

THE
PLEASANTNESS
OF A
RELIGIOUS LIFE

DISPLAYED, PROVED, AND RECOMMENDED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF EVERY ONE,
PARTICULARLY OF THE YOUNG.

TO THE READER.

THAT distinction which the learned Dr. Henry More insists so much upon, in his explanation of the *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, between the *Animal* Life and the *Divine* Life, is certainly of great use to lead us into the understanding of that mystery. What was the fall and apostasy of man, and what still his sin and misery, but the soul's revolt from the *Divine* Life, and giving up itself wholly to the *Animal* Life? And what was the design of our Redeemer, but to recover us to the Divine and Spiritual Life again, by the influences of his grace? And to this, his gospel has a direct tendency; his religion all spiritual and divine, while all other religions pour of the *Animal* Life. "Christianity" (says) "is that period of the wisdom and providence of God, wherein the *Animal* Life is remarkably interrupted, and triumphed over, by the *Divine*." Bk. 2. . 7. *And so far, and no farther, are we Christians indeed, than as this revolution is brought about in our souls.*

The conflict is between these two. Nothing awes more forcibly than *Pleasure*; in order therefore to the advancing of the interests of the *Divine* Life in myself and others, I have here endeavoured, God has enabled me, to make it evident, that the *pleasures* of the *Divine* Life are unspeakably better, and more deserving, than those of the *Animal* Life. Where people convinced of this, we should gain our point.

The substance of this was preached last year in my sermons, in the ordinary course of my ministry, among many other *Reasons why we should be religious*. I was then solicited to make it public, and now take this opportunity to prepare it for the press, when, through the good hand of my God upon me, I have finished my *Fifth Volume of Expositions*, before I go about the *Sixth*. And herein, I confess,

I indulge an inclination of my own; for this doctrine of the *Pleasantness of Religion* is what I have been long delighted with, and taken all occasions to mention. Yet I would not thus far have gratified either my friends' request, or my own inclination, if I had not thought that, by the blessing of God, it might be of some service to the common interest of Christ's kingdom, and the common salvation of precious souls.

May 31, 1714.

M. H

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

TRUE religion and godliness are often, in Scripture, and particularly in this book of the Proverbs, represented, and recommended to us, under the name and character of *wisdom*; (Prov. i. 2, 7, 20; ii. 2, 10; iii. 13; Ps. cxi. 10.) because it is the highest improvement of the *human nature*, and the best and surest guide of *human life*. It was one of the first and most ancient discoveries of God's mind to the children of men, to the inquisitive part of them, that are in search for wisdom, and would have it at any rate. Then when God made a *weight for the winds*, and a *decree for the rain*, when he brought all the other creatures under the established rule and law of their creation, according to their respective capacities, then he declared this to man, a reasonable creature, as the law of his creation, (Job xxviii. 25—28.) *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, the evil of sin, is understanding.*

The great men of the world, that engross its wealth and honours, are pretenders to wisdom, and think none do so well for themselves as they do; but though their neighbours applaud them, and their

posterity, that reap the fruit of their worldly wisdom, approve their sayings, yet *this their way is their folly*, (Ps. xlix. 13.) and so it will appear, when God himself shall call those *fools*, who said to their souls, *Take your ease, in barns full of corn, and bags full of money*, Luke xii. 20. Jer. xvii. 11.

The learned men of the world were *well-wishers* to wisdom, and modestly called themselves *φιλόσοφοι*, — *Lovers of wisdom*; many wise principles we have from them, and wise precepts; and yet their philosophy failed them in that in which man's great duty and interest consist, acquainting himself with his Maker, and keeping up communion with him: here-in they that *professed themselves to be wise, became fools*; (Rom. i. 22.) and the world, by wisdom, knew not God, 1 Cor. i. 21.

But true Christians are, without doubt, the truly wise men, to whom Christ is *made of God, Wisdom*, (1 Cor. i. 30.) in whom are hid, not from them, but for them, all the *treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, Col. ii. 3. They understand themselves best, and on which side their interest lies, that give up themselves to the conduct of Christ, and his Word and Spirit; that consult his oracles, and govern themselves by them, which are indeed the truest oracles of reason, Prov. ix. 10. Men never begin to be *wise*, till they begin to be *religious*; and they then leave off to be *wise*, when they leave off to do *good*, Ps. xxxvi. 3.

Now, to recommend to us the study and practice of this true wisdom, to bring us into a willing subjection to her authority, and keep us to a conscientious observance of her dictates, the Great God is here, by Solomon, reasoning with us, from those topics, which in other cases are usually cogent and commanding enough. It is wonderful condescension, that he who has an indisputable authority over us, thus vouchsafes to *reason with us*; to draw with the cords of a man, and the bands of love; (Hos. xi. 4.) when he might make use only of the cords of a God, and the bands of the law, (Ps. ii. 3.) to invite us to that by precious promises which he enjoins upon us by his precepts, and those not grievous, 1 John v. 3.

Interest is the great governess of the world; which when men are once convinced of, they will be swayed by more than by any thing else; every one is for what he can get, and therefore applies himself to that which he thinks he can get by. The common inquiry is, *Who will show us any good?* We would all be happy, would all be easy.

Now it is here demonstrated by Eternal Truth itself, that it is our interest to be religious; and therefore religion deserves to be called wisdom, because it teaches us to do well for ourselves. And it is certain, that the way to be happy, that is, perfectly holy, hereafter, is to be holy, that is, truly happy, now. It is laid down for a principle here, *Happy is the man that finds wisdom*, (v. 13.) that finds the principles and habits of it planted in his

own soul by divine grace; that, having diligently sought, has, at length, found that *Pearl of great price*: the man that getteth understanding, reckons himself therein a true gainer. The man—*qui profert intelligentiam—that draws out understanding*, so the original word signifies; that produces it, and brings it forth; and so the Chaldee reads it.—Happy is the man, that, having a good principle in him, makes use of it both for his own and others' benefit; that, having laid up, lays out.

It is necessary to our being happy, that we have right notions of happiness; the nature of it, wherein it consists, what are the ingredients of it, and what the ways that lead to it: for many keep themselves miserable by thinking themselves happy, when really they are not; and we have reason to suspect their mistake concerning themselves, because they mistake so grossly concerning others: they call the proud happy, (Mal. iii. 15.) they bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhors. Ps. x. 3. It concerns us therefore to consider, whence we take our measures of happiness, and what rules we go by in judging of it; that we may not covet our lot with those with whom we should dread to have our lot; that we may not say, as the Psalmist was tempted to say, when he looked upon the outward prosperity of worldly people, *Happy is the people that is in such a case*; but as he was determined to say, when he looked upon the true felicity of godly people, *Happy, thrice happy, for ever happy, is that people, whose God is the Lord*; (Ps. cxliv. 15.) and as God here says, whose judgment, we are sure, is according to truth, *Happy is the man that finds wisdom*.

The happiness of those that are religious, is here proved,

I. From the true profit that is to be got by religion. *Godliness is profitable to all things*; (1 Tim. iv. 8.) it is of universal advantage. Though we may be losers for our religion, yet we shall not only not be losers by it, but we shall be unspeakable gainers, in the end. They that trade with wisdom's talents, will find the merchandise of it better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold, and that it is more precious than rubies. As long since as Job's time it was agreed, that the advantages of religion were such, that, as they could not be purchased, so they could not be valued, with the gold of Ophir, the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The topaz of Ethiopia could not equal them, Job xxviii. 16, 19. Length of days is in wisdom's right hand, even life for evermore; length of days, and no shortening of them; and in her left hand riches and honour, (v. 16.) the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the honour that comes from God, which are true riches, and true honours, because durable, because eternal, and for ever out of the danger of poverty and disgrace.

In all labour there is profit, more or less, of one kind or other, but no profit like that in the labour

religion. They who make a business of it will find great advantage by it; its present incomes are valuable, and a comfortable, honourable maintenance for a soul; but its future recompences infinitely more so, above what we are able either to speak or think.

[I. From the *transcendent pleasure* that is to be found in it. Here profit and pleasure meet, which complete the happiness; and *Omne tulit punctum, miscuit utile dulci*—

Where pleasure and advantage meet,
They make the cheerful scene complete.

Those who pursue the gains of the world in wealth and riches, must be willing to deny themselves in their pleasures; and those that will indulge themselves in their pleasures, must be content not to get any, but to spend it. As they that are covetous, now they must not be voluptuous; so they that are voluptuous, leave no room to be covetous; but it is so in the profits and pleasures of religion. Here man may both *get* and *save*, the spiritual riches of divine grace, and yet, at the same time, bathe in a stream of divine consolations, and be a holy cure in spiritual delights, while he *lays up treasures in heaven*; the soul may even then dwell at ease, when it is labouring most diligently for the rest that endures to *eternal life*.

This is that which the text speaks of; and both *profit* and *pleasure* of religion are put together in the next words, *She is a tree of life*, (v. 18.) both *enriching* and *delighting to them that lay hold upon*. What gain or comfort like that of life?

We are here assured, that her *ways are ways of pleasantness*; not only *pleasant ways*, but, in the strict, *ways of pleasantness*, as if pleasantness were confined to those ways, and not to be found anywhere else; and the pleasantness arises not from any foreign circumstance, but from the innate goodness of the ways themselves. Or it notes the superlative pleasantness of religion; it is as pleasant as pleasantness itself. *They are ways of pleasantness*, &c.; it is the word from which Naomi had her name in the day of her prosperity, which afterward she disclaimed; (Ruth i. 20.) *Call me not Naomi, pleasant*; but *Marah*, bitter. Think you hear Wisdom saying, on the contrary, "Call me not *Marah*, bitter, as some have miscalled me, but call me *Naomi*, pleasant." The vulgar Latin reads it, *via pulchra* *cautiful ways*; ways of sweetness, so the Chaldees. Wisdom's ways are so; that is, the ways which she has directed us to walk in, the ways of her commandments; they are such, that if we *keep close to, and go on in*, them, we shall certainly find true pleasure and satisfaction. Wisdom says, "*This is the way, walk in it*"; and you shall not only find *life at the end*, but *pleasure in the way*." That which is the only right way to happiness, we must resolve to

travel, and to proceed, and persevere in, whether it be fair or foul, pleasant or unpleasant; but it is a great encouragement to a traveller, to know that his way is not only the right way, but a pleasant way; and such the way to heaven is.

God had told us by Solomon, (*ch.* ii. 3, 4.) that we must *cry after knowledge*, must *give our voice to understanding*, that we must *seek* it, and *search* for it, must spare no cost or pains to get it. He had told us, that this wisdom would restrain us from the way both of the *evil man*, and of the *strange woman*; (*ch.* ii. 12, 16.) that it would keep us from all the forbidden pleasures of sense. Now lest these *restraints* from pleasure, and *constraints* to piety and labour, should discourage any from the ways of religion, he here assures us, not only that our pains will be abundantly recompensed with the profits of religion, but that the pleasures we *forego* will be abundantly balanced with the pleasures we shall enjoy.

2. It is added, *All her paths are peace*. Peace is sometimes put for all good; here some take it for the good of safety and protection. Many ways are *pleasant*; they are clean, and look smooth, but they are *dangerous*, either not sound at bottom, or beset with thieves: but the ways of wisdom have in them a *holy security*, as well as a *holy serenity*; and they that walk in them, have God himself for their *shield* as well as their *sun*, and are not only joyful in the hope of good, but are, or may be, quiet also from the fear of evil.

But we may take it for the good of pleasure and delight; and so it imports the same as the former part of the verse. As there is *pleasantness* in wisdom's ways, so there is *peace* in all her *paths*.

(1.) There is not only peace in the *end* of religion, but peace in the *way*. There is not only peace provided as a bed, for good men to lie down in at night, when their work is done, and their warfare is accomplished; (they shall then *enter into peace, rest in their beds*, Isa. lvii. 2. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace*, Ps. xxvii. 37. it is everlasting peace;) but there is also peace provided as a shade, for good men to work in all day, that they may not only do their work, but do it with delight: for even the *work of righteousness*, as well as its reward, *shall be peace*, (Isa. xxxii. 17.) and the immediate *effect of righteousness*, as well as its issue at last, *quietness and assurance for ever*.

It is possible, that war may be the way to peace; *Sic querimus pacem—thus we pursue peace*, is the best motto to be engraven on weapons of war; but it is the glory of those who are truly religious, that they not only seek peace, but enjoy it; the peace of God rules their hearts, and by that means keeps them; and even while they are travellers, they have peace, though they are not yet at home.

It is the misery of the carnal, irreligious world, that *The way of peace they have not known*, (Rom. iii.

17.) for they are *like the troubled sea ; there is no peace, says my God, to the wicked*, Isa. lvii. 20, 21. How can peace be spoken to them that are not the *sons of peace*, (Luke x. 5, 6.) to them that have not grace for the word of peace to fasten upon? They may cry peace to themselves, but there is no true peace either in their way, or in their end. To such, I say, (2 Kings ix. 18.) *What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me ;* while in God's name I speak peace to all that are in covenant with the God of peace, to all the faithful subjects of the *Prince of peace*. They have experimentally known the way of peace, and to them I say, "*Go on, and prosper ; go on in peace, for the God of love and peace is and will be with you.*"

(2.) There is not only this peace in the way of religion in general, but in the particular *paths* of that way ; view it in the several acts and instances of it, in the exercise of every grace, in the performance of every duty, and you will find, that what is said of the body of Christianity, is true of every part of it ; it is *peace*.

The *ways* of religion are *tracked* as path-ways are ; (Cant. i. 8.) *We go forth by the footsteps of the flock*. It is the *good old way* that all have walked in that are gone to heaven before us, and this contributes something to the peace of it ; "*Walk in the old way, and you shall find rest to your soul*," Jer. vi. 16. We go on in our way with so much the more assurance, when we see those going before us, who *through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises* ; let us but keep the path, and we shall not miss our way.

The Chaldee reads it, *itineræ, ejus, pacifica—her journeys are peace*. The paths of wisdom are not like walks in a garden, which we make use of for diversion only, and an amusement ; but like tracks in a great road, which we press forward in with care and pains, as a traveller in his journey, *plus ultra—further still*, till we come to our journey's end. We must remember, that in the ways of religion we are upon our journey, and it is a journey of business, business of life and death, and therefore we must not trifle, or lose time ; but must lift up our feet, as Jacob did, (Gen. xxix. 1.) *Then Jacob went on his way ;* in the margin it is, *he lift up his feet* ; and we must *lift up our hearts*, as Jehoshaphat did in the *ways of the Lord*, (2 Chron. xvii. 6.) and not take up short of the end of our faith and hope, not take up short of home : and though the journey is long, and requires all this care and application, yet it is pleasant, it is peace, notwithstanding.

In the way of religion and godliness, taken generally, there are different paths, according to the different sentiments of wise and good men in the less weighty matters of the law ; but, blessed be God, every *different path* is not a *by-path* ; and if it be not, but kept within the same hedges of divine

truths and laws, as to the essentials of religion, it may be, it shall be, a way of peace ; for both he that *eateth*, and he that *eateth not, give God thanks*, (Rom. xiv. 6.) and have comfort in it. If we have clear views, we shall perceive that *the kingdom of God, the way of wisdom, is not meat and drink*, and we shall find it to be, *righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, Rom. xiv. 17.

(3.) There is this peace in *all* the paths of wisdom, in all the instances of *pure and undefiled religion*. Look into them *all*, make trial of them *all*, and you will find there are none to be excepted, none to be quarrelled with : they are all uniform, and of a piece : the same golden thread of peace and pleasure runs through the whole web of serious godliness.

We cannot say so of this world, that *all* its paths are peace, however some of them may pretend to give the mind a little satisfaction. Its pleasures have their allays ; that which one thing sweetens, another comes presently, and imbibers. But as there is a universal rectitude in the principles of religion, (Ps. cxix. 128.) *I have esteemed all thy precepts concerning all things to be right ;* and, (Prov. viii. 8.) *All the words of my mouth are in righteousness*, (says wisdom,) *and there is nothing froward or perverse in them* ; so there is a universal peace and pleasure in the practice of religion. All our paths, if such as they should be, will be such as we could wish.

The doctrine, therefore, contained in these words, is,

That true piety has true pleasure in it. Or thus ;
The ways of religion are pleasant and peaceful ways.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE.

It is a plain truth which we have here laid down, and there is little in it that needs explication : it were well for us, if we would but as readily subscribe to the certainty of it, as we apprehend the sense and meaning of it. Nor will any complain, that it is hard to be understood, but those who know no other pleasures than those of sense, and relish no other, and therefore resolve not to give credit to it. Those who think, how can this be, that there should be pleasure in piety? will be ready to ask, what is the meaning of this doctrine? and to call it a *hard saying*.

You know what *pleasure* is ; I hope you know, in some degree, what the pleasure of the *mind* is, a pleasure which the soul has the sensation of. And do you not know, in some degree, what *piety* is, a due regard to a God above us, and having the eyes of the soul ever up unto him? Then you know what

I mean when I say, that there is an abundance of real pleasure and satisfaction in the ways of religion and godliness.

But to help you a little in the understanding of it, and to prevent mistakes, observe,

I. That I speak of *true piety*, and of that, *as far as it goes*.

1. *Hypocrites are very much strangers to the delights and pleasures of religion*; nay, they are *altogether* so, for it is *joy* which those *strangers* do not *intermeddle with*. Counterfeit piety can never bring in true pleasure. He that acts a part upon a stage, though it be the same part of one that is ever so pleasant, though he may humour the pleasantness well, does not experience it. The pleasures of God's house lie not in the outer courts, but within the veil. None know what the *peace of God* means, but those that are under the dominion and operation of his grace; nor can any that *deny the power of godliness*, expect to share in the pleasures of it. *When wisdom enters into thine heart*, takes possession of that, and becomes a living, active principle there; then, and not till then, it is *pleasant unto thy soul*, Prov. ii. 10. They that aim at no more than the credit of their religion before men, justly fall short of the comfort of it in themselves.

