their arguments, they were able, artificially, to clothe horrible blasphemies to allure the simple.

And, like the Hyæna, they can counterfeit the voice of the shepherds, to deceive and destroy the sheep. There is (saith a late † Worthy) an *erudita nequitia*, a learned kind of wickedness, a subtle art of deceiving the minds of others. Upon which account the Spirit of God sometimes compares them, 2 Pet. ii. 3. to cunning and cheating *tradesmen*, who have the very art to set a gloss upon their bad wares with fine words, *πλάστοις λόγοις υμᾶς ἐμπαρουσδοῦται*, they buy and sell the people with their ensnaring and feigned words[‡]. And sometimes he compares them to cunning *gamesters*, that have the art and sleight of hand, to cog the *die*, to deceive the unskilful, and win their game, Eph. iv. 14. *ἐν τῇ πονείᾳ*, &c.

And sometimes the Spirit of God compares them to *witches* themselves, Gal. iii. 1. *τίς υμᾶς ἐξασχάνει*, *Foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?* How many strange fates have been done upon the bodies of men and women, by *witchcraft*? But far more and stranger upon the souls of men, by the *magic of error*. Jannes and Jambres, performed wonderful things in the sight of Pharaoh, by which they deceived and hardened him; and unto these false teachers are compared.

Such a man was Elymas the sorcerer, who laboured to seduce the deputy, Sergius Paulus, though a prudent man, Acts xiii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *Oh full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child of the devil!* saith Paul unto him. The art of seduction from the ways of truth and holiness, discovers a man to be both the *child* and *scholar* of the devil.

* With the disguise of painted eloquence, with sophistical arguments taken from scripture, perniciously wrested, and with false and deceitful argument, the most horrid blasphemies are artfully dressed up to ensnare the simple. *Pres. to Hyd. Socin.*

† Mr. W. Gurnal, *Christian Armour*, Part 2. p. 33.

‡ There are certain vain talkers and seducers of men's minds, not in reality Christians, but men making a trade and merchandize of Christianity, who so mix the poison of error with some sweetening allurements, as with wine and honey, that he who drinks of that palatable potion, being taken with its sweetness, is unawares betrayed to death, *Ignatius. Epist. to Trallian. p. 68.*

But as the wise and painful ministers of Christ, who turn many to righteousness, shall have double glory in heaven; so those subtle and most active agents for the devil, who turn many from the ways of righteousness, will have a double portion of misery in hell.

The Remedies.

The proper *remedies* in this case are principally two.

Remedy 1. Pray fervently, and labour diligently in the use of all God's appointed means, to get more solidity of judgment, and strength of grace, to establish you in the truth, and secure your souls against the cunning craftiness of men that lie in wait to deceive.

It is the ignorance and weakness of the people, which makes the factors for errors so successful as they are. Consult the scriptures, and you shall find these cunning merchants drive the quickest and gainfullest trade among the weak and injudicious. So speaks the apostle, *With good words and fair speeches, they deceive the hearts of the simple*; *αἰαῖων*, harmless, weak, easy souls, who have a desire to do well, but want wisdom to discern the subtilties of them that mean ill; who are void both of fraud in themselves, and suspicion of others. Oh! what success have the deceivers, *ῥητορικοῦ καὶ εὐλογοῦ*, their fair words and sugared speeches, sweet and taking expressions, among such innocent ones!

And who are they among whom Satan's cunning gamesters commonly win the game, and sweep the stakes, but weak Christians, credulous souls, whom for that reason the apostle calls *νηπιῖαι*, children? The word properly signifies an infant, when it is referred to the age; but unskilful and unlearned, when referred (as it is here) to the mind. So again, 2 Pet. ii. 14. They (that is the false teachers here spoken of) beguile *ψυχὰς ἀεὶ κλονεῖσας*, unstable souls, souls that are not confirmed and grounded in the principles of religion. Whence by the way, take notice of the unspeakable advantage, and necessity of being well catechised in your youth; the more judicious, the more secure.

Remedy 2. Labour to acquaint yourselves with the sleights and artifices Satan's factors and instruments generally make use of, to seduce and draw men from the truth. The knowledge of them is a good defensative against them. Now there are two common artifices of seducers, which is not safe for Christians to be ignorant of.

First, They usually seek to disgrace and blast the reputations of those truths, and ministers set for their defence, which they design afterwards to overthrow and ruin, and to beget credit and reputation to those errors which they have a mind to introduce. How

many precious truths of God are this day, and with this design, defamed as legal and carnal doctrines; and those that defend them, as men of an *Old-Testament* spirit?

Humiliation for sin, contrition of spirit, &c. fall under disgrace with many, and indeed all qualifications and pre-requisites unto coming to Christ, as things not only needless, but pernicious unto the souls of men, although they have not the least dependence upon them: yea, faith itself, as a pre-requisite unto justification, as no better than a condition pertaining to *Adam's covenant*.

And so for the persons of orthodox ministers: you see into what contempt the false teachers would have brought both the person and preaching of Paul himself, 2 Cor. x. 10. "His bodily presence (say they) is weak, and his speech contemptible."

Secondly, Their other common artifice is, to insinuate their false doctrines among many acknowledged and precious truths, which only serve for a convenient vehicle to them; and besides that, to make their errors as palatable and gustful as they can to the vitiated appetite of corrupt nature. The fore-mentioned worthy* hath judiciously observed how artificially Satan hath blended his baneful doses, to please the palate of *carnal reason*, *spiritual pride*, and the desire of *fleshly liberty*.