Hypocrites have other things that they delight in, the satisfactions of the world, the gratifications of sense, which put their mouths out of taste for spiritual pleasures, so that they have *no pleasure in them*. They that have their hearts upon their marketings, are weary of the *new moons* and the *sabbaths*, Amos viii. 5. With good reason, therefore, does Job ask, *Will the hypocrite delight himself in the Almighty?* (ch. xxvii. 10.) No, his soul takes its ease in the creature, and returns not to the Creator as its *rest* and *home*.

Some transitory pleasure a hypocrite may have in religion, from a *land-flood* of sensible affections, who yet has not the least taste of the *river of God's pleasures*. There were those who *delighted to know God's ways*; (Isa. lviii. 2.) they met with some agreeable notions in them, that surprised them, and pleased their fancies, but they did not delight to walk in them. The stony ground *received the word with joy*, and yet received no lasting benefit by it, Luke viii. 13. Herod *heard John gladly*, (Mark vi. 20.) He found something very agreeable in his sermons, and which natural conscience could not but embrace, and yet could not bear to be reprov'd for his Herodias. A florid preacher, such as Ezekiel was, may be to them as a *very lovely song of one that can play well on an instrument*, (Ezek. xxxiii. 32.) and yet, at the same time, *the word of the Lord*, if it touch their consciences, and show them their transgressions, is to them a *reproach*, Jer. vi. 10.

They whose hearts are not right with God in their religion, cannot have the pleasure of *communion*

with God; for it is the *soul* only that converses *with God*, and that he communicates himself to; *bodily exercise profiteth little*, (1 Tim. iv. 8.) and therefore pleases little. The service of God is a burthen and a task to an unsanctified, unrenewed heart; it is out of its element when it is brought into that air: and therefore, instead of snuffing it up, and saying, Behold, what a pleasure it is! it *snuffs at it*, and says, *Behold, what a weariness it is!* Mal. i. 13.

Nor can they take any pleasure in communing with their own consciences, or in their reflections; for *they* are ready, upon all occasions, to give them uneasiness, by charging them with that which is disagreeable to their profession, and gives the lie to it. And though they cry, *Peace, peace*, to themselves, they have that within them, that tells them the God of heaven does not speak *peace* to them; and this casts a damp upon all their pleasure, that their religion itself gives them pain, God himself is a terror to them, and the gospel itself condemns them for their insincerity. In time of trouble and distress, none are so much *afraid*, as the *sinners in Zion*, (Isa. xxxiii. 14.) the secret sinners there; and fearfulness is the greatest surprise of all to the hypocrites, (Amos vi. 1.) that were at *ease in Zion*, and thought its strong holds would be their security.

Therefore it is that hypocrites cast off religion, and discharge themselves of the profession of it, after they have a while disguised themselves with it, because it did not sit easy; and they are weary of it. Tradesmen that take no pleasure in their business, will not stick to it long; no more will those that take no pleasure in their religion; nor will any thing carry us through the outward difficulties of it, but the inward delights of it; if those be wanting, the *tree* is not *watered*, and therefore even *its leaf* will soon *wither*, Ps. i. 3. The hypocrite will not *always call upon God*, will not long do it, because he *will not delight himself in the Almighty*, Job xxvii. 10. This ought not to be a stumbling-block to us. Thus hypocrites in religion prove apostates from it; and the reason is, because they never found it pleasant. They never found it pleasant, because they were never sincere in it, which was *their fault*, and not the fault of the religion they professed.

Let us therefore take heed, and beware of hypocrisy, (Luke xii. 1.) if ever we hope to find *pleasure* in religion. Counterfeit piety has some other end in view, some other end to serve, than that which is the spring of *true delight*. They who rest in that, *hew them out cisterns* (Jer. ii. 13.) that can hold but little water, and that *dead*; nay, *broken cisterns* that *can hold no water*; and how can they expect the pleasure which *they* have, who cleave to, and continually draw from, the *Fountain of life* and *living waters*? No; as their principles are, such are their pleasures; as their aims are, such are their joys; they appeal to the world, and to the world they shall

go. But let not the credit of religion suffer for the sake of those who are only pretenders to it, and so indeed enemies to it.

2. It is possible that true Christians may, through their own *fault* and *folly*, want very much of the pleasure of religion; and therefore, I say, true piety, *as far as it goes*, is very *pleasant*; as far as it has its due influence upon us, and is rightly understood, and lived up to.

We abide by it, That *Wisdom's ways* are always pleasant, and yet must own, that Wisdom's children are sometimes unpleasant, and therein come short of *justifying* Wisdom in this matter as they ought to do, (Luke vii. 35.) and rather give advantage to her accusers, and prejudice to her cause. Either they miss these ways, and turn aside out of them, and so lose the pleasure that is to be found in them; or, (which is a common case,) they refuse to take the comfort which they might have in these ways. They hamper themselves with needless perplexities, make the yoke heavy which Christ has made easy, and that frightful which he designed should be encouraging: they indulge themselves, and then, as Jonah when he was angry, justify themselves, in causeless griefs and fears, and think they do well to put themselves into an agony, to be very heavy and sore amazed, and their souls *exceeding sorrowful even unto death*, as Christ's was; whereas Christ put himself into such an agony to make us easy.

But let not true piety suffer in its reputation because of this; for though it be called a religious melancholy, it is not so, for it is contrary to the very nature and design of religion, while it shelters itself under the colour of it, and pretends to take rise from it. It is rather to be called *δεισιδαιμονία*—a *superstitious melancholy*, arising from such a slavish fear of God as the heathens were driven by to their daemons and barbarous sacrifices; which is a great injury to the honour of his goodness, as well as a great injury to themselves.

If the professors of religion look for that in the world, which is to be had in God only, and that is *perfect happiness*; and if they look for that in themselves, which is to be had in Christ only, and that is a *perfect righteousness*; or if they look for that on earth, which is to be had in heaven only, and that is *perfect holiness*; and then fret, and grieve, and go mourning, from day to day, because they are disappointed in their expectations, they may thank themselves; *Why seek they the living among the dead?* Luke xxiv. 5.

Let but religion, *true* and *pure* religion, in all the laws and instances of it, command and prevail, and these *tears* will soon be *wiped away*. Let but God's servants take their work before them, allow each principle of their religion its due weight, and each practice of it its due place and proportion, and let them not dash one precept of the gospel, any

more than one table of the law, in pieces against the other. Let them look upon it to be as much *their* duty to rejoice in Christ Jesus, as to mourn for sin; nay, and more, for *this* is in order to *that*: and ~~then~~ we shall not fear, that their sorrows will in the least shake the truth of our doctrine, for, as far as the religion is carried, it will carry this character along with it, and further it cannot be expected.

II. In true *piety*, I say, there is a *pleasure*: there is that which we may find comfort in, and fetch satisfaction from. There is a *bonum jucundum*—a *pleasant good*, as well as *utile*—a *useful one*. That is pleasant, which is agreeable, which the soul rejoices in, or, at least, reposes in; or which it *relishes*, pleases itself with, and desires the continuance and repetition of. Let a man's faculties be in their due frame and temper, not vitiated, corrupted, or depraved, and there is that in the exercise of religion which highly suits them, and satisfies them. And this pleasure is such as is not allayed with any thing to cast a damp upon it.

1. The ways of religion are *right* and *pleasant*; they are pleasant without the allay of injury and iniquity. Sin pretends to have its pleasures, but they are the *perverting of that which is right*, (Job xxxiii. 27.) they are *stolen waters*, (Prov. ix. 17.) unjust, though pleasant; but the pleasures of godliness are as agreeable to the rectitude of our nature as they are gratifying to the pure and undebauched desires of it. It is the way in which we *should go*; and the way in which, if we were not wretchedly degenerated, we *would go* of choice.

They are *right*, for they are marked out to us by our *rightful* Lord, who, having given us the being of rational creatures, has authority to give us a law suited to our being; and he has done it, both by natural conscience, and by the written word: he has said, *This is the way, walk in it*, Isa. xxx. 21. It is not only permitted and allowed us, but charged and commanded us, to walk in it. He has sent us, as messengers from him, to travel this road upon his errand.

They are *right*, for they lead directly to our *great end*, have a tendency to our welfare here and for ever. They are the only right way to that which is the felicity of our being, which we shall certainly miss and come short of, if we do not walk in this way.

But that is not all, they are also *pleasant*; *Behold how good and how pleasant!* Ps. cxxxiii. 1. It is the happiness of those that fear God, that he not only *teaches them in the way that he shall choose*, (and we may be sure that is the right way,) but also that *their souls shall dwell at ease*, Ps. xxv. 12, 13. Justly may they dwell at ease, who have Infinite Wisdom itself to choose their way, and guide them in it. That may be *right*, which is not *pleasant*, and that *pleasant* which is not *right*; but religion is both: therefore,

In the next verse it is compared to the *tree of life*. The tree of knowledge was indeed *pleasant to the eyes*, and a *tree to be desired*, but it was *forbidden*, (Gen. iii. 6.) and therefore religion is called a *tree of life*, which was not only pleasant, but was allowed, till sin entered.

2. They are *easy* and *pleasant*; pleasant without the alloy of toil and difficulty, any more than what arises from the corruption of our own nature; that indeed makes such opposition, that we have need of arguments, (and, blessed be God, we have good arguments,) to prove the practice of religion *easy*: but it is more than this, it is *pleasant*.

Much less is said than is intended, when we are told that *his commandments are not grievous*, 1 John v. 3. They are not only not grievous and galling, but they are gracious and pleasing. His yoke is *easy*, Matt. xi. 30. The word there used, *χρησός*, signifies more than so, it is *sweet* and *gentle*; not only easy as a yoke is to the neck, when it is so well fitted as not to hurt it, but easy as a pillow is to the head, when the head is weary and sleepy. It is not only tolerable, but very comfortable. There is not only no matter of complaint in the ways of God, nothing to hurt us, but there is abundant matter of joy and rejoicing. It is not only work which is not weariness, but work which is its own wages; such a *tree of life*, as will not only screen us from the storm and tempest, and feed us with necessary food, but we may sit down under the shadow of it with great delight, and the fruit of it will be *sweet unto our taste*, Cant. ii. 3.

3. They are *gainful* and *pleasant*, and have not the alloy of expense and loss. That may be profitable, which yet may be unpleasant, and that pleasant, which afterward may prove very unprofitable and prejudicial. What *fruit* have sinners from those things in which yet they said they had pleasure? Rom. vi. 21. But religion brings both pleasure with it, and profit after it. The pleasures of religion do not cost us dear; there is no loss by them when the account comes to be balanced.

The gain of this world is usually fetched in by toil and uneasy labour, which are grievous to flesh and blood. The servants of this world are drudges to it; they *rise up early*, *sit up late*, and *eat the bread of sorrows*, (Ps. cxxvii. 2.) in pursuit of its wealth. They *labour*, and *bereave their souls of good*; (Eccl. v. 8.) but the servants of God have a pleasure even in the work they are to get by, and which they shall be recompensed for.

Beside the tendency that there is in the practice of serious godliness to our happiness in the other life, there is much in it that conduces to our comfort in this life. David observes it to the honour of religion, (Ps. xix. 11.) that not only *after* keeping, but *in* keeping, God's commandments, *there is a great reward*; a present great reward of obedience in obe-

dience. *A good man is satisfied from himself*, (Prov. xiv. 14.) that is, from that which Divine Grace has wrought in him; and the saints are said to *sing in the ways of the Lord*, (Ps. cxxxviii. 5.) as those that find them pleasant ways.

The more closely we adhere to the rules of religion, the more intimate our converse is with divine things; and the more we live with an eye to Christ and another world, the more comfort we are likely to have in our own bosoms. *Great peace* have they that *love God's law*, (Ps. cxix. 165.) and the more they love it, the greater their peace is; nay, it is promised to the church, that *all her children shall be taught of the Lord*, (and those whom he teaches, are well taught, and taught to do well,) and then *great shall be the peace of her children*, (Isa. liv. 13.) it shall be entailed upon them; *Peace like a river, in omne volubilis avum—rolling on from age to age*.

III. I call it a *true* pleasure. As there is *science*, *falsely so called*, (1 Tim. vi. 20.) so there is *pleasure*, *falsely so called*. One of the ancients distinguishes between *ἡδονὰς ἀληθεῖς*, and *ἡδονὰς ψευδοῦς*. (*Damascen. Orthod. Fid. l. 2.*) *pleasures that have some truth in them, and pleasures that deceive us with a lie in their right hand*. Some have said that the School of Epicurus, which is commonly branded and condemned for making pleasure man's *chief good*, did not mean sensual pleasure, but the pleasure of the mind. And we should be willing enough to admit it, were not the other principles of his philosophy so atheistical and irreligious. But this we are sure of, that it is a *true* pleasure which religion secures to us; a pleasure that deserves the name, and answers it to the full.

It is a *true* pleasure, for,

1. It is *real*, and *not counterfeit*. Carnal worldlings pretend a great satisfaction in the enjoyments of the world, and the gratifications of sense. *Soul, take thine ease*, says one, Luke xii. 19. *I have found me out substance*, says another, (Hos. xii. 8.) *even the life of my hand*. *I have seen*, says a third, *the fire*, Isa. xlv. 16. *The wicked boasts of his heart's desire*; but Solomon assures us, not only that *the end of that mirth is heaviness*, but that even *in laughter the heart is sorrowful*, Prov. xiv. 13. But those that make a god of their belly, and those that make a god of their money, find such a constant pain and uneasiness attending their spiritual idolatries, that their pleasure is but from the teeth outward. Discontent at present disappointments, and fear of worse ungoverned passions, (which seldom are made less turbulent by the gratifications of the appetite,) and above all, conscience of guilt, and dread of divine wrath, these give them the lie, when they boast of their pleasures, which, with such allays, are not to be boasted of; they would not be thought to be disappointed in that which they have chosen for their happiness, and therefore they seem to be pleased,

they seem to be pleasant, when really their heart, if it knows its own wickedness, cannot but *know its own bitterness*, Prov. xiv. 10.

And many of the good things of this world, of which we said, *These same shall comfort us*, prove vexations to us; and we are disappointed in that, wherein we most promised ourselves satisfaction. *If we say our bed shall comfort us*, perhaps it is not a bed to rest on, but a bed to toss on, as it was to poor Job, when *wearisome nights were appointed to him*. Nay, such strangers are we to real pleasure in the things of this life, and so often do we deceive ourselves with that which is counterfeit, that we wish to live to those days of life which we are told will be *evil days*, and those years of which we are assured that we shall say, *We have no pleasure in them*, Eccl. xii. 1.

But the pleasures of religion are solid, substantial pleasures, and not painted; gold, and not gilded over: these sons of pleasure *inherit substance*, (Prov. viii. 21.) it is that *which is* the firm foundation, the strong superstructure, the *consolations of God*, which are not *few*, nor *small*, (Job xv. 14.) while a vain and foolish world, *cause their eyes to fly upon that which is not*, Prov. xxiii. 5. Worldly people pretend to the joy they have not; but godly people conceal the joy they have; as he did, that had found the treasure hid in the field. They have, like their Master, *meat to eat, which the world knows not of*, John iv. 32.

2. It is *rational*, and not *brutish*. It is the pleasure of the soul, not of sense; it is the peculiar pleasure of a man, not that which we have in common with the inferior creatures. The pleasures of religion are not those of the mere animal life, which arise from the gratifications of the senses of the body, and its appetites; no, they affect the soul, that part of us by which we are allied to the world of spirits, that noble part of us, and therefore are to be called the true pleasures of a man.

The brute creatures have the same pleasures of sense that we have, and perhaps, in some of them, the senses are more exquisite, and consequently they have them in a much higher degree; nor are their pleasures liable to the correctives of reason and conscience as ours are. Who live such merry lives as the leviathan, who *plays in the deep*, or the birds that *sing among the branches*? Ps. civ. 12, 26.

But what are these to a man, who being *taught more than the beasts of the earth, and made wiser than the fowls of heaven*, (Job xxxv. 11.) and being dignified above the beasts, not so much by the powers of reason, as by a capacity for religion, is certainly designed for enjoyments of a more excellent nature, for spiritual and heavenly delights. When God made man, he left him not to the enjoyments of the wide world, with the other creatures, but enclosed him a paradise,—a garden of pleasure, (so Eden signifies,) where he should have delights proper for

him; signified indeed by the pleasures of a garden, pleasant trees, and their fruits, but really the delights of a soul, that was a ray of divine light, and a spark of divine fire, newly breathed into him from above, and on which God's image and likeness were imprinted. And we never recover our felicity, which we lost by our first parents' indulging the appetite of the body, till we come to the *due relish* of those pleasures which man has in common with angels, and a *due contempt* of those which he has in common with the brutes.

The pleasures of wisdom's ways may at second-hand affect the body, and be an advantage to that; hence it is said (Prov. iii. 8.) to be *health to the navel*, and *marrow to the bones*; but its residence is in the *hidden man of the heart*, (1 Pet. iii. 4.) and its comforts *delight the soul in the multitude of its thoughts*, Ps. xciv. 19. It is pleasant to the soul, and makes it like a watered garden. These are pleasures which a man, by the assistance of divine grace, may reason himself *into*, and not, (as it is with sensual pleasures,) reason himself *out of*.

There is no pleasure separate from that of religion, which pretends to be an intellectual pleasure, but that of *learning*, and that of *honour*; but as to the pleasure of a proud man in his dignities, and the respects paid him, as Herod, in the acclamations of the crowd, it does but affect the fancy; it is *vain-glory*, it is not glory, it is but the folly of him that receives the honour, fed by the folly of them that give it; so that it does not deserve to be called a rational pleasure; it is a lust of the mind that is gratified by it, and that is as much an instance of our degeneracy, as any of the *lusts of the flesh* are.

And as to the pleasure of a scholar, abstracted from religion, it is indeed rational and intellectual; but it is only the pleasure of the mind in knowing truth, and not its enjoying good. Solomon, who had as much of this pleasure as ever any man had, and as nice a taste of it, yet has assured us from his own experience, that in *much wisdom* of this kind is *much grief*, and *he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow*, Eccl. i. 18.

But the pleasures which a holy soul has in knowing God, and in communion with him, are not only of a spiritual nature, but they are satisfying, they are filling to the soul, and make a happiness adequate to its best affections.

3. It is durable, and not flashy and transitory: that is true pleasure, and deserves the name, which will continue with us as a *tree of life*, and not wither as the *green herb*; which will be not as the light of a *candle*, which is soon burnt out, but as that of the *sun*, which is a faithful witness in heaven. We reckon that most *valuable*, which is most *durable*.

The pleasures of sense are fading and perishing; as *the world passeth away*, (1 John ii. 17.) so do the

lusts of it : that which at first pleases and satisfies, after a while palls and surfeits. *As the crackling of thorns under a pot*, (Eccl. vii. 6.) which make a great blaze, and a great noise for a little while, but soon end in soot and ashes; such is the *laughter of the fool*; the *end of his mirth is heaviness*. Belshazzar's jollity is soon turned into the utmost consternation; *The night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear to me*, (Isa. xxi. 4.) The pleasures of sin are said to be but for a *season*, (Heb. xi. 25.) for the *end of that mirth is heaviness*. As they have no *consistence*, so they have no *continuance*.

But the pleasures of religion will abide, they wither not in winter, nor tarnish with time, nor does age wrinkle their beauty; frost nips them not, nor do storms blast them; they continue through the greatest opposition of events, and despise that time and *chance*, which *happens to all things under the sun*, Eccl. ix. 11. Believers, when they are sorrowful, they are but *as* sorrowful, for they are *always rejoicing*, (2 Cor. vi. 10. and ii. 14.) *thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph*. If an immortal soul make an eternal God its chief joy, what should hinder but that it should *rejoice evermore*, (1 Thess. v. 16.) for as the treasure, so the pleasure, is laid up there, where *neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal*. The joy which Christ gives to those that are his, is joy which *no man taketh from them*, (John xvi. 22.) for it is their heart that rejoices. They are the beginning of everlasting pleasures, the earnest and foretaste of them; so that they are, in effect, pleasures for evermore.

So then the great truth which I desire my heart and yours may be fully convinced of, is this; That a holy, heavenly life, spent in the service of God, and in communion with him, is, without doubt, the most pleasant and comfortable life any man can live in this world.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLEASURE OF BEING RELIGIOUS, PROVED FROM THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION, AND MANY PARTICULAR INSTANCES OF IT.

THE doctrine needs no further explication, nor can have any better, than our own experience of it; but the chief part of this undertaking is to prove the truth of it. And O that God, by me, would set it before you in a true light, so that you may be all convinced of it, and embrace it as a faithful saying, and well worthy of all acceptance, that a godly life is a pleasant life: and that we may be wrought upon to live such a life.

Pleasure is a tempting thing; what yields delight cannot but attract desire; it is next to necessity, so

strongly does it urge. Surely, if we were but fully persuaded of this, that religion has pleasure on its side, we should be wrought upon by the allurements of it to be religious. It is certainly so, let us not be in doubt of it. Here is a bait that has no hook under it, a pleasure courting you which has no pain attending it, no bitterness at the latter end of it; a pleasure which God himself invites you to, and which will make you happy, truly and eternally happy: and shall not this work upon you?

But we may entertain ourselves, and our hearers, long enough with discourses of the pleasantness of Wisdom's ways, but they will not profit unless they be *mixed with faith*. O! that we would all mix faith with this truth! that we would yield to the evidence of it.

To make way for the proof of it, I would only desire two things:

1. That you would *lay aside prejudice*, and give a fair and impartial hearing to this cause, and do not prejudge it. He that *answers* any matter before he *hears* it, hears it out, it is *folly* and *shame* to him; (Prov. viii. 13, 14.) especially if it be a matter of great importance and concern to himself; a matter of life and death. Be willing, therefore, to believe, that it is possible there *may*, and then I doubt not but to make out, that it is certain there *is* true pleasure in true religion.

You have got a notion, it may be, and are confirmed in it by the common cry of the multitude, that religion is a sour melancholy thing, that it is to bid farewell to all pleasure and delight, and to spend your days in grief, and your years in sighing: and if we offer any thing to the contrary, that it is a pleasant thing, and the best entertainment that can be to the mind, you are ready to say, as Ezekiel's hearers did of him, *Doth he not speak parables?* (Ezek. xx. 49.) does he not speak paradoxes? You startle at it, and start from it as a hard saying, like Nathaniel, when he said, *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* (John i. 46.) So you are ready to say, Can there be any pleasure in religion? Believe it, Sirs, there can be, there cannot but be, pleasure in it.

Do not measure religion by the follies of some that profess it, but do not live up to their profession, nor adorn it; let them bear their own burthen, or clear themselves as they can; but you are to judge of things, not persons, and therefore ought not to be prejudiced against religion for their sakes. Nor should you measure by the ill opinions which its adversaries have of it, or the ill name which they endeavour to put it into, who neither know it, nor love it, and therefore care not what unjust things they say to justify themselves in the contempt of it, and to hinder others from embracing it; but think freely of this matter.

2. That you would admit this as a principle, and

abide by it,—that, *The soul is the man*: this is the *Postulatum* that I lay down, in order to the proof of the doctrine, and I hope it will be readily granted me, that man is principally to be considered as an intellectual, immortal being, endued with spiritual powers and capacities, allied to the world of spirits, and accountable to the Father of spirits; that there is a spirit in man, that has sensations and dispositions of its own, active and receptive faculties distinct from those of the body; and that this is the part of us, which we are, and ought to be, most concerned about, because it is really well or ill with us, according as it is well or ill with our souls.

Believe, that in man's present state, the soul and the body have separate and contesting interests; the body thinks it is its interest to have its appetites gratified, and to be indulged in its pleasures; while the soul knows it is its interest to have the appetites of the body subdued and mortified, that spiritual pleasures may be the better relished; and we are here upon our trial, which of these two we will side with.

Be wise, therefore, be resolute, and show yourselves men that are actuated and governed by reason, and are affected with things as reason represents them to you: not reason, as it is in the mere natural man, clouded, and plunged, and lost in sense; but reason elevated and guided by divine revelation to us, and divine grace in us. Walk by faith, and not by sense; let the God that made you, and knows you, and wishes you well, and from whom your judgment must proceed, determine your sentiments in this matter, and the work is done.

Now I shall, in the first place, endeavour to prove this doctrine, by showing you *what religion is*, wherein it *consists*, and what those things are which constitute serious godliness; and then you shall yourselves judge, whether it be not in its own nature pleasant. If you understand religion aright, you will find, that it has an innate sweetness in it, inseparable from it. Let it but speak for itself, and it will recommend itself. The very exhibition of this beauty in its own features and proportions, is enough to bring us all in love with it.

You shall see the pleasures of religion in twelve instances of it.

I. To be religious, is to *know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*, (John xvii. 3.) And is not that pleasant? This is the first thing we have to do, to get our understandings rightly informed, concerning both the *object* and the *medium* of our religious regards, to seek and receive this light from heaven, to have it diffused through our souls as the morning light in the air, and to be *turned* to the impressions of it, *as the clay to the seal*, (Job xxxviii. 14.) and this is a pleasure to the soul that understands itself, and its own true interest. *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to*

behold the sun, (Eccl. xi. 7.) *it rejoiceth the heart*, Prov. xv. 30. Hence, light is often put for joy and comfort; but no light is comparable to that of the *knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*, 2 Cor. iv. 6.

This is finding the knowledge we had lost, and must for ever have despaired of finding, if God had not made it known to us by his Spirit. It is finding the knowledge that we are undone *without*, and happy for ever in; for what is heaven but this knowledge in perfection? It is finding the knowledge which the soul would covet and rest in, if it had but recovered itself from the delirium, which by the fall it is thrown into. They that *sat in darkness*, when they begin to be religious, begin to *see a great light*, Matt. iv. 16. And it is a pleasing surprise to them; it is coming into a new world; such a pleasure as none could know so well, as he that had his sight given him, though he was *born blind*, John ix. 25. *Blessed are your eyes*, (says Christ to those whom he had brought into an acquaintance with himself,) *for they see. Apply thy heart to my knowledge*, saith Solomon, Prov. xxii. 17, 18. *for it is a pleasant thing if thou keep it within thee*. Thou wilt eat honey, because it is good, Prov. xxiv. 13, 14. *and the honey-comb, which is sweet to the taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul*. Could a learned man, that had hit upon a demonstration in *mathematics*, cry out in a transport of joy, *εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα*,—*I have found, I have found*; and may not they much more boast of the discovery, that have found the knowledge of the Most High?

There is no pleasure in any learning like that of learning Christ, and the things that *belong to our everlasting peace*; for that which is known is not small and trivial, is not doubtful and uncertain, is not foreign to us, and which we are not concerned in; which are things that may much diminish the pleasure of any knowledge; but it is great and sure, and of the last importance to us, and the knowledge of it gives us satisfaction. Here we may rest our souls. To know the perfections of the divine nature, the unsearchable riches of divine grace to be led into the mystery of our redemption and reconciliation by Christ; this is food, such knowledge as this is a feast to the soul: it is *meat indeed*, and *drink indeed*: it is the knowledge of that *which the angels desire to look into*, 1 Peter i. 12. If the knowledge of the law of God was so sweet to David, *sweeter than honey to his taste*, Ps. xix. 10; cxix. 103. how much more should the knowledge of the gospel of Christ be so to us? When God gives this *wisdom and knowledge*, with it he *gives joy* to him that is *good in his sight*, Eccl. ii. 26.

I wonder what pleasure or satisfaction those can have in themselves, that are ignorant of God, and Christ, and another world, though they are told there is such a knowledge to be had, and there are

those that have it, and it is their continual entertainment. But thus do men stand in their own light, when they *love darkness rather than light*.

II. To be religious, is to *return to God, and repose in him as the rest of our souls*. And is not that pleasant? It is not only for our understandings to embrace the knowledge of him, but our affections to fasten upon the enjoyment of him: it is to love God as our *chief good*, and to rest in that love; to *love him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and might*, who is well worthy of all that love, and infinitely more; amiable in himself, gracious to us; who will accept our love, and return it; who has promised to *love those that love him*, Prov. viii. 17. The love of God reigning in the soul (and that is true religion) is as much a satisfaction to the soul, as the love of the world is a vexation to it, when it comes to be reflected upon, and is found to be so ill bestowed.

How pleasant must it needs be, so far to recover ourselves, as to quit the world for a portion and happiness as utterly insufficient to be so, and to depend upon him to be so, who has enough in him to answer our utmost expectations! When we have in vain sought for satisfaction where it is not to be had, to seek it and find it where it is! To come from doating upon *lying vanities*, and *spending our money for that which is not bread*, (Isa. lv. 2.) to live, and live plentifully, upon a God that is enough, a God all-sufficient, and in him to enjoy *our own mercies*! Did ever any thing speak a mind more easy and better pleased than that of David, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul!* (Psalm cxvi. 7.) to God as thy rest, for in him, I am where I would be, I have what I would have: or that, (Ps. xvi. 2, 5, 6.) *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord, the portion of my inheritance, and of my cup?* And then, *The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage?* Or that, (Ps. lxxiii. 25.) *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee; for when flesh and heart fail, thou art the strength and joy of my heart, and my portion for ever!*

Religion consists not in raptures and transports; yet, without doubt, holy souls that are at home in God, that have *made the Most High their habitation*, (Ps. xci. 9.) whose desires are toward him, whose delights are in him, who are in him as their centre and element, *dwell at ease*. None can imagine the pleasure that a believer has in his covenant relation to God, and interest in him, and the assurance of his love. Have I taken *thy testimonies to be my heritage for ever?* (Ps. cxix. lli.) surely they are the *rejoicing of my heart*; I cannot be better provided for. When King Asa brought his people to renew their covenant with God, it is said *they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice and with shoutings, and with trumpets*, (2 Chron. xv. 14, 15.) *And all Judah rejoiced at the*

oath, for they had sworn with all their heart. When we come to make it our own act and deed, to *join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant*, and are upright with him in it, we cannot but be pleased with what we have done; it is a marriage covenant, it is made with joy: (Cant. ii. 16.) *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*.

III. To be religious, is to *come to God as a father, in and by Jesus Christ as a mediator*. And is not this pleasant? We have not only the pleasure of knowing and loving God, but the pleasure of drawing nigh to him, and having by faith a humble freedom and intimacy with him; (Ps. lxxv. 4.) *blessed are they that dwell in his courts, they shall be satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple*. Religion is described by coming to God; and what can be more agreeable to a soul that comes from him?

It is to come to God as a child to his father, his father's house, to his father's arms, and to cry, *Abba, Father*. To come as a petitioner to his prince, is a privilege; but to come as a child to his father, is a pleasure; and this pleasure have all the saints, that have received the *Spirit of adoption*. They can look up to the God that made them, as one that loves them, and has a tender compassion for them, *as a father has for his children*, (Ps. ciii. 13.) and delights to do them good, *taking pleasure in their prosperity*; as one whom though they have offended, yet is reconciled to them, owns them as his children, and encourages them to call him father. When he afflicts them, they know it is in love, and for their benefit, and that still it is *their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom*, Luke xii. 32. When Ephraim bemoaned himself *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*, God bemoaned him *as a dear son, as a pleasant child*, Jer. xxxi. 18, 20. And if even prodigals, when penitents, become pleasant children to God, surely they have no reason to be unpleasant to themselves.

But this is not all, it is not only to come to God as a father, who *himself loves us*, (John xvi. 27.) but it is to come to him in the name of Jesus Christ, who is our *Advocate with the Father*; that by these two *immutable things* we might have *strong consolation*, that we have not only a God to go to, but an Advocate to introduce us to him, and to speak for us. Believing in Christ is sometimes expressed by rejoicing in him; for it is a complacency of soul in the methods which infinite wisdom has taken, of bringing God and man together by a Mediator. *We are the circumcision that rejoice in Christ Jesus*, (Phil. iii. 3.) not only rely upon him, but triumph in him. Paul is not only not ashamed of the cross of Christ, but he *glories in it*, Gal. vi. 14. And when the eunuch is brought to *believe in Christ with all his heart, he goes on his way rejoicing*, highly pleased with what he has done.

What a pleasure, what a satisfaction, is it, to lodge the great concerns of our souls and eternity (which,

surely, we cannot but have some careful thoughts about) in such a skilful, faithful hand as that of our Lord Jesus? And this we do by faith. To *cast the burthen* upon him who is *able to save to the uttermost*, and as willing as he is able, and thus to make ourselves easy. How is blessed Paul elevated at the thought of this! *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, is risen again*, Rom. viii. 34. And with what pleasure does he reflect upon the confidence he had put in Jesus Christ! (2 Tim. i. 12.) *I know whom I have believed, and he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day*. They that know what it is to be in pain for sin, and in care to obtain the favour of God, cannot but know what a pleasure it is to believe in Christ as the propitiation for our sins, and our intercessor with God.

How can we live a more pleasant life, than to *live by the faith of the Son of God*? (Gal. ii. 20.) to be continually depending on him, and deriving from him, and referring all to him; and as we have received him, so to *walk in him*? It is in believing, that we are *filled with joy and peace*, Rom. xv. 13.

IV. To be religious, is to *enjoy God in all our creature-comforts*. And is not that pleasant? It is to take the common supports and conveniences of life, (be they of the richest, or be they of the meanest,) as the products of his providential care concerning us, and the gifts of his bounty to us, and in them to *taste and see that the Lord is good*, (Ps. xxxiv. 8.) good to all, good to us. It is to look above second causes to the first, through the creature to the Creator, and to say concerning every thing, that is agreeable and serviceable to us, "This I asked, and this I have from the hand of my heavenly Father." What a noble taste and relish does this put into all the blessings with which we are daily loaded; our health and ease, our rest and sleep, our food and raiment, all the satisfaction we have in our relations, peace in our dwellings, success in our callings! The sweetness of these is more than doubled. it is highly raised, when by our religion we are taught and enabled to see them all coming to us from the goodness of God, as our great Benefactor, and thus to enjoy them *richly*, (1 Tim. vi. 17.) while those who look no further than the creature, enjoy them very *poorly*, and only as the inferior creatures do.

Carnal, irreligious people, though they take a greater liberty in the use of the delights of sense than good people dare take, and therein think they have the advantage of them, yet, I am confident, they have not half the true delight in them that good people have; not only because all excesses are a force upon nature, and surfeits are as painful as hunger and thirst, but because, (though they do not thus abuse God's good creatures,) they deprive themselves of the comfort of receiving them from their Father's hand, and are not affected to him as obe-

dient children. *They knew not that I gave them corn, and wine, and oil*, Hos. ii. 8. They make use of the creature, but (Isa. xxii. 11.) *they have not looked unto the Maker thereof, nor had respect to him that fashioned it long ago*, as good people do; and so they come short of the pleasure which good people have.