Carnal reason is that great idol which the more intelligent part of the carnal world worships. And are not the Socinian heresies as pleasant to it, as a well mixt *julep* to a *feverish stomach*.

Spiritual pride is another *Diana*, which obtains greatly in the world; and no doctrine like the Pelagian, and Semipelagian errors to gratify it. A doctrine that sets fallen nature upon its legs again, and persuades it, it can go alone to Christ; at least, with a little external help of moral suasion, without any preventing or creating work in the soul. That goes down glib and gratefully.

And then for *fleshly liberty*, How doth those that are fond of it rejoice in that doctrine, or opinion, which looses nature from the yoke of restraint? How does the poor deluded *Papist* hug himself, to think he hath liberty by his religion, to let loose the reins of his lust to all sensualities, and quit himself from all that guilt by *auricular* confession to the priest once a year? How doth the *Famelist* smile upon that principle of his, which tells him, the gospel allows more liberty than severe legal teachers think fit to tell them of: they press repentance and faith; but Christ hath done all this to thy hand.

Cause 12. Having considered the several causes of errors found in the evil dispositions of the seduced, as also the impulsive and instrumental causes, namely, Satan and false teachers employed by him; I shall now proceed to discover some special and most successful methods frequently used by them, to draw the minds of

men from the truth. Amongst which, that which comes first to consideration, is the great skill they have in representing the abuses of the ordinances of God and duties of religion, by wicked men to scare tender and weak consciences from the due use of them, and all further attendance upon them.

The abuse of Christ's holy appointments is so cunningly improved to serve this design, that the minds of many well-meaning persons receive such deep disgust at them, that they are scarce ever to be reconciled to them again. A strong prejudice is apt to drive men from one extreme upon another, as thinking they can never get far enough off from that which hath been so scaringly represented to them. Thus, making good the old observation, *Dum vitant stulti vitia, in contraria currunt*; they run from the troublesome smoke of superstition into the fire of an irreligious contempt of God's ordinances, split themselves upon Charybdis to avoid Scylla.
Ex. gr.

The Papists having deeply abused the ordinance of Baptism by their corruptive mixtures and additions of the superstitious *cross*, *chrism*, &c. Part whereof is not sufficiently purged to this day by the reformation; and finding also multitudes of carnal Protestants dangerously resting upon their supposed baptismal regeneration to the great hazard of their salvation; which mistake is but too much countenanced by some of its administrators: they take from hence such deep offence at the administration of it to any infants at all, (though the seed of God's covenanted people) that they think they can never be sharp enough in their invectives against it; nor have they patience to hear the most rational defences of that practice.

So, for that scriptural heavenly duty of *singing*: what more commonly alleged against it than the abuse and ill effects of that precious ordinance? How often is the nonsense and error of the common translation, the rudeness and dulness of the metre of some Psalms, as Psal. vii. 13. as also the cold formality with which that ordinance is performed by many who do but parrotize? I say, how often are these things buzzed into the ears of the people to alienate their hearts from so sweet and beneficial a duty?

And very often we find it urged to the same end, how unwarrantable and dangerous a thing it is for carnal and unregenerated persons to appropriate to themselves in singing those praises and experiences which are peculiar to the saints; not understanding or considering that the singing of Psalms is an ordinance of Christ appointed for teaching and admonition, as well as praising, Col. iii. 16. "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and "hymns," &c. * Thus Antinomianism took, if not its rise, yet

* The divinity of former ages, saith Mr. Saltmarsh, put but a grain or drachm of

its encouragement from the too rigorous pressing of the law upon convinced sinners.

If Satan can prevail first with wicked men to corrupt and abuse God's ordinances by superstitious mixtures and additions; and then with good men to renounce and slight them for the sake of those abuses; he fully obtains his design, and gives Christ a double wound at once; one by the hands of his avowed enemies, the other by the hands of his friends, no less grievous than the first. First, wicked men corrupt Christ's ordinances, and then good men nauseate them.

The remedies.

The proper remedies against errors, insinuated by the abuses of duties are such as follow:

Remedy 1. Let men consider, that there is nothing in religion so great, so sacred and excellent, but some or other have greatly corrupted, or vilely abused them.

What is there in the whole world more precious and excellent than the free-grace of God? and yet you read, Jude 4. of some that turned the grace of our Lord into lasciviousness. What more desirable to Christians than the glorious liberty Christ hath purchased for them by his blood, and settled upon them in the gospel-charter? A liberty from Satan, sin, and the rigour and curse of the law; and yet you read, 1 Pet. ii. 16. of them that used this liberty for a cloak of maliciousness. It is true Christ came to be a sacrifice for sin, but not a cloak for sin; to set us at liberty from the bondage of our lusts, not from the ties and duties of our obedience. Under the pretence of this liberty it was, that the Gnostics, Carpocratians, and the Menandrians of old, did not only connive at, but openly taught and practised all manner of lewdness and uncleanness.

* St. Augustine, in his book of heresy, makes this sad complaint, "The Menandrians (saith he) do willingly embrace all uncleanness as the fruit of the grace of God towards men." And not only the liberty purchased by Christ, but the very person and gospel of Christ are liable to abuses; and oftentimes, through the corruptions of men's hearts, become stones of stumbling, and rocks of offence. What then? Shall we renounce the grace of God, our Christian liberty, the very gospel, yea, and person of Christ

gospel to a pound of law, in their receipts for distempered souls. *Vide Saltmarsh of free grace*, p. 40.