Is it not pleasant to taste covenant-love in common mercies? very pleasant to see the hand of our heavenly Father spreading our table, filling our cup, making our houses safe, and our beds easy? This they do, that by faith have their eyes ever towards the Lord, that by prayer fetch in his blessing upon all their enjoyments, and by praise give the glory of them to that *mercy* of his which *endureth for ever*. And when thus a continual regard is had to that mercy, an abundant sweetness is thereby infused into all the comforts of this life; for as the wrath and curse of God is the wormwood and the gall, (Lam. iii. 19.) in all the *afflictions* and *miseries* of this life; so his loving kindness is the honey and oil in all the comforts and enjoyments of this life: that is it which is *better than life*, (Ps. lxxiii. 3.) and which is abundantly satisfying; which *puts gladness into the heart beyond the joy of harvest*, Ps. iv. 7. Then the *nations* are glad, and *sing for joy*, when not only *the earth yields her increase*, but with it God, even *their own God*, gives them his blessing, Ps. lxxvii. 4, 6. And when the church is brought to such a sense of God's grace, as to cry out, *How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!* (Zech. ix. 17.) it follows, that then *corn shall make the young men cheerful*; intimating that we have no joy of our enjoyments, no true joy of them, till we are led by these streams to the fountain. *To the pure, all things are pure*, (Tit. i. 15.) and the more pure they are, the more pleasant they are.

V. To be religious, is to *cast all our cares upon God, and to commit all our ways and works to him, with an assurance that he will care for us*. And is not this pleasant? It is a very sensible pleasure to be eased of some pressing burthen which we are ready to sink under; and care is such a burthen: it is a heaviness in the heart of man, which makes it to stoop. Now true religion enables us to *acknowledge God in all our ways*, (Prov. iii. 6.) and then depend upon him to *direct our steps*, and follow his directions, not leaning to our own understanding. It is to refer ourselves, and the disposal of every thing that concerns us in this world, to God, and to his will and wisdom, with an entire acquiescence in his award and arbitration; *Here I am, let the Lord do with me as seemeth good in his eyes*, 2 Sam. xv. 26.

To be truly godly, is to have our wills melted into the will of God in every thing, and to say *Amen* to it, not only as a prayer, but as a covenant; *Father in heaven, thy will be done; not as I will, but as thou wilt*. It is to be fully reconciled to all the disposals of the divine providence, and methods of divine

grace, both concerning others and ourselves : to be satisfied that all is well that God does, and will appear so at last, when the mystery of God shall be finished. And how does the mind enjoy itself that is come to this ! How easy is it ! It is not only freed from racking anxieties, but filled with pleasing prospects : fears are hereby silenced, and hopes kept up and elevated. Nothing can come amiss to those who have thus been taught by the principles of their religion to make the best of that which is, because it is the will of God ; which is making a virtue of necessity.

What uncomfortable lives do they live, that are continually fretting at that which cannot be helped, quarrelling with the disposals of Providence, when they cannot alter them ; and thus by contracting guilt as well as by indulging grief, doubling every burthen ? But how pleasantly do they travel through the wilderness of this world, who constantly follow the pillar of cloud and fire, and accommodate themselves to their lot, whatever it is ? That, like Paul, through Christ strengthening them, have learned in every estate to be content, know how to want, and how to abound ? Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13.

Religion brings the mind to the condition, whatever it is, and so makes it easy, because the condition, though it be not in every thing to our mind, it is according to God's mind, who in all occurrences performeth the thing that is appointed for us, (Job xxiii. 14.) and will make all work for good to them that love him. When the psalmist had directed us to delight ourselves always in the Lord, (Ps. xxxvii. 4, 5.) that is, to make our religion a constant pleasure to ourselves, he directs us, in order thereunto, to commit our way unto the Lord, to trust also in him that he will bring it to pass, so that we shall have the desire of our hearts. And when St. Paul had encouraged us to be careful for nothing, but in every thing to make our requests known to God, he assures us that if we do so, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds, Phil. iv. 6, 7.

VI. To be religious, is to rejoice in the Lord always, Phil. iii. 1. and iv. 4. And is not that pleasant ? It is not only one of the privileges of our religion, that we may rejoice, but it is made one of the duties of it. We are defective in our religion, if we do not live a life of complacency in God, in his being, his attributes, and relations to us. It should be a constant pleasure to us, to think that there is a God ; that he is such a one as the Scripture has revealed him to be, a Being infinitely wise and powerful, holy, just, and good ; that this God governs the world, and gives law to all the creatures ; that he is our owner and ruler ; that in his hand our breath is, in his hand our times, our hearts, and all our ways are. Thus certainly it is, and thus it must be, and happy they that can please themselves with these thoughts ; as those must needs be a constant terror to themselves, who could wish it were otherwise.

They who thus delight in God have always something, and something very commanding too, to delight in ; a fountain of joy that can never be either exhausted or stopped up, and to which they may always have access. How few are there that live many days, and rejoice in them all ! Eccl. xi. 8. Such a thing is supposed indeed, but it is never found true in any, but those that make God their joy, the gladness of their joy, as the psalmist expresses it, (Ps. xliii. 4.) their exceeding joy : and in him it is intended the joy should terminate, when we are bid to rejoice evermore, 1 Thess. v. 16.

The conversion of the nations to Christ, and his holy religion, is often prophesied of in the Old Testament, under the notion of their being brought into a state of holy joy ; (Ps. xcvi. 11. and xcvi. 1. and c. 1.) Let the earth rejoice that the Lord reigns, and let the multitude of isles be glad thereof ; make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy to all people, Rom. xv. 10. When Samaria received the gospel, there was great joy in that city, Acts viii. 8. so essential is joy to religion.

And the conversation of those that are joined to the Lord, when it is as it should be, is cheerful and joyful. They are called upon to walk in the light of the Lord, (Isa. ii. 5.) and to sing in the ways of the Lord, (Ps. cxxxviii. 5.) and to serve the Lord their God with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things, (Deut. xxviii. 47.) yea, and in the want of all things too, (Hab. iii. 17.) Though the fig-tree do not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine. Has God now accepted thee, and thy works in Jesus Christ, Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart ; Eccl. ix. 7. It is the will of God that his people should be a cheerful people, that his Israel should rejoice in every good thing which the Lord their God giveth them, (Deut. xxvi. 11.) so that it is their own fault if they have not a continual feast, and be not made to rejoice with the outgoings of every morning, and every evening ; for the compassions of that God, in whom they rejoice, are not only constant, but new and fresh daily.

VII. To be religious, is to make a business of praising God : And is not that pleasant ? It is indeed very unpleasant, and contrary to our inclination, to be obliged continually to praise one that is not worthy of praise ; but what can be more pleasant, than to praise him to whom all praise is due, and ours particularly ; to whom we and all the creatures lie under all possible obligations ; who is worthy of, and yet exalted far above, all blessing and praise ; from whom all things are, and therefore to whom all things ought to be ?

There is little pleasure in praising one, whom none praise that are wise and good, but only the fools in Israel ; but in praising God we concur with the blessed angels in heaven, and all the saints, and do

it in concert with them, who the more they know him, the more they praise him, *Bless the Lord, ye his angels, and all his hosts*; and therefore with what pleasure can I cast in my mite into such a treasury, *Bless the Lord, O my soul!*

There is little pleasure in praising one, who will not regard our praises, nor take notice of our expressions of esteem and affection: but when we offer to God the sacrifice of praise continually, (according to the obligation which our religion lays upon us,) that is, *the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name*, (Heb. xiii. 15.) we offer it to one that takes notice of it, accepts it, is well pleased with it, smells a savour of rest from it, (Gen. viii. 21.) and will not fail to meet those with his mercies, who follow him with their praises: for he has said, that they who offer praise, glorify him; such a favourable construction does he put upon it, and such a high stamp upon coarse metal.

Now what is it that we have to do in religion but to praise God? We are taken into covenant with God, that we should be to him for a name, and for a praise, (Jer. xiii. 11.) are called into his marvellous light, that we should show forth the praises of him that called us, (1 Pet. ii. 9.) and how can we be more comfortably employed? They are, therefore, blessed that dwell in God's house, for they will be still praising him, Ps. lxxxiv. 4. And it is a good thing, good in itself, and good for us; and it is very pleasant to give thanks unto the Lord, and to show forth his praises, (Ps. cxxxv. 3. and xcii. 1.) for we cannot do ourselves a greater honour, or fetch in a greater satisfaction, than by giving unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: it is not only a heaven upon earth, but it is a pledge and earnest of a heaven in heaven too; for if we be here every day blessing God, (Ps. cxlv. 2.) we shall be praising him for ever and ever; for thus all that shall go to heaven hereafter begin their heaven now. Compare the hellish pleasure which some take in profaning the name of God, and the heavenly pleasure which others take in glorifying it, and tell me which is preferable.

VIII. To be religious, is to have all our inordinate appetites corrected and regulated. And is not that pleasant? To be eased from pain is a sensible pleasure, and to be eased from that which is the disease and disorder of the mind, is a mental pleasure. Those certainly live a most unpleasant, uncomfortable life, that are slaves to their appetites, and indulge themselves in the gratifications of sense, though ever so criminal; that lay the reins on the neck of their lusts, and withhold not their hearts from any joy. The drunkards and unclean persons, though they are said to give themselves up to their pleasures, yet, really, they estrange themselves from that which is true pleasure, and subject themselves to a continual pain and uneasiness.

The carnal appetite is often overcharged, and that

is a burthen to the body, and its distemper. When enough is as good as a feast, I wonder what pleasure it can be to take more than enough; and the appetite, the more it is indulged, the more humorous and troublesome it grows; it is surfeited, but not satisfied; it does but grow more impetuous, and more imperious. It is true of the body, what Solomon says of a servant, (Prov. xxix. 21.) *He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son, nay his master, at the length*. If we suffer the body to get dominion over the soul, so that the interests of the soul must be damaged to gratify the inclinations of the body, it will be a tyrant, (as a usurper generally is,) and will rule with rigour. And as God said to the people, (1 Sam. viii. 18. when by Samuel he had showed them the manner of the king that they chose, when they rejected his government,) *you will cry out in that day because of your king which ye have chosen you, and the Lord will not hear*; so it is with those that bring themselves into disorders, diseases, and terrors by the indulgence of their lusts. Who can pity them? They are well enough served for setting such a king over them. *Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow?* (Prov. xxiii. 29, 30.) None so much as they that tarry long at the wine, though they think themselves to have the monopoly of pleasure. The truth is, they that live in these pleasures are dead while they live, (1 Tim. v. 6.) and while they fancy themselves to take the greatest liberty, really find themselves in the greatest slavery; for they are led captive by Satan at his will, and of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage, 2 Pet. ii. 19.

And if the carnal appetite has not gained such a complete possession, as quite to extinguish all the remains of reason and conscience; those noble powers, since they are not permitted to give law, will give disturbance; and there are few that have so full an enjoyment of the forbidden pleasures of sense, but that they sometimes feel the checks of reason, and the terrors of conscience, which mar their mirth, as the hand-writing on the wall did Belshazzar's, and make their lives uncomfortable to them, and justly so, which makes them the more so.

Now to be religious, is to have the exorbitant power of those lusts and appetites broken, and since they will not be satisfied, to have them mortified, and brought into a quiet submission to the commanding faculties of the soul, according to the direction of the divine law; and thus the peace is preserved, by supporting good order and government in the soul.

Those certainly live the most easy, healthful, pleasant lives, that are most sober, temperate, and chaste; that allow not themselves to eat of any forbidden tree, though pleasant to the eye; that live regularly, and are the masters, not the servants, of

their own bellies, (1 Cor. ix. 27.) that keep under their bodies, and bring them into subjection to religion and right reason, and by laying the axe to the root, and breaking vicious habits, dispositions, and desires, in the strength of divine grace, have made the refraining from vicious acts very easy and pleasant: Rom. viii. 13. If through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body, we live, we live pleasantly.

IX. To be religious, is to have all our unruly passions likewise governed and subdued. And is not that pleasant? Much of our torment arises from our intemperate heats, discontent at the providence of God, fretfulness at every cross occurrence, fear of every imaginary evil, envy at those that are in a better state than ourselves, malice against those that have injured us, and an angry resentment of every, the least, provocation. These are thorns and briers in the soul; these spoil all our enjoyments, both of ourselves, and of our friends, and of our God too; these make men's lives unpleasant, and them a terror to themselves, and to all about them.

But when by the grace of God these roots of bitterness are plucked up, which bear so much gall and wormwood, and we have learned of our Master to be meek and lowly in heart, (Matt. xi. 29.) we find rest to our souls, we enter into the pleasant land. There is scarcely any of the graces of a Christian, that have more of a present tranquillity and satisfaction, both inherent in them, and annexed to them, than this of meekness. *The meek shall eat, and be satisfied, (Ps. xxii. 26.) they shall inherit the earth, (Matt. v. 5.) they shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace, (Ps. xxxvii. 11.) and they shall increase their joy in the Lord, (Isa. xxix. 19.)* which nothing diminishes more than ungoverned passion; for that grieves the Spirit of grace, the Comforter, and provokes him to withdraw, Eph. iv. 30, 31.

How pleasant it is for a man to be master of his own thoughts, to have a calmness and serenity in his own mind, as those have, who have rule over their own spirits, and thereby are kept in peace; peace, that will break an angry man's heart, but that will not break a meek man's sleep.

X. To be religious, is to dwell in love to all our brethren, and to do all the good we can in this world. And is not that pleasant? Love is the fulfilling of the law; it is the second great commandment, to love our neighbour as ourselves, Rom. xiii. 10. All our duty is summed up in one word, which as it is a short word, so it is a sweet word, Love. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is to live in holy love! Ps. cxxxiii. 1. It is not only pleasing to God, and amiable in the eyes of all good men, but it will be very comfortable to ourselves; for they that dwell in love, dwell in God, and God in them, 1 John iv. 16.

Religion teaches us to be kind to our relations, and to please them well in all things; neither to give nor resent provocations; to bear with their infirmi-

ties; to be courteous and obliging to all with whom we converse; to keep our temper, and the possession and enjoyment of our own souls, whatever affronts are given us: and can any thing contribute more to our living pleasantly?

By love we enjoy our friends, and have communion with them in all their comforts, and so add to our own; rejoicing with them that do rejoice, 1 Thess. iii. 9. By love we recommend ourselves to their love; and what more delightful than to love, and be beloved? Love is the very element of a pure and sanctified mind, the sweet air it breathes in, the cement of the best society, which contributes so much to the pleasure of human life. The sheep of Christ, united in flocks by the bond of holy love, lie down together in the green pastures, by the still waters, where there is not only plenty, but pleasure. The apostle (exhorting his friends to be of good comfort, (2 Cor. xiii. 11.) and to go on cheerfully in their Christian course) exhorts them, in order to that, to be of one mind, and to live in peace, and then the God of love and peace will be with them.

And what pleasure comparable to that of doing good? It is some participation of the pleasure of the Eternal Mind, who delights to show mercy, and to do good. Nay, besides the divinity of this pleasure, there is a humanity in it; the nature of man, if it be not debauched and vitiated, cannot but take pleasure in making any body safe and easy. It was a pleasure to Job, to think that he had caused the widow's heart to sing for joy, had been eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor, and that they had been warmed with the fleece of his sheep, Job xxix. 13, 15, 16. and xxxi. 20. The pleasure that a good man has in doing good, confirms that saying of our Saviour's, that it is more blessed to give than to receive, Acts xx. 35.

XI. To be religious, is to live a life of communion with God. And is not that pleasant? Good Christians being taken into friendship, have fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ, (1 John i. 3.) and make it their business to keep up that holy converse and correspondence. Herein consists the life of religion, to converse with God, to receive his communications of mercy and grace to us, and to return pious and devout affections to him: and can any life be more comfortable? Is there any conversation that can possibly be so pleasant as this to a soul that knows itself, and its own powers and interests?

In reading and meditating upon the word of God, we hear God speaking with a great deal of condescension to us, and concern for us; speaking freely to us, as a man does to his friend, and about our own business, speaking comfortably to us in compassion to our distressful case: and what can be more pleasant to those who have a value for the favour of God, and care about the interests of their

own souls; Ps. cxli. 6. *When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words, for they are sweet*: the words of God will be very sweet to those who see themselves overthrown by sin, and so they will be to all that love God. With what an air of pleasure does the spouse say, *It is the voice of my beloved*, and he speaks to me? Cant. ii. 8, 10.

In prayer and praise we speak to God, and we have liberty of speech, have leave to *utter all our words before the Lord*, as Jephthah did his in Mizpeh, Judg. xi. 11. We speak to one whose ear is open, is bowed to our prayers, nay, to whom the *prayer of the upright is a delight*, (Prov. xv. 8.) which cannot but make it a very great delight to them to pray. It is not only an *ease* to a burthened spirit to unbosom itself to such a friend as God is, but a pleasure to a soul that knows its own extraction, to have such a *boldness*, (as all believers have,) to *enter into the holiest*.

Nay, we may as truly have communion with God in providences as in ordinances, and in the duties of common conversation, as in religious exercises; and thus, that pleasure may become a continual feast to our souls. What can be more pleasant, than to have a God to go to, whom we may *acknowledge in all our ways*, and whom our *eyes are ever towards*; (Ps. xxv. 15.) to see all our comforts coming to us from his hand, and all our crosses too; to refer ourselves, and all events that are concerning us, to his disposal, with an assurance that he will order all for the best? What a pleasure is it to behold the beauty of the Lord in all his works, and to taste the goodness of the Lord in all his gifts, in all our expectations to see every man's judgment proceeding from him; to make God our hope, and God our fear, and God our joy, and God our life, and God our all! This is to live a life of communion with God.

XII. To be religious, is to *keep up a constant expectation of the glory to be revealed*: it is to set eternal life before us as the mark we aim at, and the prize we run for, and to *seek the things that are above*, Col. iii. 1. And is not this pleasant? It is our duty to think much of heaven, to place our happiness in its joys, and thitherward to direct our aims and pursuits; and what subject, what object, can be more pleasing? We have need, sometimes, to frighten ourselves from sin, with the terrors of *eternal death*; but it is much more a part of our religion, to encourage ourselves in our duty; with the hopes of that *eternal life* which God hath given us, that *life which is in his Son*, 1 John v. 11.

What is Christianity, but *having our conversation in heaven*, (Phil. iii. 20.) trading with the *New Jerusalem*; and keeping up a constant correspondence with that *better country*, that is, the heavenly, as the country we belong to, and are in expectation of; to which we remit our best effects and best affections;

where our head and home is, and where we hope and long to be?

Then we are as we should be, when our minds are in a heavenly frame and temper; then we do as we should do, when we are employed in the heavenly work, as we are capable of doing it in this lower world; and is not our religion then a heaven upon earth? If there be a fulness of joy and pleasure in that glory and happiness, which is *grace and holiness* perfected; there cannot but be an abundance of joy and pleasure in that *grace and holiness*, which is *glory and happiness* begun. If there will be such a complete satisfaction in vision and fruition, there cannot but be a great deal in faith and hope, so well founded as that of the saints is. Hence we are said, *believing to rejoice with joy unspeakable*, (1 Pet. i. 8.) and to be *filled with joy and peace in believing*, Rom. xv. 13.

It is the character of all God's people, that they are born *from* heaven, and bound *for* heaven, and have laid up their treasure *in* heaven; and they that know how great, how rich, how glorious, and how well secured that happiness is to all believers, cannot but own, that if that be their character, it cannot but be their unspeakable comfort and delight.

Now sum up the whole, and then tell me, whether religion be not a pleasant thing indeed, when even the *duties* of it themselves are so much the delights of it: and whether we do not serve a good master, who has thus made our work its own wages, and has graciously provided *two* heavens for those that never deserved *one*

CHAPTER III.

THE PLEASANTNESS OF RELIGION PROVED, FROM THE PROVISION THAT IS MADE FOR THE COMFORT OF THOSE WHO ARE RELIGIOUS, AND THE PRIVILEGES THEY ARE ENTITLED TO.

We have already found by *inquiry*, (O! that we could say we had found by *experience*!) that the very principles and practices of religion themselves have a great deal of pleasantness in them, and the one half of it has not been told us; and yet the comfort that attends religion, and follows after it, cannot but exceed that which is inherent in it, and comes with it. If the *work of righteousness* be *peace*, much more is the *effect of righteousness* so, Isa. xxxii. 17. If the precepts of religion have such an air of sweetness in them, what then have the comforts of it? Behold, *happy is the people*, even in this world, *whose God is the Lord*.

We must conclude, that they who walk in the ways of *Holy Wisdom*, have, or may have, true *peace* and *pleasure*; for God has both taken care for their comfort, and given them cause to be comforted: so that

if they do not live easily and pleasantly, it is their own fault.

I. The God whom they serve, has, in general, taken care for their comfort, and has done enough to convince them, that it is his will they should be comforted; that he not only gives them leave to be cheerful, but would have them to be so: for what could have been done more to the satisfaction of his family, than he has done in it?

1. There is a *purchase made* of peace and pleasure for them, so that they come to it fairly, and by a good title. He that purchased them a *peculiar people* to himself, took care that they should be a pleasant people, that their comforts might be a credit to his cause, and the joy of his servants in his work might be a reputation to his family. We have not only *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*, (Rom. v. 1, 2, 3.) but peace in our own consciences too: not only peace *above*, but peace *within*; and nothing less will pacify an offended conscience, than that which satisfied an offended God. Yet this is not all, we have not only inward peace, but we *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*, and triumph over, nay, we triumph in, tribulation.

Think what a vast expense (if I may so say) God was at, of blood and treasure, to lay up for this, and secure to us, not only a future bliss, but present pleasure, and the felicities not only of our home but of our way. Christ had *trouble*, that we might have *peace*; *pain*, that we might have *pleasure*; *sorrow*, that we might have *joy*. He wore the crown of thorns, that he might crown us with roses, and a lasting joy might be upon our heads. He put on the *spirit of heaviness*, that we might be arrayed with the *garments of praise*. The garden was the place of his agony, that it might be to us a *garden of Eden*, and there it was that he covenanted with his prosecutors for the disciples, (upon his surrendering himself,) saying in effect to all agonies, as he did to them. *If ye seek me let these go their way*, (John xviii. 8.) If I be resigned to trouble, let them *depart in peace*.

This was that which made *Wisdom's ways pleasantness*; the *everlasting righteousness* which Christ, by dying, wrought out, and brought in. This is the foundation of the treaty of peace, and consequently the fountain of all those consolations which believers are happy in. Then it is, that *all the seed of Israel glory*, when they can each of them say, *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength*; (Isa. xlv. 24, 25.) and then Israel shall dwell safely, in a holy security, when they have learned to call Christ by this name, *The Lord our Righteousness*, Jer. xxiii. 6. If Christ had not gone to the Father, as our High Priest, with the blood of sprinkling in his hand, we could never have rejoiced, but must have been always trembling.

Christ is *our peace*, (Eph. ii. 14, 17.) not only as

he *made peace* for us with God; but as he *preached* to them *that were afar off*, and to them *that were nigh*, and has engaged that his people, whenever they may have trouble in the world, shall have *peace in him*; (John xvi. 33.) upon the assurance of which they may be of *good cheer*, whatever happens. It is observable, that in the close of that ordinance which Christ instituted in *the night wherein he was betrayed*, (to be a memorial of his sufferings,) he both sung a hymn of joy, and preached a sermon of comfort; to intimate, that that which he designed in dying for us, was to give us *everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace*, (2 Thess. ii. 16.) and that we should aim at in all our commemorations of his death.

Peace and comfort are bought and paid for; if any of those who were designed to have the benefit of this purchase, deprive themselves of it, let them bear the blame, but let him have the praise who intended them the kindness; and who will take care, that though his kindness be deferred, it shall not be defeated; for though his disciples may be sorrowful for a time, *their sorrow shall be turned into joy*, John xvi. 20.

2. There are *promises made* to believers of *peace* and *pleasure*. The benefits Christ bought for them, are conveyed to them and settled upon them in the covenant of grace; which is *well-ordered in all things*, (2 Sam. xxiii. 5.) for the comfort and satisfaction of those, who have made that covenant *all their salvation and all their desire*. There it is that *light is sown for the righteous*, and it will come up again in due time; the promises of that covenant are the *wells of salvation* out of which they *draw water with joy*; the *breasts of consolation*, out of which, by faith, they *suck and are satisfied*, Isa. xii. 3. and lxvii. 11.

The promises of the Old Testament, that point at gospel times, speak mostly of this as the blessing reserved for those times, that there should be great joy and rejoicing; (Isa. xxxv. 1. and lx. 1.) *The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; Arise, shine, for the light is come*. The design of the gospel was to make religion a more pleasant thing than it had been, by freeing it, both from the burthensome services which the Jews were under, and from the superstitious fears which the heathen kept themselves and one another in awe with; by enlarging the privileges of God's people, and making them easier to come at.

Every particular believer is interested in the promises made to the church, and may put them in suit, and fetch in the comfort contained in them, as every citizen has the benefit of the charter, even the meanest. What a pleasure may one take in applying such a promise as that, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*? Or that, *All things shall work for good to them that love God*? These, and such as these, *guide our feet in the ways of peace*; and as they are a firm foundation on which to build our hopes, so they are a full fountain from which to draw our joys.

By the exceeding great and precious promises, we partake of a divine nature, (2 Pet. i. 4.) in this instance of it as much as any, a comfortable enjoyment of ourselves: and by all the other promises that promise is fulfilled, Isa. lxxv. 13, 14. *My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed; my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart:* and the encouragement given to all the church's faithful friends, is made good, *Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her all ye that love her;* Isa. lxvi. 10.

3. There is provision made for the application of that which is purchased and promised to the saints. What will it avail that there is wine in the vessel, if it be not drawn out? that there is a cordial made up, if it be not administered? Care is therefore taken, that the people of God be assisted in making use of the comforts treasured up for them in the everlasting covenant.

A religious life, one may well expect, should be a very comfortable life; for Infinite Wisdom has devised all the means that could be to make it so; *What could have been done more for God's vineyard,* (Isa. v. 4.) to make it flourishing as well as fruitful, than what he has done in it? There is not only an overflowing fulness of oil in the *Good Olive*, but *golden pipes*, (as in the prophet's vision, Zech. iv. 12.) for the conveyance of that oil to the lamps, to keep them burning. When God would himself furnish a paradise for a beloved creature, there was nothing wanting that might contribute to the comfort of it; in it was planted *every tree that was pleasant to the sight, and good for food*, (Gen. ii. 9.) so in the gospel there is a paradise planted for all the faithful offspring of the second Adam: a Canaan, a land *flowing with milk and honey*, a *pleasant land*, a rest for all the spiritual seed of Abraham. Now, as God put Adam into paradise, and brought Israel into Canaan, so he has provided for the giving of possession to all believers, of all that comfort and pleasure that is laid up for them. As in the garden of Eden, innocency and pleasure were twisted together; so, in the gospel of Christ, grace and peace, *righteousness and peace have kissed each other*, (Ps. lxxxv. 10.) and all is done that could be wished, in order to our *entering into this rest*, this blessed *sabbath*, (Heb. iv. 3, 9.) So that if we have not the benefit of it, we may thank ourselves: God would have comforted us, and we would not be comforted, our souls refused it.

Four things are done with this view, that those who live a godly life, may live a comfortable and pleasant life; and it is a pity they should receive the grace of God herein in vain.

(1.) The *Blessed Spirit* is sent to be the *Comforter*; he does also enlighten, convince, and sanctify, but he has his name from this part of his office, (John

xiv. 16.) he is, *ὁ παράκλητος, the Comforter*. As the *Son of God* was sent to be the *Consolation of Israel*, (Luke ii. 25.) to provide matter for comfort; so the *Spirit of God* was sent to be the *Comforter*, to apply the consolation which the Lord Jesus has provided. Christ came to make peace, and the Spirit to speak peace, and to *make us to hear joy and gladness*, even such as will cause *broken bones* themselves to rejoice, Ps. li. 8. Christ having wrought out the salvation for us, the work of the Spirit is to give us the comfort of it; hence the joy of the saints is said to be the *joy of the Holy Ghost*, (1 Thess. i. 6.) because it is his office to administer such comforts as tend to the filling of us with joy.

God, by his Spirit *moving on the face of the waters*, made the world according to the word of his power; and by his Spirit moving on the souls of his people, even when they are a perfect chaos, he *creates the fruit of the lips*, Peace, (Isa. lxvii. 19.) the product of the word of his promise; and if he did not create it, it would never be: and we must not only attend to the word of God speaking to us, but submit to the Spirit of God working upon us with the word.

The Spirit, as a Comforter, was given not only for the relief of the saints in the suffering ages of the church, but to continue with the church *always to the end*, for the comfort of believers, in reference to their constant sorrows, both temporal and spiritual; and what a favour is this to the church, no less needful, no less advantageous, than the sending of the Son of God to save us, and for which, therefore, we should be no less thankful. Let this article never be left out of our songs of praise, but let us always give thanks to him, who not only sent his *Son to make satisfaction for us*, for *his mercy endureth for ever*, but sent his *Spirit to give satisfaction for us*, for *his mercy endureth for ever*; sent his Spirit not only to work in us the disposition of children towards him, but also to witness to our adoption, and *seal us to the day of redemption*.

The Spirit is given to be our Teacher, and to *lead us into all truth*, and as such he is a Comforter; for by rectifying our mistakes, and setting things in a true light, he silences our doubts and fears, and sets things in a pleasant light. The Spirit is our Remembrancer, to put us in mind of that which we do know, and as such he is a Comforter; for, like the disciples, we distrust Christ in every exigence, because *we forget the miracles of the loaves*, Mat. xvi. 9. The Spirit is our Sanctifier; by him *sin is mortified*, and grace wrought and strengthened, and as such he is our Comforter; for nothing tends so much to make us easy, as that which tends to make us holy. The Spirit is our Guide, and we are said to be *led by the Spirit*, and as such he is our Comforter; for under his conduct we cannot but be led into *ways of pleasantness*, to the *green pastures*, and *still waters*.

(2.) The *Scriptures* are written, *that our joy may be full*; (1 John i. 4.) that we may have that joy which alone is filling, and has that in it which will fill up the vacancies of other joys, and make up their deficiencies; and that we may be full of that joy, may have more and more of it, may be wholly taken up with it, and may come, at length, to the full perfection of it in the kingdom of glory: *these things are written to you*, not only that you may receive the word with joy, at first, when it is a new thing to you, but that your joy may be full, and constant. The word of God is the chief conveyance, by which comfort is communicated from Christ, the fountain of life, to all the saints. That book, which the *Lamb*, that was slain, took out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne, is that which we are by faith to feed upon and digest, and to fill our souls with; and we shall find that it will, like Ezekiel's roll, (Ezek. iii. 3.) be in our mouths as honey for sweetness, and the opening of its seals will put a new song into our mouth, Rev. v. 9.

Scripture light is pleasant, much more sweet, more pleasant, than for the eyes to behold the sun; the manner of its conveyance is such, as makes it abundantly more so, for God speaks to us after the manner of men, in our own language. The comforts which the Scripture speaks to us are the *sure mercies of David*, such as we may depend upon, and it is continually speaking. The Scriptures we may have always with us, and whenever we will, we may have recourse to them; so that we need not be to seek for cordials at any time. The word is nigh thee, (Rom. x. 8.) in thy house, and in thy hand, and it is thine own fault if it be not in thy mouth, and in thy heart. Nor is it a spring shut up, nor a fountain sealed: those that compare spiritual things with spiritual, will find the Scripture its own interpreter; and spiritual pleasure to flow from it as easily, as plentifully, to all that have spiritual senses exercised, as the honey from the comb.

The saints have found pleasure in the word of God, and all those who have given up themselves to be led and ruled by it. It was such a comfort to David in his distress, that if he had not had that for delight, he would have perished in his affliction, (Ps. cxix. 92.) nay, he had the joy of God's word to be his continual entertainment, (Ps. cxix. 54.) *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*:—"Thy words were found, (says Jeremiah,) and I did eat them, feast upon them with as much pleasure, as ever any hungry man did upon his necessary food, or epicure upon his dainties; I perfectly regaled myself with them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart:" (Jer. xv. 16.) and we not only come short of their experiences, but frustrate God's gracious intentions, if we do not find pleasure in the word of God; for *whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written*

for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope, Rom. xv. 4.

(3.) *Holy ordinances* were instituted for the furtherance of our comfort, and to make our religion pleasant unto us. The conversation of friends with each other, is reckoned one of the greatest delights of this world; now ordinances are instituted for the keeping up of our communion with God, which is the greatest delight of the soul that is allied to the other world. God appointed to the Jewish church a great many feasts in the year (and but one fast, and that but for one day) for this end, that they might rejoice before the Lord their God, they and their families, Deut. xvi. 11.

Prayer is an ordinance of God, appointed for the fetching in of that peace and pleasure which is provided for us. It is intended to be not only the ease of our hearts, by casting our burthen upon God, as it was to Hannah, (1 Sam. i. 18.) who, when she had prayed, went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad; but to be the joy of our hearts, by putting the promises in suit, and improving our acquaintance with heaven: *Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full*, John xvi. 24. There is a throne of grace erected for us to come to; a Mediator of grace appointed, in whose name to come; the Spirit of grace given to help our infirmities, and an answer of peace promised to every prayer of faith: and all this, that we might fetch in, not only sanctifying, but comforting, grace in every time of need, Heb. iv. 16. God's house, in which wisdom's children dwell, is called a house of prayer, and thither God brings them, on purpose to make them joyful, Isa. lvi. 7.

Singing of psalms is a gospel ordinance, that is designed to contribute to the pleasantness of our religion; not only to express, but to excite, and to increase, our holy joy. In singing to the Lord, we make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation, Ps. xcv. 1. When the apostle had warned all Christians to take heed of drunkenness, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess*, lest they should think, that thereby he restrained them from any mirth, that would do them good, he directs them, instead of the song of the drunkard, when the heart is merry with wine, to entertain themselves with the songs of angels; (Eph. v. 18, 19.) *Speaking to yourselves* (when you are disposed to please yourselves) *in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord*. There is no substance in this ordinance, but the word and prayer put together; but the circumstance of the voice and tune being a natural means of affecting our hearts, both with the one and with the other, God, in condescension to our state, has been pleased to make a particular ordinance of it, to show how much it is his will, that we should be cheerful: (Jam. v. 13.) *Is any merry, let him sing psalms*. Is

any vainly merry? let him suppress the vanity, and turn the mirth into a right channel; he need not banish nor abjure the mirth, but let it be holy, heavenly mirth, and in that mirth let him sing psalms. Nay, *Is any afflicted*, and merry in his affliction, let him show it by *singing psalms*, as Paul and Silas did, *in the stocks*, Acts xvi. 25.