* *Menandriana omnem turpitudinem libenter amplexi sunt, tanquam gratiæ Dei erga homines fructum.* August. lib. de heres.

himself, because each of them have been thus vilely abused by wicked wretches? At the peril of our eternal damnation be it, if we do so. *Blessed is he* (saith our Lord) *that is not offended in me.* Beware, lest by this means Satan at once wound the Lord Jesus Christ by scandal, and thy soul by prejudice.

Remedy 2. Consider also, that it is the nature and temper of a gracious soul to raise his esteem, and heighten his love to those ordinances, which are most abused and disgraced by men.

The more they are abused and opposed by others, the higher they should be valued and honoured by us: Psal. cxix. 126, 127. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law; therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold; q. d. The more they are disgraced and abused by wicked men, the more do I honour and prize them. A like spirit with David's was found in Elijah, 1 Kings xix. 14. "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant; thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword."

A good man will strive to honour and secure those truths and duties most, which he finds under most disgrace or danger: he loves the truth sincerely, who cleaves to it, and stands by it under all opposition. This is a good trial of the soundness of thy heart, and purity of thine ends in religion; such a proof as the honour and reputation of religion in the world can never give thee.

In Solomon's time the Jews were very cautious how they admitted and received proselytes, suspecting that by-ends and worldly respects may draw men to it; but they were not so cautious in times of disgrace and persecution.

Remedy 3. Before you part with any ordinance or practice in religion, bethink yourselves whether you never found any spiritual blessings or advantages in that path which you are now tempted to forsake.

Had you never any spiritual meltings of your hearts and affections in that heavenly ordinance of *singing*? And, may there not be now thousands of mercies in your possession, in consequence to, and as the fruit of your solemn dedication to God in baptism, by your covenanted parents? For my own part, I do heartily and solemnly bless God for it upon this account; and so I hope thousands besides myself have cause to do: however, such a practice may by no means be deserted by you, because abused by others.

Cause 13. Another method and artifice by which false teachers draw multitudes of disciples after them, is, by granting to their ignorant and ambitious followers the *Liberty of Prophecy*: flattering them into a conceit of their excellent gifts and attainments, when God knows they had more need to be catechised and taught

the principles of Christianity than undertake to expound and apply those profound mysteries unto others.

Satan hath filled the church and world with errors and troubles this way.

* When ignorant and unexperienced persons begin to think it a low and dull thing to sit from year to year under other men's teachings, and to fancy that they are wiser than their teachers, their pride will quickly tempt them to shew their ignorance, and that mischievous ignorance will prove dangerous to the truth and troublesome to the church. The apostle forbids the ordination of a novice, lest he be puffed up, and fall into the condemnation of the devil; and in 1 Tim. i. 7. he shews us the reason why some swerved and turned aside unto vain janglings: and it was this, that *they desired to be teachers of the law, neither understanding what they said, nor whereof they affirmed*; that is, they affected to be preachers, though not able to speak congruously, with tolerable sense and reason.

I do not here censure and condemn the use and exercise of the gifts of all private Christians. There are to be found amongst them some persons of raised parts, and answerable modesty and humility, who may be very useful when called to service in extraordinary cases by the voice of Providence; or exercise their gifts in a probationary way, or in a due subordination unto Christ's public officers and ordinances, by and with the consent of the pastor and congregation.

But when unqualified and uncalled persons undertake such a work out of the conceit and pride of their own hearts, or are allured to it by the crafty designs of erroneous teachers, partly to overthrow a public, regular, and standing ministry in the church, to which end the scriptures are manifestly abused, such as Jer. xxxi. 34. Rom. xii. 6. 1 Cor. xiv. 1 Pet. iv. 10. with many others: this is the practice I here censure, which, like a Trojan horse, hath sent forth multitudes of erroneous persons into the city of God to infest and defile it.

I cannot doubt but many a sincere Christian may be drawn into such employment, which puts him into a capacity of honouring God in a more eminent way, which is a thing desirable to an honest and zealous heart: and that the temptation may be greatly strengthened upon them by the plausible suggestions of cunning seducers, who tell them, that those ministers who oppose and

* Ignorant and wicked men, not minding, that the same inspired writer never advances contrary assertions on one and the same subject; and regarding only the sound of the words, do overlook the sense and scope of them; and observing that there is a diversity or seeming contrariety in the same scripture expressions, they have apostatized into error, not understanding the true meaning of them.

condemn this practice, do it as men concerned for their own interest, as desirous to monopolize the work to themselves, and as envying the Lord's people: and that Christ hath given them a greater liberty in this case, than those men will allow them. By this means they draw many after them, and fix them in their erroneous ways.

I have no mind at all here to expose the follies and mischiefs introduced this way, as neither being willing to grieve the hearts of the sincere on one side, nor gratify scoffing Atheists and profane enemies to religion upon the other side; only this I will, and must say, that by this means the sacred scriptures are most injuriously wrested, the peace and order of the church disturbed, and a great many mistakes and errors introduced.

The remedies.

The prevention and cure of errors this way introduced, or likely to be introduced into the church, is by pondering and applying the following *considerations*.

Consideration 1. Let all that encourage others, or undertake by others encouragement such a work as this, for which they are not competently qualified, and unto which they are not regularly called, consider seriously with themselves what danger they cast their own and other men's souls upon.