The Lord's day is appointed to be a pleasant day, a day of holy rest, nay, and a day too of holy joy; a thanksgiving day: (Ps. 118. 24.) *This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice, and be glad in it.* The Psalm or Song for the Sabbath-day begins thus, *It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord*, Ps. xcii. 1. So far were the primitive Christians carried in this notion, that the Lord's day was designed for holy triumph and exultation, that they thought it improper to kneel in any act of worship on that day.

The Lord's supper is a spiritual feast; and a feast (Solomon says, Eccl. x. 19.) was made for laughter, and so was this for holy joy. We celebrate the memorials of his death, that we may rejoice in the victories that he obtained, and the purchases he made, by his death; and may apply to ourselves the privileges and comforts, which by the covenant of grace are made *ours*. *There* we cannot but be glad, and rejoice in him, where we remember his love more than wine, Cant. i. 4.

(4.) The ministry is appointed for the comfort of the saints, and their guides in the ways of wisdom are instructed, by all means possible, to make them ways of pleasantness, and to encourage them to go on pleasantly in those ways. The priests of old were ordained for men, (Heb. v. 1, 2.) and were therefore taken from among men, that they might have compassion upon the mourners. And the prophets had this particularly in their commission, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem*, Isa. xl. 1.

Gospel-ministers, in a special manner, are appointed to be the helpers of the joy of the Lord's people; to be Barnabases, *Sons of consolation*; to strengthen the weak hands, and feeble knees, and to say to them who are of a fearful heart, *Be strong*, Isa. xxxv. 3, 5. The tabernacles of the Lord of hosts being amiable, the care of all that serve in those tabernacles, must be to make them appear so; that they who compass the altars of God, may find him their exceeding joy.

Thus has God taken care for the comfort of his people, so that he is not to be blamed if they be not comforted. But that is not all:

II. There are many particular benefits and privileges which they are entitled to, who walk in the ways of religion, that contribute very much to the pleasantness of those ways. By the blood of Christ those benefits and privileges are procured for them, which speaks them highly valuable, and by the

covenant of grace they are secured to them, which speaks them unalienable.

1. Those who walk in Wisdom's ways are discharged from the debts of sin, and that is pleasant. They are privileged from arrests, (Rom. viii. 33.) *Who shall lay any thing to their charge?* while it is God that justifies them, and will stand by his own act, against hell and earth: and he is always near that justifies them, Isa. l. 8. And so is their Advocate, that pleads for them, nearer than their accuser, though he stand at their right hand to resist them; and is able to cast him out, and all his accusations.

Surely, they put a force upon themselves, that are merry and pleasant under the guilt of sin: for if conscience be awake, it cannot but have a fearful looking for of wrath; but if sin be done away, the burthen is removed, the wound is healed, and all is well: "*Son, be of good cheer*, (Mat. ix. 2.) Though sick of a palsy, yet be cheerful, for *thy sins are forgiven thee*; and therefore, not only they shall not hurt thee, but God is reconciled to thee, and will do thee good. Thou mayst enjoy the comforts of this life, and fear no snare in them; mayst bear the crosses of this life, and feel no sting in them; and mayst look forward to another life without terror or amazement."

The pain which true penitents experience in their reflections upon their sins, makes the pleasure and satisfaction they have in the assurance of the pardon of them doubly sweet; as the sorrow of a woman in travail is not an allay, but rather a foil to the joy, that a child is born into the world. No pain is more acute than that of broken bones, to which the sorrows of a penitent sinner are compared; but when they are well set, and well knit again, they are not only made easy, but they are made to rejoice, to which the comforts of a pardoned sinner are compared: *Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice*, Ps. li. 8. All our bones, when kept, that not one of them was broken, must say, Lord, who is like unto thee? But there is a more sensible joy for one displaced bone reduced, than for the multitude of the bones that were never hurt; for one lost sheep brought home, than for ninety and nine that went not astray. Such is the pleasure which they have, that know their sins are pardoned.

When God's prophets must speak comfortably to Jerusalem, they must tell her that her iniquity is pardoned, Isa. xl. 2. Such a pleasure there is in the sense of the forgiveness of sins, that it enables us to make a light matter of temporal afflictions, particularly that of sickness, (Isa. xxxiii. 24.) *The inhabitants shall not say, I am sick, for the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.* And to make a great matter of temporal mercies, when they are thus sweetened and secured, particularly that of recovery from sickness; (Isa. xxxviii. 17.)

Thou hast, in love to my soul, cured my body, and delivered it from the pit of corruption, for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. If our sins be pardoned, and we know it, we may go out, and come in, in peace, nothing can come amiss to us; we may lie down and rise up with pleasure, for all is clear between us and heaven: thus *blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven.*

2. They have the Spirit of God witnessing with their spirits, that they are the children of God, Rom. viii. 16. and that is pleasant. Adoption accompanies justification, and if we have an assurance of the forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of God's grace, (Eph. i. 5, 7.) we have an assurance of this further comfort, that we were predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ. The same evidence, the same testimony that is given of our being pardoned, serves as an evidence and testimony of our being preferred, our being thus preferred. Can the children of princes and great men please themselves with the thoughts of the honours and expectations that attend that relationship? And may not the children of God think with pleasure on the adoption they have received, (Gal. iv. 6.) the Spirit of adoption, and that Spirit is witness to their adoption? And the pleasure must be the greater, and make the stronger impression of joy, when they remember, that they were by nature not only *strangers and foreigners*, but *children of wrath*, and yet are thus highly favoured.

The comfort of relations is none of the least of the delights of this life; but what comfort of relations is comparable to this, of being related to God, as our Father; and to Christ, as our elder Brother; and to all the saints and angels too, as belonging to the same family; which we are happily brought into relation to? The pleasure of claiming and owning this relation, is plainly intimated in our being taught to cry, *Abba, Father*, (Rom. viii. 15.) why should it be thus doubled, and in two languages? but to intimate to us, the unaccountable pleasure and satisfaction with which good Christians call God *Father*; it is the string they harp upon, *Abba, Father*.

With what pleasure does David's own spirit witness to this! *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord*; (Ps. xvi. 2.) and it is more to me that God is mine, than if all the world were mine. But when with our spirits the Spirit of God witnesses this too, saying to thy soul, "*Yea, he is thy God*, and he owns thee as one of his family; witness what he has wrought both in thee, and for thee, by my hand;" what joy does this fill the soul with, *joy unspeakable*; especially considering that, as the prophet speaks in the place, in the same heart and conscience, where it was said, (and by the Spirit too, when he convinced as a Spirit of bondage,) *Ye are not my people*, even there

it shall be said unto them, by the Spirit, (when he comforts as a Spirit of adoption,) *Ye are the sons of the living God*, Hos. i. 10.

3. They have access with boldness to the throne of grace, and that is pleasant. Prayer not only fetches in peace and pleasure, but it is itself a great privilege, and not only an honour, but a comfort; one of the greatest comforts of our lives, that we have a God to go to at all times, so that we need not fear coming unseasonably, or coming too often: and in all places, though as Jonah in the *fish's belly*, or as David in the *depths*, or in the *ends of the earth*, Ps. cxxx. 1. and lxi. 2.

It is a pleasure to one that is full of care and grief to unbosom himself; and we are welcome to pour out our complaint before God, and to show before him our trouble, (Ps. cxlii. 2.) and to one that wants, or fears wanting, to petition one that is able and willing to supply the wants. And we have great encouragement to make our requests known to God; we have access with confidence, (Eph. iii. 12.) not access with difficulty, (as we have to great men,) nor access with uncertainty of acceptance, as the Ninevites, *Who can tell if God will return to us?* But we have access with assurance, *whatsoever we ask in faith, according to his will, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*, 1 John v. 16.

It is a pleasure to talk to one that we love, and that we know loves us, and though far above us, yet takes notice of what we say, and is tenderly concerned for us: what a pleasure is it then to speak to God! to have not only a liberty of access, but a liberty of speech, *παρρησία*, freedom to utter all our mind, humbly, and in faith; *boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*, Heb. x. 19, 20. (and not with fear and trembling, as the high priest under the law, entered into the holiest,) and boldness to pour out our hearts before God, (Ps. lxi. 8.) as one (though he knows our case better than we ourselves) who will give us the satisfaction of knowing it from us, according to our own showing. Beggars that have good benefactors, live as pleasantly as any other people; it is the case of God's people, they are beggars, but they are beggars to a bountiful Benefactor, that is rich in mercy to all that call upon him: Blessed are they that wait daily at the posts of wisdom's doors, Prov. viii. 34. If the prayer of the upright be God's delight, it cannot but be theirs, Cant. ii. 14.

4. They have a sanctified use of all their creature-comforts, and that is pleasant. The Lord knows the way of the righteous, and takes cognizance of all their concerns; (Ps. xxxvii. 23.) The steps, yea, and the stops too, of a good man are ordered by the Lord; both his successes when he goes forward, and his disappointments when he goes backward; he blesses the work of their hands, and his blessing makes rich, and adds no sorrow with it, Prov. x. 22. More is im-

plied than is expressed ; it adds joy with it, infuses a comfort into it.

What God's people have, be it little or much, they have it from the love of God, and with his blessing, and then *behold all things are clean and sweet to them* ; they come from the hand of a Father, by the hand of a Mediator, not in the channel of common providence, but by the golden pipes of the promises of the covenant. Even the *unbelieving husband*, though not sanctified himself, yet is *sanctified to the believing wife*, (1 Cor. vii. 14.) and so is the comfort of other relations ; for to those who please God, every thing is pleasing, or should be so, and is made so by his favour. And hence it is, (Ps. xxxvii. 16.) that *a little that a righteous man has*, having a heart to be content with it, and the divine skill of enjoying God in it, is better to him than the riches of many wicked were to them ; and that *dinner of herbs where love is*, and the *fear of the Lord*, is better, and yields abundantly more satisfaction, than a *stalled ox*, and *hatred and trouble therewith*, Prov. xv. 16, 17.

5. They have the *testimony of their own consciences for them in all conditions*, and that is pleasant. A good conscience is not only a brazen wall, but a continual feast ; and all the melody of Solomon's instruments of music of all sorts, were not to be compared with that of the bird in the bosom, when it sings sweet. If Paul has a *conscience void of offence*, though he be *sorrowful*, yet he is *always rejoicing* ; nay, and even when he is *pressed above measure*, (2 Cor. i. 8, 12.) and has *received a sentence of death within himself*, his *rejoicing is this*, even the *testimony of his conscience* concerning his integrity.

As nothing is more painful and unpleasant, than to be smitten and reproached by our own hearts ; to have our consciences fly in our faces, and give us our own ; so, there is nothing more comfortable, than to be upon good grounds reconciled to ourselves ; to *prove our own work* (Gal. vi. 4.) by the touchstone of God's word, and to find it right, for then have we *rejoicing in ourselves alone, and not in another*. For if our hearts condemn us not, (1 John iii. 21.) then have we *confidence towards God* ; may *lift up our face without spot* unto him, and comfortably appeal to his omniscience : *Thou, O Lord, knowest me, thou hast seen me, and tried my heart towards thee*, Jer. xii. 3.

This will not only make us easy under the censures and reproaches of men, as it did Job, *My heart shall not reproach me*, though you do ; and Paul, *It is a very small thing with me to be judged of man's judgment* ; but it will be a continual delight to us, to have our own hearts say, *Well done*. For the voice of an enlightened, well-informed conscience, is the voice of God, it is his deputy in the soul. The thoughts of the sober heathen between themselves when they did not accuse, yet the utmost they could

do was but to *excuse*, which is making the best of bad ; but they who have their *hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience* by the blood of Christ, (Rom. ii. 15.) are not only *excused*, but encouraged and commended, for their *praise is not of men, but of God*.

It is easy to imagine the holy, humble pleasure that a good man has, in the just reflection upon the successful resistance of a strong and threatening temptation ; the seasonable suppressing and crossing of an unruly appetite or passion, and a check given to the tongue, when it was about to *speak unadvisedly*. What a pleasure is it to look back upon any good word spoken, or any good work done, in the strength of God's grace, to his glory, and any way to the advantage of our brethren, either for soul or body ! With what a sweet satisfaction may a good man lay down in the close of the Lord's day, if God has enabled him, in some good measure, to do the work of the day in the day, according as the duty of the day requires ? We may then *eat our bread with joy*, and *drink our wine with a merry heart*, when we have some good ground to hope, that God now *accepteth our works* through Jesus Christ, Eccl. ix. 7.

6. They have the *earnests and foretastes of eternal life and glory*, and that is pleasant indeed. They have it not only secured to them, but dwelling in them, in the first-fruits of it, such as they are capable of in their present imperfect state, (1 John v. 13.) *These things are written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know*, not only that you *shall have*, but that you *have eternal life* ; you are *sealed with that holy Spirit of promise*, (Eph. i. 13, 14.) marked for God, which is the *earnest of our inheritance*, not only a ratification of the grant, but part of the full payment.

Canaan, when we come to it, will be a land flowing with milk and honey ; in *God's presence*, there is a *fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*, Ps. xvi. 11. But lest we should think it long ere we come to it, the God whom we serve has been pleased to send to us, as he did to Israel, some clusters of the grapes of that good land to meet us in the wilderness : which if they were sent as an excuse of the full enjoyment, and we were to be put off with them, that would put a bitterness into them ; but being sent us in earnest of the full enjoyment, that puts a sweetness into them, and makes them pleasant indeed.

A day in *God's courts*, an hour at his table in communion with him, is very pleasant, better than a *thousand days*, than ten thousand hours, in any of the enjoyments of sense ; but this very much increases the pleasantness of it, that it is the pledge of a blessed eternity, which we hope to spend *within the veil*, in the vision and fruition of God. Sabbaths are sweet, as they are *earnests of the everlasting sabbatism*, or *keeping of a sabbath* (as the apostle calls it, Heb. iv. 9.) which *remains for the people of*

God.——Gospel feasts are therefore sweet, because earnest of the everlasting feast, to which we shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. The joys of the Holy Ghost are sweet, as they are earnest of that joy of our Lord, into which all Christ's good and faithful servants shall enter. Praising God is sweet, as it is an earnest of that blessed state, in which we shall not rest day or night from praising God. The communion of saints is sweet, as it is an earnest of the pleasure we hope to have in the *general assembly, and church of the first-born*, Heb. xii. 23.

They that travel in Wisdom's ways, though sometimes they find themselves walking in the low and darksome *valley of the shadow of death*, where they can see but a little way before them, yet at other times they are led with Moses to the top of mount Pisgah, and thence have a pleasant prospect of the land of promise, and the glories of that good land, not with such a damp upon the pleasure of it as Moses had, (Deut. xxxiv. 4.) *Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither*; but such an addition to the pleasure of it as Abraham had, when God said to him, (Gen. xiii. 15.) *All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it*. Take the pleasure of the prospect as a pledge of the possession shortly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOCTRINE FURTHER PROVED BY EXPERIENCE.

HAVING found religion in its own nature *pleasant*, and the comforts and privileges so, with which it is attended; we shall next try to make this truth more evident, by appealing to such as may be thought competent witnesses in such a case. I confess, if we appeal to the *natural man*, the mere *animal* (as the word signifies, 1 Cor. ii. 14.) that looks no further than the things of sense, and judges by no other rule than sense, and *receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God*, for they are *foolishness to him*; such a one will be so far from consenting to this truth, and concurring with it, that he will contradict and oppose it: our appeal must be to those, that have some spiritual senses exercised, for otherwise the *brutish man knows not, neither doth the fool understand this*, Ps. xcii. 6.

We must therefore be allowed to appeal to convinced sinners, and comforted saints; wicked people whom the Spirit has roused out of a sinful security, and godly people, whom the Spirit has put to rest in a holy serenity, are the most competent witnesses to give evidence in this case; and to their experience we appeal.

I. Ask those that have tried the ways of sin and

wickedness, of vice and profaneness, and begin to pause a little, and to consider, whether the way they are in be right; and let us hear what is their experience concerning those ways; and our appeal to them is in the words of the apostle, *What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?* Rom. vi. 21. Not only, *What fruit will ye have at last, when the end of these things is death?* or, (as Job xxi. 21.) *What pleasure hath he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst?* But what fruit, what pleasure had ye then, when you were in the enjoyment of the best of it?

Those that have been running to an excess of riot, that have laid the reins on the neck of their lusts, have rejoiced with the *young man in his youth*, and *walked in the way of their hearts, and the sight of their eyes*, have taken a boundless liberty in the gratifications of sense, and have made it their business to extract out of this world, whatever may pass under the name of pleasure: ask them now, when they begin to reflect, which they could not find in their hearts to do while they were going on in their pursuit, what they think of those pleasures which pretend to vie with those of religion; and they will tell you,

1. That *the pleasure of sin was painful and unsatisfying in the enjoyment*, and which then they had no reason to boast of. It was a sordid pleasure, and beneath the dignity of a man, and which could not be had, but by yielding up the throne in the soul to the inferior faculties of sense, and allowing them the dominion over reason and conscience, which ought to command and give law. It was the gratifying of an appetite which was the disease of the soul, and which would not be satisfied, but, like the daughters of the horse-leech, still cry, *Give, give*.

What poor pleasure has the covetous man in the wealth of the world! It is the *lust of the eye* that is thereby humoured, for *what good has the owner thereof, save the beholding thereof with his eyes?* And what a poor satisfaction is that! And yet even that is no satisfaction neither, for *he that loveth silver*, will find, that the more he has, the more he would have, so that *he shall not be satisfied with silver*; nay, it fastens upon the mind a burthen of care and perplexity, so that *the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep*, Eccl. v. 10, 11, 12.