The apostle tells us, 2 Pet. iii. 16. "That the unlearned and unstable do wrest the scriptures to their own destruction." Danger enough, one would think, to scare them from it, did not the same sin of ignorance which makes them wrest the scriptures, cause them also to slight and overlook the danger of so doing*.

Certainly, my friends, it is a great deal safer and more excusable, to put an ignorant rustic into an apothecary's shop to compound a medicine of drugs and spirits which he understands not, and confidently administer the same to the bodies of men, than for such persons as are led by ignorance and confidence to intermeddle with the ministerial employment; the one perhaps, by mistake, may poison men's bodies; but the other their souls. An ignorant master, or pilot, that never learned the compass, is rather to be trusted among rocks and quicksands than a proud ignorant person with the conduct of souls.

Consideration 2. What daring presumption is it to intrude ourselves into so great and weighty an employment, without any call or warrant of Christ? Rom. x. 14. "How shall they call upon him of whom they have not heard? and, how shall they hear with-

* Athanasius declares, that the malicious wresting of scripture brings forth errors. *Athanasius against Appolinar.*

“out a preacher; and how shall they preach except they be sent?”

These mysteries must be committed to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others: those abilities must be examined, 1 Tim. iii. x. and the exercise of them warranted by a due and orderly appointment thereunto, 1 Tim. iv. 14. else, (as one well observes) *In tam præpostero discipline ruina tot essent sensuo, quot capita; tot dissensus quot sensus*; we shall have as many senses of scripture as we have preachers, &c.

If every Phaëton, that thinks himself able, shall undertake to drive the chariot of the sun, no wonder if the world be set on fire. Gifts and abilities of mind are not of themselves sufficient to make a preacher. Some lawyers at the bar may be as skilful as the judge upon the bench, but without a commission they dare not sit there.

Consideration 3. The honour you affect, to vent your unsound notions with liberty, is, in scripture-account, your greatest dishonour.

The scripture reckons false teachers among the basest of the people: *The prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail*, i. e. the basest part of the whole body of the people, Isa. ix. 15. And so far is due gospel-liberty from countenancing such dangerous irregularities, that we find in a clear prophecy of gospel-times, what shame God will pour upon them, Zech xiii. 4, 5. “They shall be brought with shame enough to confess, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.”

Consideration 4. How much more safe, regular and advantageous were it for such as you, to fill your own proper places under able and faithful gospel-ministers, and to suck the breasts of fruitful ordinances, than to consume and pine away by sucking your own breasts? I mean, living upon your own weak and insufficient gifts, in the sinful neglect of Christ’s appointments?

Cause 14. False teachers also propagate their errors by a spirit of *Enthusiasm*, the usual concomitant of erroneous doctrine; and draw away multitudes after them, by pretending to extraordinary revelations, visions, and voices from heaven, which seem to give great credit to their way and party †.

This was an old trick and practice of deceivers, Deut. xiii. 1. to give signs and wonders in confirmation of their way, which signs

† But some being deceived by the predictions of the false prophets, of whom both God and the true prophets had forewarned them, fell from the word of God, and forsook the true tradition; for all these, being entangled with the snares of the devil, (which they ought to have foreseen and avoided) have profaned the divine Name and worship, through their foolishness. *Lact. book 4. chap. 30. on Heres.*

the Lord may permit to fall out to prove his people, ver. 2, 4. though, for the most part, they are confuted by their unanswerable events.

In the beginning of our *reformation* by Luther, Calvin, &c. there sprang up a generation of men, called Swinkfeldians, great pretenders to revelations and visions, who were always speaking of *deifications*; and an higher strain of language they commonly used among themselves, than other serious Christians understood, and therefore scornfully entitled orthodox and humble Christians, who stuck to the scripture-phrase, and wholesome form of sound words, Grammatists, Vocabulists, Literalists, &c. "These men (as * "Sculterus in his annals, *ad annum* 1525. observes of them) were "so entangled in certain enthusiastic snares, that they thought it "the highest impiety to renounce them; and they had befooled "multitudes with their magnificent words of *Illumination, Revelation, Deification*.

Much of the same spirit was Thomas Muntzer, John of Leyden, David George, Jacob Behemen, &c. whose cloudy nonsense, enigmatical expressions, and wilful obscurity, drew many into a strange admiration of them; they all pretend to an higher knowledge of mysteries than what the gospel is acquainted with; and yet give us (as Mr. Baxter well observes) neither reasons with Aristotle, nor miracles with Christ and his apostles, to cause us to believe any of their new revelations. *Vide Baxter of the Sin against the Holy Ghost*, p. 148.

Of the same bran were our late Familists in England, of whom Henry Nichols was the chief leader, who decried the written word as a dead letter; and set up their own fond conceits and fancies under the notion of the Spirit, against whom that heavenly and learned man, Mr. Samuel Rutherford, seasonably and successfully appeared: Hacket, Copinger, and Arthington were of the same tribe; who lived a while wrapt up in Antinomian fancies, which at last brake forth into the highest and most horrid blasphemies.

Another art they make use of to seduce the credulous is a pretence unto the spirit of prophecy; and great success they promise themselves this way among the weak, but curious vulgar. And to this end Satan hath inspired and employed some cunninger heads to invent very pleasing predictions and prophecies, in favour of that party whom he designs to deceive. And how catching and bewitching these things are, gaining more respect among these vain spirits, than the divine unquestionable prophecies of scripture, this age hath had full and sad experience.