Drunkenness passes for a pleasant sin, but it is a brutish pleasure, for it puts a force upon the powers of nature, disturbs the exercise of reason, and puts men out of the possession and enjoyment of their own souls; and so far is it from yielding any true satisfaction, that the gratifying of this base appetite is but bringing oil to a flame: *When I awake, I will seek it yet again*, is the language of the drunkard, Prov. xxiii. 35.

Contention and revenge pretend to be pleasant sins too, *Est vindicta bonum vitâ jucundius ipsâ*,—

vengeance is a gratification more delightful than life itself, but it is so far from being so, that it is, of all other sins, the most vexatious; it kindles a fire in the soul, puts it into a hurry and disorder: where they are, there is *confusion and every evil work*. The lusts, whence not only *wars and fightings* come, (Jam. iv. 1.) but other sins are said to *war in the members*; they not only *war against the soul*, (1 Pet. ii. 11.) and threaten the destruction of its true interests, but they war in the soul, and give disturbance to its present peace, and fill it with continual alarms.

They that have made themselves slaves to their lusts, will own, that it was the greatest drudgery in the world, and therefore is represented in the parable of the prodigal, by a young gentleman hiring himself to one that *sent him into his field to feed swine*, (Luke xv. 16.) where he was made a fellow-commoner with them, and *would fain have filled his belly with the husks* that they did eat; such a disgrace, such a dissatisfaction, is there in the pleasures of sin: besides the diversity of masters which sinners are at the beck of, and their disagreement among themselves; for they that are *disobedient* to that God who is *One*, are *deceived*, serving *divers lusts and pleasures*, and therein *led captive* by Satan, their sworn enemy, *at his will*, Tit. iii. 3.

2. That the *pleasure of sin was very bitter and tormenting in the reflection*. We will allow that there is a pleasure in sin *for a season*, (Heb. xi. 25.) but that season is soon over, and is succeeded by another season that is the reverse of it; the sweetness is soon gone, and leaves the bitterness behind in the bottom of the cup: the wine is red, and *gives its colour*, its flavour very agreeable, but at the last it *bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder*, Prov. xxiii. 32. Sin is that *strange woman*, whose flatteries are charming, but *her end bitter as worm-wood*, Prov. v. 3, 4.

When conscience is awake, and tells the sinner he is *verily guilty*; when his sins are set in order before him in their true colour, and he sees himself defiled and deformed by them; when *his own wickedness* begins to *correct him*, and his *backslidings* to *reprove him*, and his own heart makes him *loathe himself for his abominations*, (Jer. ii. 19.) where is the pleasure of his sin then? As the thief is ashamed when he is discovered to the world, so are the drunkards, the unclean, when discovered to themselves; and say, *Where shall I cause my shame to go?* there is no remedy, but I must *lie down in it*. If the pleasure of any sin would last, surely that of ill-got gain would, because there is something to show for it; and yet though that wickedness be *sweet* in the sinner's mouth, though he *hide it under his tongue*, yet in *his bowels it is turned into the gall of asps*, Job xx. 12, &c. He hath *swallowed down riches*, but shall be forced to *vomit them up again*.

Solomon had skimmed the cream of sensual delights, and pronounced not only *vanity and vexation*, concerning them all, even the best; but concerning those of them that were *sinful*, the forbidden pleasures into which he was betrayed, that the reflection upon them filled him with horror and amazement: *I applied my heart*, (says he,) *to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness*; so he now calls the irregularities into which he had fallen: he cannot speak bad enough of them, for *I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands*, Eccl. vii. 26.

And is such pleasure as this worthy to come in competition with the pleasures of religion, or to be named the same day with them? What senseless creatures are the sensual, that will not be persuaded to quit the pleasures of brutes, when they shall have in exchange the delights of angels!

II. Ask those that have *tried the ways of wisdom*, what is their experience concerning those ways? *Call now if there be any that will answer you, and to which of the saints will you turn?* Job v. 1. Turn you to which you will, and they will agree to this, that *Wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and her paths peace*. However about some things they may differ in their sentiments, in this, they are all of a mind, that God is a good master, and his service not only perfect freedom, but perfect pleasure.

And it is a debt which aged and experienced Christians owe both to their Master and to their fellow-servants, both to Christ and Christians, to bear their testimony to this truth; and the more explicitly and solemnly they do it, the better: let them tell others *what God has done for their souls*, and how they have *tasted that he is gracious*, (Ps. lxvi. 16.) let them own, to the honour of God and religion, that (1 Kings viii. 56.) there *has not failed one word of God's good promise*, by which he designed to make his servants pleasant; that what is said of the pleasantness of religion, is really so: let them *set to their seal that it is true*. Let it have their *probatum est—we have found it so*.

The ways of religion and godliness, are the good *old ways*, (Jer. vi. 16.) Now if you would have an account of the way you have to go, you must inquire of those that have travelled it, not those who have only occasionally *stept* into it, but those whose business had led them to *frequent* it. Ask the ancient travellers, whether they have found *rest to their souls* in this way; and there are few you shall inquire of, but will be ready to own these four things from experience:

1. That they have found *the rules and dictates of religion very agreeable both to right reason, and to their true interest*, and therefore pleasant. They have found the *word nigh them*, and accommodated to them, and not at such a mighty distance as they

were made to believe. They have found *all God's precepts concerning all things to be right*, and reasonable, and highly equitable; and when they did but show themselves men, they could not but consent, and subscribe to the law, *that it was good*, (Rom. vii. 16.) and there is a wonderful propriety in this. For the laws of humility and meekness, sobriety and temperance, contentment and patience, love and charity, are agreeable to ourselves when we are in our right mind; they are the rectitude of our nature, the advancement of our powers and faculties, the composure of our minds, and the comfort of our lives, and carry their own *letters of commendation* along with them. If a man understood himself, and his own interest, he would comport with these rules and govern himself by them, though there were no authority over him to oblige him to it. All that have thoroughly tried them, will say they are so far from being chains of imprisonment to a man, and as fetters to his feet, that they are as chains of ornament to him, and as the girdle to his loins.

Ask experienced Christians, and they will tell you what abundance of comfort and satisfaction they have had in keeping sober, when they have been in temptation to excess; in doing justly, when they might have gained by dishonesty as others do, and nobody know it; in forgiving an injury, when it was in the power of their hand to revenge it; in giving alms to the poor, when perhaps they straitened themselves by it; in submitting to an affliction, when the circumstances of it were very aggravating; and in bridling their passion under great provocations. With what comfort does Nehemiah reflect upon it, that though his predecessors in the government had abused their power, yet *so did not I*, (says he, Neh. v. 15.) *because of the fear of God!* And with what pleasure does Samuel make his appeal, (1 Sam. xii. 3.) *Whose ox have I taken, or whom have I defrauded?* And Paul his; *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.* If you would have a register of experiences to this purpose, read the 119th Psalm, which is a collection of David's testimonies to the sweetness and goodness of God's law, the equity and excellency of it, and the abundant satisfaction that is to be found in a constant conscientious conformity to it.

2. That they have found *the exercises of devotion to be very pleasant and comfortable*, and if there be an heaven upon earth, it is in communion with God in his ordinances; in hearing from him, in speaking to him, in receiving the tokens of his favour and communications of his grace, and returning pious affections to him, pouring out the heart before him, lifting up the soul to him.

All good Christians will subscribe to David's experience; (Ps. lxxiii. 28.) *It is good for me to draw near to God*; the nearer the better; and it will be best of all, when I come to be nearest of all, within

the veil, and will join with him in saying, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul!* (Ps. cxvi. 7.) to God as to thy rest, and repose in him. I have found that satisfaction in communion with God, which I would not exchange for all the delights of the sons of men, and the peculiar treasures of kings and provinces.

What a pleasure did those pious Jews in Hezekiah's time find in the solemnities of the passover, who, when they had kept seven days according to the law in attending on God's ordinances, *took counsel together to keep other seven days*, and they kept *other seven days with gladness*, 2 Chron. xxx. 23. And if Christ's hearers had not found an abundant sweetness and satisfaction in attending on him, they would never have continued their attendance three days in a desert place, as we find they did, Matt. xv. 32. No wonder then that his own disciples, when they were spectators of his transfiguration, and auditors of his discourse with Moses and Elias in the holy mount, said, *Master, it is good for us to be here*; here let us *make tabernacles*, Matt. xvii. 4.

I appeal to all that know what it is to commune with God in an ordinance, to worship him *in the spirit*, whether they have not found abundant satisfaction in it? They will say with the spouse, (Cant. ii. 3.) *I sat down under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste*: and with the noble Marquis of Vico, "*Let their money perish with them, that esteem all the wealth and pleasure of this world worth one hour's communion with God in Jesus Christ.*" They will own that they never had that true delight and satisfaction in any of the employments or enjoyments of this world which they have had in the service of God, and in the believing relishes of that *loving-kindness* of his, which is *better than life*, Ps. lxxiii. 3. These have put gladness into their hearts, more than the joy of harvest, or theirs that divide the spoil. If in their preparations for solemn ordinances they have *gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed*, yet they have *come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them*, Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

That they have found *the pleasures of religion sufficient to overcome the pains and trouble of sense*, and to *take out the sting of them*, and *take off the terror of them*. This is a plain evidence of the excellency of spiritual pleasures, that religious convictions will soon conquer sensual delights, and quite extinguish them. So that they become as *songs to a heavy heart*; for a *wounded spirit who can bear?* But it has often been found, that the pains of sense have not been able to extinguish spiritual delights, but have been conquered and quite over-balanced by them. Joy in spirit has been to many a powerful allay to trouble in the flesh.

The pleasure that holy souls have in God, as it needs not to be supported by the delights of sense, so it fears not being suppressed by the grievances of sense. They can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in

him as the God of their salvation, even then, when the *fig-tree doth not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine*, (Hab. iii. 17, 18.) for even then, when in the world they have tribulation, Christ has provided that in him they should have satisfaction.

For this we may appeal to the martyrs, and other sufferers for the name of Christ; how have their spiritual joys made their bonds for Christ easy, and made their prisons their "*delectable orchards*," as one of the martyrs called his. Animated by these comforts, they have not only taken patiently, but *taken joyfully, the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they have in heaven a better and a more enduring substance*, Heb. x. 34. Ask Paul, and he will tell you, (2 Cor. vii. 4, 5.) that even then, when he was *troubled on every side, when without were fightings and within were fears, yet he was filled with comfort, and was exceeding joyful in all his tribulation*; and that as his sufferings for Christ increased, his consolation in Christ increased proportionably, 2 Cor. i. 5. And though he expects no other but to finish his course with blood, yet he doubts not but to *finish his course with joy*.

Nay, we may appeal to the sick-beds and death-beds of many good Christians for the proof of this; when wearisome nights have been appointed to them, yet God's *statutes have been their songs, their songs in the night*, Ps. cxix. 54. "*I have pain*," says one, "*but I bless God I have peace*;" "*weak and dying*," said another, "*but sat lucis intus*," *light and comfort enough within*. The delights of sense forsake us, when we most need them to be a comfort to us; when a man is *chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain, he abhorreth bread and dainty meat, and cannot relish it*, Job xxxiii. 19, 20. But then the bread of life and spiritual dainties have the sweetest relish of all.

Many of God's people have found it so: *This is my comfort in mine affliction, that thy word hath quickened me*, Ps. cxix. 50. *This has made all their bed in their sickness, and made it easy*.

The *pleasantness of Wisdom's ways* has sometimes been remarkably attested by the joys and triumphs of dying Christians, in reflecting upon that divine grace which has carried them comfortably through this world, and is then carrying them more comfortably out of it to a better. "*What is that light which I see?*" said an eminent divine upon his death-bed. "*It is the sun-shine*," said one that was by. "*No*," replied he, "*it is my Saviour's shine. O the joys! O the comforts that I feel! Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell; but I see and feel things that are unutterable, and full of glory. O let it be preached at my funeral, and tell it when I am dead and gone, that God deals familiarly with man. I am as full of comfort as my heart can hold*." Mr. Joseph

Allein's life, and Mr. John Janeway's, have remarkable instances of this.

4. They have found, that *the closer they have kept to religion's ways, and the better progress they have made in those ways, the more pleasure they have found in them*. By this it appears, that the pleasure takes its excellency from the religion; that the *more* religion prevails, the *greater* the pleasure is. What disquiet and discomfort Wisdom's children have, is owing, not to *Wisdom's ways*, those are pleasant, but to their deviations from those ways, or their slothfulness and trifling in these ways; those indeed are unpleasant, and sooner or later will be found so.

If good people are sometimes drooping, and in sorrow, it is not because they are good, but because they are not so good as they should be. They do not live up to their profession and principles, but are too much in love with the body, and hanker too much after the world: though they do not turn back to Sodom, they look back towards it, and are too mindful of the country *from which they came out*; and this makes them uneasy, this forfeits their comforts, and grieves their Comforter, and disturbs their peace, which would have been firm to them, if they had been firm to their engagements. But if we turn aside out of the ways of God, we are not to think it strange, if the consolations of God do not follow us.

But if we cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, then we find the joy of the Lord our strength. Have we not found those duties most pleasant, in which we have taken most pains and most care? and that we have had the most comfortable sabbath-visits made to our souls when we have been most in the Spirit on the Lord's day? Rev. i. 10.

And the longer we continue, and the more we mend our pace, in these ways, the more pleasure we find in them. This is the excellency of spiritual pleasures, and recommends them greatly, that they increase with use, so far are they from withering, or going to decay: the difficulties which may at first be found in the ways of religion wear off by degrees, and the work of it grows more easy, and the joys of it more sweet.

Ask those that have back-slidden from the ways of God, have left their first love, and begin to be-think themselves, and to remember whence they are fallen, whether they had not a great deal more comfort when they kept close to God, than they have had since they turned aside from him; and they will say with that adulteress, when she found the way of her apostasy hedged up with thorns, *I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now*; Hos. ii. 7. There is nothing got by departing from God, and nothing lost by being faithful to him.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTRINE ILLUSTRATED BY THE SIMILITUDE USED IN THE TEXT, OF A PLEASANT WAY OR JOURNEY.

THE practice of religion is often in Scripture spoken of as a *way*, and our walking in that *way*: it is the way of God's commandments, it is a *high way*: the King's high way, the King of kings' high way; and those that are religious, are *travelling* in that way. The schoolmen commonly call Christians in this world, *Viatores*—*travellers*; when they come to heaven, they are *Comprehensores*—*they have then attained*, are at home: here they are in their journey, there at their journey's end. Now if heaven be the *journey's end*, the *prize of our high calling*, and we be sure if we *so run* as we ought, that *we shall obtain*, it is enough to engage and encourage us in our way, though it be ever so unpleasant; but we are told, *ex abundantia*—*very fully*, that we have also a pleasant road.

Now there are *twelve things* which help to make a *journey pleasant*, and there is something like to each of them which may be found in the *way of Wisdom*, by those that walk in that way.

I. It helps to make a journey pleasant to *go upon a good errand*. He that is brought up a prisoner in the hands of the ministers of justice, whatever conveniences he may be accommodated with, cannot have a pleasant journey, but a melancholy one: and that is the case of a wicked man; he is going on in this world toward destruction; the way he is in, though wide and broad, leads directly to it; and while he persists in it, every step he takes is so much nearer hell, and therefore he cannot have a pleasant journey: it is absurd and indecent to pretend to make it so; though the way may seem right to a man, yet there can be no true pleasure in it, while the end thereof is the ways of death, and the *steps take hold on hell*, Prov. v. 5.

But he that goes into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, whatever difficulties may attend his journey, yet the errand he goes on is enough to make it pleasant: and on this errand they go that travel Wisdom's ways: they look for a kingdom which cannot be moved, and are pressing forward in the hopes of it. Abraham went out of his own country *not knowing whither he went*, (Heb. xi. 8.) but those that set out and hold on in the way of religion, know whither it will bring them, that it leads to life, eternal life; and therefore *in the way of righteousness is life*, (Prov. xii. 28.) because there is such a life at the end of it.

Good people go upon a good errand, for they go on God's errand as well as their own; they are serving and glorifying him, contributing something to his honour, and the advancement of the interests of his kingdom among men; and this makes it plea-

sant; and that which puts so great a reputation upon the duties of religion, as that by them God is served and glorified, cannot but put so much the more satisfaction into them. With what pleasure does Paul appeal to God, as the God whom *he served with his spirit in the gospel of his Son!* Rom. i. 9.

II. It helps to make a journey pleasant, to have strength and ability for it. He that is weak, sickly, and lame, can find no pleasure in the pleasantest walks: how should he, when he takes every step in pain? A strong man rejoices to run a race, but he that is feeble trembles to set one foot before another. Now this makes the ways of religion pleasant, that they who walk in those ways, are not only cured of their natural weakness, but are filled with spiritual strength; they travel not in their own might, but in the *greatness of his strength*, who is *mighty to save*, Isa. lxiii. 1.

Were they to proceed in their own strength, they would have little pleasure in the journey, every little difficulty would foil them, and they would tire presently; but they go forth, and go on, in the strength of the Lord God, (Ps. lxxi. 16.) and upon every occasion, according to his promise, he renews that strength to them, and they *mount up with wings like eagles*, they go on with cheerfulness and alacrity, they *run*, and are not *weary*, they *walk*, and do not *faint*, Isa. xl. 31. God, with his comforts, enlarges their hearts, and then they not only go, but *run the way of his commandments*, Ps. cxix. 32.