* *Iretiti suis quibusdam Enthusiasticis laqueis, unde se extricari summam putant impietatem: demerubunt multos magnificis istis verbis, Illuminatio, Revelatio, Deificatio, &c.*

Now the design of Satan in these things, is to gain credit of those *sects*, as people peculiarly favoured and beloved of God above others; as if they were the particular favourites of heaven, as Daniel was; and so to draw the multitude to admire their persons, and espouse their errors.

The Remedies.

Now the *remedies* in this case are such as follow.

Remedy 1. Whatever doctrine or practice seeks credit to itself this way, falls justly thereby under suspicion, that it wants a solid scripture-foundation.

God hath not left his people to seek satisfaction in such uncertain ways as these; but hath given them a surer word of prophecy, to which they do well to take heed, 2 Pet. i. 19. He hath tied us to the standing rule of the word, forbidding us to give heed to any other voice or spirit, leading us another way, Isa. viii. 19. 2 Thes. ii. 1, 2. Gal. i. 8. Scripture-light is a safe and sure light, a pleasant and sufficient light.

The scripture (saith Luther) is so full, that as for visions and revelations, *Nec curo, nec desidero*, I neither regard nor desire them. And when he himself had a vision of Christ, after a day of fasting and prayer, he cried out, *Avoid Satan, I know no image of Christ, but the scriptures.* An hankering mind after these things, speaks a sickly and distempered state of soul, as longing after trash in young distempered persons, doth a distempered state, or ill habit of body.

Mr. William Bridges somewhere tells us of a religious lady of the Empress's bed-chamber, whose name was Gregoria, who being greatly troubled about her salvation, wrote to Gregory, that she would never cease importuning him, till he had sent her word, that he had obtained a revelation from heaven, that she should be saved; to whom he returned this answer; *Rem difficilem postulas et inutilem*, Thou requirest of me that which is difficult to me, and unprofitable for thee.

Remedy 2. Consider how often the world hath been abused by the tricks and cheats of that officious spirit, the devil, in such ways as these.

What hath propagated idolatry among Heathens and Christians more than this? *Hinc fluxerunt multæ peregrinationes, monasteria, delubra, dies festi et alia*, saith Lavater, on Job xxxiii. Pilgrimages, monasteries, shrines of saints, holidays, &c. have been introduced by this trick. It were endless to give instances of it in the histories of former ages*.

* Of the prophecies, visions, and pretended inspirations of Storke, Pfeiffer, H h

We have a notable late account of it among ourselves, in a book entitled, [*A discovery of the notorious Fulschood and Dissimulation, contained in a book, stiled, The gospel way confirmed by miracles,*] licensed and published 1649, wherein is laid open to the world, the free confession of Ann Wells, Matthew Hall, &c. deluding the people of Whatfield, in Suffolk, with such pretended voices, visions, prophecies, and revelations, the like have scarcely been heard of in England since the reformation. Multitudes of people were deluded by them.

At length the Lord extorted from this woman a full confession of the notorious falseness of these things, by a terrible vision of hell; her partizans laboured four days to suppress and stifle it, but to no purpose; for the horrors of conscience prevailed with her to confess the notorious dissimulations contained in that book, before the people of Whatfield and a justice of the peace. And thus the Lord out-shot Satan in his own bow.

Remedy 3. Consider how difficult, yea, and impossible it is for a man to determine, that such a voice, vision, or revelation, is of God; and that Satan cannot feign or counterfeit it; seeing he hath left no certain marks by which we may distinguish one spirit from another: *an albus? an ater?*

Sure we are, Satan can transform himself into an angel of light; and therefore abandoning all those unsafe and uncertain ways, whereby swarms of errors have been conveyed into the world, let us cleave inseparably to the sure word of prophecy, the rule and standard of our faith and duty.

Cause 15. Another way in which false teachers discover their subtilty with great success is, in *timing* their assaults and nicking the proper season, when the minds of men are most apt and easy to be drawn away by their fair and specious pretences.

Such a season as this, they find about the time of men's first conversion, or soon after their implantation into Christ. Now it is that their affections are most lively and vigorous, though their judgments be but weak. They have now such strong and deep apprehensions of the grace and love of Christ, and such transcendent zeal for him, that they easily embrace any thing whereby they conceive he may be honoured and exalted. They have also such deep apprehensions, and powerful aversions as to sin, that they are in danger to fly even from truth and duty itself, when it shall be artificially represented to them as sin. For not only that which is *malum per se*, sin indeed; but that which is *male coloratum*, painted with sin's colours, is apt to scare and fright them.

Becold, Warendrop, &c. with the efficacy of them on the deluded people, and fatal consequences of them both to the deceived, and deceivers. See *Mr. Samuel Rutherford's Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist*, p. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

Besides, these young converts or novices, have not had time to confirm and root themselves in the truth; and trees newly planted, are much more easily drawn up, than those that have spread and fastened their roots in the earth. It is observable what a swarm of false teachers troubled the churches of Corinth, Galatia, and Philippi, at, and newly after, their first planting: and what danger those young Christians were in, abundantly appears in the apostle's frequent cautions and holy jealousies over them: he bids them "beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the circumcision," Phil. iii. 2. "I fear lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 3. he was afraid of the Galatians, lest he had bestowed upon them labour in vain, Gal. iv. 11. he would not give place to false brethren, no, not for an hour, Gal. ii. 5. charges the Romans to receive them that were weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations, Rom. xiv. 1. All which, and many more expressions, discover his grounded jealousy, and their extraordinary danger of seduction at their first plantation. A novice in Christianity, is the person Satan seeks for: Strong believers are not in such apparent danger as little ones in Christ, 1 John v. 21. *Little children keep yourselves from idols.*

And the reason is, because keen affections, matched with weak judgments, give a mighty advantage to seducers. Children are apt to be taken with beautiful appearances and fine shews; and erroneous teachers have the very knack to set a gloss of extraordinary sanctity upon their dangerous opinions. Hence those persons that promoted the sect of the Nicolaitans, made use of a cunning woman, who, for her skill in painting errors with the colours of truth, got the name of Jezebel, Rev. ii. 20. That queen was famous for the art of painting, 1 Kings xvi. and so was this false prophetess: Indeed there was scarce any eminent sect of Errorists or Heretics mentioned in church-history, but some curious feminine artist hath been employed to lay the beautiful colours upon it. So we find Simon Magus had his Helena; Corpocrates his Marcellina: Mantanus his Priscilla and Maximilla. And the curious colours of holiness, zeal, and free grace, artificially laid upon the face of error, how wrinkled and ugly soever in itself, sets it off temptingly and takingly to weak and injudicious minds.

Moreover, erroneous teachers are great boasters: They usually give out to the world what extraordinary comforts they meet with in their way, which proves a strong temptation to young converts, who have been so lately in the depths of spiritual trouble, to try at least, if not embrace it, for the expected comfort's sake.

Ah, how many pious ministers in England, upon such grounds and pretences as these, have had their spiritual children rent from them as soon as born? they have travailed as in birth for them; and no sooner did they begin to take comfort in the success of their labours, but to the great grief and discouragement of their hearts, they have been this way bereaved of them. Those that have owned them as their spiritual fathers one month, would scarce vouchsafe to own them when they have met them in the streets another month. Many sad instances I could give of this, and as remarkable as they are fresh and recent; but I silence particulars. Oh! see the advantage Satan and his instruments gain by nicking such a critical season as this is.

The cure, or remedy.

The remedies in this case are twofold: the first respects the spiritual father, and the second the spiritual children; both are concerned in the danger, and the Lord help both to attend to their duty.

Remedy 1. Let all those whose ministry God blesses with the desirable fruits of conversion, look carefully after the souls of young converts.

No nurse should be more tender and careful of her charge than a minister should be; and unto the care of a tender nurse Paul compareth his care over the young converts in Thessalonica, 1 Thess. ii. 7. for, alas! they lie exposed to all dangers, they are credulous, and seducers cunning; they want judgment to discern truth from error; have not yet attained unto senses exercised, and age in Christ to discern good from evil; when errors are made palatable, children will be hankering after them; and seducers have the very art to make them so*.

Shepherds, look to your flocks; imitate the great shepherd of the sheep, who gathereth the lambs with his arms, and carries them in his bosom; visit them frequently, exhort and warn them diligently, and use all means to establish them in the present truths.

Remedy 2. Let young converts, and weak Christians, look carefully to themselves by an heedful attendance unto the following truths.

First, It is not safe to try, nor upon trial likely that you should find Christ in one way, and comfort in another. God doth not

* — *Veluti pueris absynthia tetra medentes
Cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum
Contingunt dulci mellis flavoque liquore.*

usually bless those ways to men's comfort and edification, into which they turn aside from that good way wherein they first met with Christ and conversion. The same ministry and ordinances, which are appointed and blessed for the one, are likewise appointed and commonly blessed for the other, Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13.

Secondly, It is a manifest snare of the devil (and you may easily discern it) to take you off from the great work you are newly engaged in, by entangling your minds with notions that are foreign to it. Your hearts are now warm with God; Satan labours this way to cool and quench them; the cunning cheat labours to steal away the sweet and nutritive food which is before you, and lay the hard and dry bones of barren controversies, and insipid notions in their room. Your business is not to form syllogisms, or study solutions to cunning arguments about lower and lesser matters, so much as it is by prayer, and self-examination, to clear your interest in Christ, and to solve those doubts that lie with weight upon your spirits, with reference to that great concern.

Thirdly, It is a sad thing to grieve the hearts of those faithful ministers, that have travailed in pain for us, and rejoiced in our conversion as the seal of their ministry. Oh! serve not your godly ministers, as the hen is sometimes served, that hath long brooded, brought forth, and with much care and self-denial, nourished up young partridges, which, as soon as fledged, take the wing, and return no more to her.

Cause 16. There is yet another artifice of false teachers, to draw men into errors, and that is, by pressing the consciences of those they have made some impressions upon, unto all *haste* and *speed*, openly to declare their new opinions, and avow and own them before the world; as knowing that this will rivet and fix them to all intents and purposes.

When they find men under half convictions and strong inclinations to their way, they are sure then to ply them with a thick succession of motives and arguments, to join themselves by a free and open profession, to that erroneous party, which are headed by themselves.

And the arguments usually pressed to this purpose are,

1. The danger of delay.

2. The comfort of declaring themselves.

1. They press them with the danger of the least delay, by telling them, That now they must live every day and hour in known sin, and hold the truth of God in unrighteousness, the evil whereof they skilfully aggravate; and the more tender and sensible the conscience is, the deeper impressions such discourses make, although the case indeed will not bear the weight they lay upon it, as having not that due allowance God gives of time and means of ful

information in matters of this nature ; yea, possibly driving them into as great a snare by precipitation, and too hasty engagements under a doubting conscience.

2. They press them to a quick resolution with the expectations of abundance of comfort, inward peace and joy, which will result from a full engagement of themselves, and open declaration of their judgment ; proselyting to a party being the main design they drive at.

This was the very art and method by which Satan prevailed with Eve to swallow the bait, Gen. iii. 5. " For God doth know, that " in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and " ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil ; " q. d. The sooner thou tastest, the better ; for the first taste will give thee a godlike knowledge, and marvellous advancement of thy understanding : didst thou but know the benefit that would accrue to thee hereby, thou wouldst not delay one moment : And thus by setting before her the speedy and immediate benefits of eating he prevailed, and drew her into the fatal snare.

In this, the ministers of Satan imitate the ministers of Christ. As these press men to make haste to Christ, lest by consulting with flesh and blood, and listening to the temptations of Satan, hopeful inclinations should be blasted in the bud ; so the others push men on to hasty resolutions, lest by hearkening to the voice of God's Spirit, and their own consciences, the design they have so far advanced, should be lost and disappointed. The ministers of Christ urge men to a speedy change of their company, and to associate themselves with spiritual and profitable Christians, as well knowing of what great use this will be to confirm and strengthen them in the ways of God : So errorists, in like manner, vehemently urge them to associate with their party, as knowing how one wedges in and fixes another in the ways of error ; for such causes Satan pushes on half convictions into hasty resolutions, quick dispatch being his great advantage. This the apostle intimates, Gal. i. 6. " I marvel " (saith he) that ye are so soon removed," &c. *εγω τα χεως*, what, so soon ! yes, if it had not been so soon, it might never have been at all : for errors (as one ingeniously observes) like fish, must be eaten fresh and new, or they will quickly stink.

The cure, or remedy.

The *remedies* and *preventatives* in this case are such as follow :

Remedy 1. Consider that hasty engagements, in weighty and disputable matters, have cost many souls dear.

As hasty marriages have produced long and late repentance ; so hath the clapping up of an hasty match betwixt the mind and error. By entertaining of strange persons, men sometimes entertain angels

unawares; but by entertaining of strange doctrines, many have entertained devils unawares. It is not safe to open the door of the soul, to let in strangers in the night; let them wait till a clear day-light of information shew you what they are.

Remedy 2. Weighty actions require answerable deliberations. It was the worthy saying of Augustus Cæsar *, “That is soon enough, that is well enough.” There be many things to be considered and thoroughly weighed, before a man change his judgment and embrace a new doctrine or opinion. Luther, in his epistle to the ministers of Norinberg, cites an excellent passage out of Basil †, “He that is about to separate himself from the society of his brethren, had need to consider many things even unto anxiety, to beg of God the demonstration of truth, with many tears; and to pass many solitary nights with waking eyes, before he attempt, or put such a matter into execution.” By the vote of the whole rational world, time and consideration ought to be proportionate to the weight of an undertaking.

Remedy 3. The only season men have to weigh things judiciously and impartially, is before their affections be too far engaged, and their credit and reputation too much concerned.

Men are better able to weigh doctrines and opinions, whilst they are other men’s, than when they have espoused them, and made them their own. Before an opinion be espoused, the affections do not blind and pervert the judgment, as they do afterward. Self-love pulls down the balance at that end which is next us ‡. If therefore, by hasty resolution, you lose this only proper and advantageous season of deliberation, you are not like to find such another.

Remedy 4. Trust not to the clearness of your own unassisted eyes, nor to the strength of your single reason; but consult, in such cases, with others that are pious and judicious, especially your godly and faithful ministers; and hearken to the counsels they give you. Paul justly wondered that the Galatians were so soon removed: and well he might; for, had they not a Paul to consult with, before they gave their consent to false teachers? or, if he was at a distance from them, about the work of the Lord in remote places, had they no godly and judicious friends near them, whose prayers and assistances they might call in, as Daniel did, Dan. ii. 17. Woe unto him that is alone in a time of temptation,

* *Satis celeriter quicquid commode geritur.*

† *Multa anxie considerare eum portet, et multas noctes absumere insonnes, et cum multis lacrymis petere a Deo veritatis demonstrationem, qui se a fratribus separari vult.*

‡ *Perit omne judicium, cum res transit in affectum, i. e.* When the affections are biased, judgment is lost.

except the Lord be with him by extraordinary assistance and direction.

Remedy 5. Lastly, Suspect that opinion (as justly you may) for erroneous, that is too importunate, and pressing upon you, and will not allow you due time of consideration, and means of information: That which is a truth to-day will be a truth to-morrow; but that which looks like a truth to-day, may be detected, and look like itself, an odious error, to-morrow: And this is the reason of that post-haste that Satan and his factors make to gain our present consent, lest a speedy detection frustrate the suit, and spoil the design. The uses follow in six consecutaries.

Consecutary 1. From all that hath been said about errors, we see in the first place, the great usefulness and plain necessity of an able, faithful standing ministry in the church.

One special end of the ministry, is the establishment of the people's souls against the errors of the times, Eph. iv. 11, 14. "He gave some apostles, &c. that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men," &c. Ministers are shepherds; and without a shepherd how soon will the flock go astray? Moses was absent but a few days from the Israelites, and at his return found them all run into snares of idolatry. A sheep is *animal sequax*, a creature that follows a leader. One straggler may mislead a whole flock. A minister's work is not only to feed, but defend the flock. "I am set (saith Paul) for the defence of the gospel," Phil. i. 17. An orthodox and faithful minister is a double blessing to the people; but woe to that people, whose ministers, instead of securing them against errors, do cause them to err, Isa. ix. 16. they are the dogs of the flock: Some in scripture are called dumb dogs, who, instead of barking at the thief, bite the children; but faithful ministers give warning of spiritual dangers. So did the worthy ministers of London, Worcestershire, Devon, &c. in their testimonies against errors.

Consecutary 2. This discourse shews us also how little quietness and peace the church may expect, till a greater degree of light and unity be poured out upon it; what by persecutions from without it, and troubles from within, little tranquillity is to be expected. It is a note of St. Bernard's, that the church hath sometimes had *pacem a Paganis, sed raro aut nunquam a filiis*, peace sometimes from Pagan persecutors, but seldom or never any peace from her own children.

We read, Zech. xiv. 7. the whole state of the Christian church, from the primitive days to the end of the world, set forth under the notion of one day, and that a strange day too, the light of it shall *neither be clear nor dark, nor day nor night, but an evening-time*

it shall be light; i. e. a day full of interchangeable and alternate providences; sometimes persecutions, heresies, and errors prevail, and these make that part of the day dark and gloomy; and then truth and peace break forth again, and clear up the day. Thus it hath been, and thus it will be, until the evening of it, and at evening time it shall be light; then light and love shall get the ascendant of error and divisions. Most of our scuffles and contentions are for want of greater measures of both these.

Consectary 3. From the manifold causes and mischiefs of errors before-mentioned, we may also see what a choice mercy it is to be kept sound in judgment, stedfast and unmoveable in the truths and ways of Christ. A sound and stedfast Christian is a blessing in his generation, and a glory to his profession. It was an high encomium of Athanasius, *Sedem maluit mutare, quam syllabam*; i. e. He would rather lose his seat, than a syllable of God's truth. Soundness of judgment must needs be a choice blessing; because the understanding is the *το ηγεμονικον*, that leading faculty which directs the will and conscience of man, and they his whole life and practice. How often, and how earnestly doth Christ pray for his people, that they may be kept in the truth? It is true, orthodoxy in itself is not sufficient to any man's salvation; but the conjunction of an orthodox head, with an honest sincere heart, does always constitute an excellent Christian, Phil. i. 10. Happy is the man that hath an head so hearted, and an heart so headed.

Consectary 4. By this discourse, we may further discover one great and special cause and reason of the lamentable decay of the spirit and power of religion, amongst the professors of the present age.

It is a complaint more just than common, that *we do all fade as a leaf*. And, what may be the cause? Nothing more probable, than the wasting of our time and spirits in vain janglings and fruitless controversies, which the apostle tells us, Heb. xiii. 9. have not profited, i. e. they have greatly damnified and injured them that have been occupied therein. Many controversies of these times grow up about religion, as suckers from the root and limbs of a fruit-tree, which spend the vital sap that should make it fruitful.

* It is a great and sad observation made upon the state of England by some judicious persons, That after the greatest increase of religion, both intensively in the power of it, and extensively in the number of converts, what a remarkable decay it suffered both ways,

* England in four years became a sink and puddle of all errors and sects; no province since the beginning of the world, in so short a time produced so many heresies as this. *Honor. Reg. de Statu Eccles. Britan. p. 1.*

when, about the year forty-four, controversies and disputations grew fervent among professors. Since that time our strength and glory have very much abated.

Consectary 5. From this discourse we may also gather the true grounds and reason of those frequent persecutions which God lets in upon his churches and people : These rank weeds call for snowy and frosty weather to subdue and kill them.

I know the enemies of God's people aim at something else ; they strike at profession, yea, at religion itself ; and according to their wicked intention, without timely repentance, will their reward be : But, whatever the intention of the agents be, the issues of persecution are, upon this account, greatly beneficial to the church ; the wisdom of God makes them excellently useful both to prevent and cure the mischiefs and dangers of errors. If enemies were not, friends and brethren would be injurious to each other. Persecution, if it kills not, yet, at least, it gives check to the rise and growth of errors : And, if it do not perfectly redintegrate and unite the hearts of Christians, yet, to be sure, it cools and allays their sinful heats ; and that two ways : (1.) By cutting out for them far better and more necessary work. Now, instead of racking their brains about unnecessary controversies, they find it high time to be searching their hearts, and examining the foundations of their faith and hope, with respect to the other world. (3.) Moreover, such times and straits discover the sincerity, zeal, and constancy of them we were jealous of, or prejudiced against before, because they followed not us.

Consectary 6. Lastly, Let us learn hence both the duty and necessity of charity and mutual forbearance ; we have all our mistakes and errors one way or other ; and therefore must maintain mutual charity under dissents in judgment.

I do not say but an erring brother must be reduced if possible, and that by sharp rebukes too, if gentler essays be ineffectual, Tit. i. 13. and the wounds of a friend have more faithful love to them than the kisses of an enemy ; and if God make us instrumental by that, or any other method, to recover a brother from the error of his way, he will have great cause both to bless God, and thank the instrument who thereby saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins, James v. 20. It is our duty if we meet an enemy's ox or ass going astray, to bring him back again, Exod. xxiii. 4. much more the soul of a friend. Indeed we must not make those errors that are none ; nor stretch every innocent expression to that purpose ; nor yet be too hasty in meddling with contention till we cannot be silent and innocent ; and then, whatever the expence be, truth will repay it.