That which to the old nature is impracticable and unpleasant, and which therefore is declined, or undertaken with reluctancy, to the new nature is easy and pleasant: and this new nature is given to all the saints, which puts a new life and vigour into them, strengthens them with all might in the inner man, (Col. i. 11.) unto all diligence in doing-work, patience in suffering-work, and perseverance in both; and so all is made pleasant. They are *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, (Eph. vi. 10.) and this not only keeps the spirit willing, even when the flesh is weak, but makes even the *lame man to leap as an hart*, and the *tongue of the dumb to sing*, Isa. xxxv. 6. *I can do all things through Christ strengthening me*, Phil. iv. 13.

III. It helps to make a journey pleasant to have day-light. It is very uncomfortable travelling in the night, in the black and dark night. *He that walketh in darkness* (says our Saviour) *knows not whither he goes*, (John xii. 35.) right or wrong, and that is uncomfortable: and in another place, *If a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him*, John xi. 10. And this is often spoken of as the miserable case of wicked people, *They know not, neither will they understand, they walk on in darkness*, Psal. lxxxii. 5. They are in continual danger, and so much the more, if they be not in continual fear.

But Wisdom's children are all children of the

light, and of the day. They were darkness, but are light in the Lord, and walk as the children of the light. *Truly the light is sweet*, even to one that sits still, but much more so to one that is on a journey; and doubly sweet to those who set out in the dark, as we all did. But this great light is risen upon us, not only to please our eyes, but to *guide our feet* into the way of peace, Luke i. 79. And they are indeed paths of peace when we are guided into them, and guided in them, by the light of the gospel of Christ. And all that walk in the light of gospel conduct, cannot fail to walk in the light of *gospel comforts*.

And it adds to the pleasure of having day-light in our travels, if we are in no danger of losing it, and of being benighted: and this is the case of those that walk in the light of the Lord; for the Sun of Righteousness that is risen upon them, with healing under his wings, shall *no more go down*, but shall be *their everlasting light*, Isa. lx. 20.

IV. It helps to make a journey pleasant, to have a good guide, whose knowledge and faithfulness one can confide in. A traveller, though he has day-light, yet may miss his way, and lose himself, if he have not one to show him his way, and go before him, especially if his way lie, as ours does, through a wilderness, where there are so many by-paths; and though he should not be guilty of any fatal mistake, yet he is in continual doubt and fear, which makes his journey uncomfortable.

But this is both the safety and the satisfaction of all true Christians, that they have not only the *gospel of Christ* for their light, as a discovering and directing light, but the Spirit of Christ for their guide. It is promised, that he shall *lead them into all truth*, (John xvi. 13.) shall *guide them with his eye*, Ps. xxxii. 8. Hence they are said to *walk after the Spirit*, and to be *led by the Spirit*, (Rom. viii. 1, 14.) as God's Israel of old were led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and fire, and the Lord was in it.

This is that which makes the way of religion such a highway, as that the *way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein*, Isa. xxxv. 8. There are fools, indeed, wicked ones, who walk after the flesh, that miss their way, and wander endlessly; *The labour of the foolish weareth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city*, Eccl. x. 15. But those fools that shall not err therein, are weak ones, the foolish things of the world, who, under a sense of their own folly are so wise, as to give up themselves entirely to the conduct of the Spirit, both by conscience and the written word: and if they have done this in sincerity, they know whom they have depended upon to *guide them by his counsel*, and afterwards to *receive them to his glory*, Ps. lxxiii. 24. Those may go on their journey pleasantly, who are promised, that whenever they are in doubt, or in danger of mistaking or being misled, they shall hear a voice, saying, *This is the way, walk in it*, Isa. xxx. 21.

V. It helps to make a journey pleasant to be under a good guard or convoy, that one may travel safely. Our way lies through an enemy's country, and they are active, subtle enemies; the road is infested with robbers, that lie in wait to spoil, and to destroy; we travel by the lions' dens, and the mountains of the leopards; and our danger is the greater, that it arises, not from flesh and blood, but spiritual wickednesses; Satan, by the world (1 Peter v. 8.) and the flesh, way-lays us, and seeks to devour us; so that we could not with any pleasure go on our way, if God himself had not taken us under his special protection.

The same Spirit that is a guide to these travellers is their *guard also*; for whoever are sanctified by the Holy Ghost, are by him *preserved in Christ Jesus*, (Jude 1.) *blameless*; and shall be preserved to the *heavenly kingdom*, (2 Tim. iv. 18.) so as they shall not be robbed of their graces and comforts, which are evidences for, and earnest of, eternal life, they are *kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation*, (1 Pet. i. 5.) and therefore may go on cheerfully.

The promises of God are a writ of protection to all Christ's good subjects in their travels, and give them such a holy security, as lays a foundation for a constant serenity. Eternal truth itself has assured them, that no evil shall befall them, (Ps. xci. 10.) nothing really and destructively evil, no evil but what God will bring good to them out of. God himself has engaged to be their Keeper, and to preserve their going out and coming in, from henceforth and for ever, which looks as far forwards as eternity itself: and by such promises as these, and that grace which is conveyed through them to all active believers, God carries them as upon eagles' wings to bring them to himself, Deut. xxxii. 11.

Good angels are appointed for a guard to all that walk in Wisdom's ways, to bear them in their arms, where they go, and to pitch their tents round about them where they rest, (Ps. xxxiv. 7.) and so to keep them in all their ways. How easy may they be that are thus guarded, and how well pleased under all events! as Jacob was, who *went on his way, and the angels of God met him*, Gen. xxxii. 1.

VI. It helps to make a journey pleasant, to have the way tracked by those that have gone before in the same road, and on the same errand. Untrodden paths are unpleasant ones; but in the way of religion, we are both directed and encouraged by the good examples of those that have chosen the way of truth before us, and have walked in it. We are bidden to follow them, who are now *through faith and patience* (those travelling graces of a Christian) *inheriting the promises*, Heb. vi. 12.

It is pleasant to think that we are walking in the same way with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with whom we hope shortly to sit down in the king-

dom of God. How many holy, wise, good men have governed themselves by the same rules that we govern ourselves by, with the same views; have lived by the same faith that we live by, looking for the same blessed hope, and have by it *obtained a good report*, Heb. xi. 2. And we go forth by the footsteps of the flock, Cant. i. 8.

Let us, therefore, to make our way easy and pleasant, take the prophets for an example, Jam. v. 10. And being compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, (that like the cloud in the wilderness that went before Israel, not only to show them the way, but to smooth it for them,) let us run with patience, and cheerfulness, the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the most encouraging pattern of all, who has left us an example, that we should follow his steps, Heb. xii. 1. And what more pleasant than to follow such a leader, whose word of command is, Follow me!

VII. It helps to make a journey pleasant to have good company: this deceives the time, and takes off the tediousness of a journey as much as any thing. *Amicus pro vehiculo*—A friend is as good as a carriage. It is the comfort of those who walk in Wisdom's ways, that though there are but few walking in those ways, yet there are some, and those the wisest and best, and more excellent than their neighbours; and it will be found there are more ready to say, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, Zech. viii. 23.

The communion of saints contributes much to the pleasantness of Wisdom's ways; we have many fellow-travellers, that quicken one another, by the fellowship they have one with another, as companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, Rev. i. 9. It was a pleasure to those who were going up to Jerusalem to worship, that their numbers increased in every town they came to, and so they went from strength to strength, they grew more and more numerous, till every one of them in Zion appeared before God, (Ps. lxxxiv. 7.) and so it is with God's spiritual Israel, to which we have the pleasure of seeing daily additions of such as shall be saved.

They that travel together make one another pleasant by familiar converse; and it is the will of God that his people should by that means encourage one another, and strengthen one another's hands. They that fear the Lord shall speak often one to another, (Mal. iii. 16.) exhort one another daily, and communicate their experiences, and it will add much to the pleasure of this, to consider the kind notice God is pleased to take of it; he hearkens, and hears, and a book of remembrance is written for those that fear the Lord, and think on his Name.

VIII. It helps to make a journey pleasant, to have the way lie through green pastures, and by the still waters; and so the ways of Wisdom do. David speaks his experience herein, (Ps. xxiii. 2.) that he

was led into the green pastures, the verdure whereof was grateful to the eye; and by the still waters, whose soft and gentle murmurs were music to the ear: and he was not driven through these, but made to lie down in the midst of these delights, as Israel when they encamped at Elim, where there were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees, Exod. xv. 27.

Gospel ordinances, in which we deal much in our way to heaven, are very agreeable to all the children of God, as these green pastures, and still waters; they call the sabbath a delight, and prayer a delight, and the word of God a delight. These are their pleasant things. There is a river of comfort in gospel ordinances, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High; (Ps. xli. 4.) and along the banks of this river their road lies.

Those that turn aside from the ways of God's commandments are upbraided with the folly of it, as leaving a pleasant road for an unpleasant one. Will a man, a traveller, be such a fool as to leave my fields, which are smooth and even, for a rock that is rugged and dangerous, or for the snowy mountains of Lebanon? Jer. xviii. 14. Shall the running waters be forsaken for the strange cold waters? Thus are men enemies to themselves, and the foolishness of man perverteth his way.

IX. It adds to the pleasure of a journey, to have it fair over-head. Wet and stormy weather takes off very much of the pleasure of a journey; but it is pleasant travelling when the sky is clear, and the air calm and serene: and this is the happiness of those who walk in Wisdom's ways, that all is clear between them and heaven; there are no clouds of guilt to interpose between them and the Sun of Righteousness, and to intercept his refreshing beams; no storms of wrath gathering that threaten them.

Our reconciliation to God, and acceptance with him, makes every thing pleasant; how can we be melancholy, if Heaven smile upon us? Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, (Rom. v. 1, 2.) and peace from God, peace made for us, and peace spoken to us, and then we rejoice in tribulation. Those travellers cannot but rejoice all the day, who walk in the light of God's countenance, Ps. lxxxix. 15.

X. It adds likewise to the pleasure of a journey, to be furnished with all needful accommodations for travelling. They that walk in the way of God, have wherewithal to bear their charges; and it is promised them that they shall want no good thing, Ps. xxxiv. 10. If they have not an abundance of the wealth of this world, which perhaps will but overload a traveller, and be an encumbrance, rather than any furtherance, yet, they have good bills; having access by prayer to the throne of grace wherever they are, and a promise that they shall receive what they ask; and access by faith to the covenant of

grace, which they may draw upon, and draw from, as an inexhaustible treasury. *Jehovah jireh, The Lord will provide.*

Christ, our Melchizedec, brings forth bread and wine, (Gen xiv. 18.) for the refreshment of the poor travellers, that they may not faint by the way, 1 Kings xix. 8. When Elijah had a long journey to go, he was victualled accordingly; God will give grace sufficient to his people for all their exercises, (2 Cor. xii. 9.) *Strength according to the day; Verily they shall be fed.* And since travellers must have refreshing places, and resting-places, Christ has provided *rest at noon*, (Cant. i. 7.) in the heat of the day, for those that are his; and *rest at night too: Return to thy rest, O my soul.*

XI. It adds something to the pleasure of a journey to sing in the way: this takes off something of the fatigue of travelling, exhilarates the spirits; pilgrims used it; and God has put a song, *a new song, into the mouths* of his people, (Ps. xl. 3.) *even praises to their God*, and comfort to themselves. He has given us cause to be cheerful, and leave to be cheerful, and hearts to be cheerful, and has made it our duty to rejoice in the Lord always.

It is promised to those, who are brought to praise God, by hearing the words of his mouth, that they shall *sing in the ways of the Lord*, (Ps. cxxxviii. 6.) and good reason, *for great is the glory of the Lord.* How pleasantly did the released captives return to their own country, when they came with singing unto Zion! Isa. li. 11. And much more Jehoshaphat's victorious army, when they came to Jerusalem, *psalteries and harps to the house of the Lord; for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies*, 2 Chr. xx. 28. With this the travellers may revive one another, *O come, let us sing unto the Lord.*

XII. It helps to make a journey pleasant to have a good prospect. The travellers in Wisdom's ways may look about them with pleasure, so as no travellers ever could; for they can call all about them their own, even the *world, and life, and death, and things present, and things to come*, in this state, *all is yours, if you be Christ's*, 1 Cor. iii. 22. The whole creation is not only at peace with them, but at their service.

They can look before them with pleasure; not with anxiety and uncertainty, but with a humble assurance; not with terror, but with joy. It is pleasant in a journey, to have a prospect of the journey's end; to see that the way we are in leads directly to it, and to see that it cannot be far off; every step we take is so much nearer it, nay, and we are within a few steps of it. We have a prospect of being shortly with Christ in paradise; yet a little while, and we shall be at home, we shall be at rest; and whatever difficulties we may meet with in our way, when we come to heaven all will be well, eternally well.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTRINE VINDICATED.

SUFFER me a little, (says Elihu to Job, Job xxxvi. 2.) *and I will show thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf*, something more to say in defence of this truth, against that which may seem to weaken the force of it. We all ought to concern ourselves for the vindication of godliness, and to speak what we can for it, for we know that it is every where spoken against: and there is no truth so plain, so evident, but there have been those who have objected against it: the prince of darkness will raise what mists he can to cloud a truth, that stands so directly against his interest; but great is the truth, *and will prevail.*

Now as to the truth of the pleasantness of religion;

I. It is easy to confront the reproaches of the enemies of religion, who give it an ill name. There are those who make it their business, having perverted their own ways, to pervert the right ways of the Lord, and cast an odium upon them; as Elymas the sorcerer did, with design to *turn away the deputy from the faith*, Acts xiii. 8, 10. They are like the wicked spies, that *brought up an evil report* of the promised land, (Numb. xiii. 32.) as a land that did eat up the inhabitants thereof; and neither could be conquered, nor was worth conquering.

The scoffers of the latter days speak ill of religion, as a task and drudgery; they dress it up in frightful, formidable colours, but very false ones, to deter others from piety, and to justify themselves in their own impiety. They suggest that Christ's yoke is heavy, and his commandments grievous, and that to be religious is to bid adieu to all pleasure and delight, and to turn tormentors to ourselves; that God is *a hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed*, Matt. xxv. 24.

There were those of old that thus reproached the ways of God, and slandered religion; for they said, *It is vain to serve God*, (Mal. iii. 14.) there is neither credit nor comfort in it, and *what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances*, and (observe their invidious description of religion) *that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts*; as if to be religious was to walk mournfully, whereas indeed it is to walk cheerfully.

Now in answer to these calumnies we have this to say, that the matter is not so. They who say thus of religion, *speak evil of the things which they know not*: while *what they know naturally as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves*, Jude 10. The devil we know was a liar from the beginning, and a false accuser of God and religion, and in this particular represented God to our first parents, (Gen. iii.

5.) as having dealt hardly and unjustly with them, in prohibiting them the *tree of knowledge*; as if he envied them the happiness and pleasure they would attain to by eating of that tree; and the same methods he still takes to alienate men's minds from the life of God, and the power of godliness. But we know, and are sure, that it is a groundless imputation, for Wisdom's ways are *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*.

II. It is easy also to set aside the misrepresentation of religion, which are made by some that call themselves its friends, and profess kindness for it. As there are enemies of the Lord that blaspheme, (2 Sam. xii. 14.) so there are among the people of the Lord those that give them great occasion to do so, as David did. How many wounds does religion receive in the house of her friends, false friends they are or foolish ones, unworthy to be called Wisdom's children, for they do not justify her as they ought; but through mistake and indulgence of their own weakness, betray her cause, instead of pleading it, and witnessing to it; and confirm people's prejudices against it, which they should endeavour to remove.

Some that profess religion are morose and sour in their profession, peevish and ill-humoured, and make the exercises of religion a burthen, and task, and terror to themselves, and all about them, which ought to sweeten the spirit and make it easy, and candid, and compassionate to the infirmities of the weak and feeble of the flock.

Others are melancholy and sorrowful in their profession, and go mourning from day to day under prevailing doubts and fears, and disquietudes about their spiritual state. We know some of the best of God's servants have experienced trouble of mind to a great degree.

But as to the former, it is their sin; and let them bear their own burthen, but let not religion be blamed for it: and as to the latter, though there are some very good people that are of a sorrowful spirit, yet we will abide by it, that true piety has true pleasure in it notwithstanding.

1. But God is sometimes pleased, for wise and holy ends, for a time, to suspend the communication of his comforts to his people, and to hide his face from them, to try their faith, that it may be *found to praise and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Christ*, (1 Pet. i. 6, 7.) and so much the more for their being awhile in *heaviness through manifold temptations*. Thus he corrects them for what has been done amiss by them, and takes this course to mortify what is amiss in them; even winter seasons contribute to the fruitfulness of the earth. Thus he brings them to a closer and more humble dependence upon Christ for all their comfort, and teaches them to live entirely upon him. And though *for a small moment* he thus *for-sakes them*, (Isa. liv. 7, 8.) it is but to magnify his power so much the more in supporting them, and to

make his returns the sweeter, for he will gather them with *everlasting loving-kindness*. Light is sown for them, and it will come up again.

2. This is their affliction, God's hand must be acknowledged in it, as his righteous hand; yet there is sin in it, and that is from themselves. Good people have not the comforts they might have in their religion, and whose fault is it? They may thank themselves; they run themselves into the dark, and then shut their eyes against the light. *My wounds stink and are corrupt*, (says David, Ps. xxxviii. 5.) The wounds of sin which I gave myself are unhealed, not bound up, or mollified with ointment. And why? Is it for want of balm in Gilead, or a physician there? No, he owns, it is because of my foolishness; I did not take the right method with them. God speaks joy and gladness to them, but they turn a deaf ear to it, like Israel in Egypt, that hearkened not to *Moses*, for *anguish of spirit and sore bondage*, Exod. vi. 9. But let not the blame be laid upon religion, which has provided comfort for their souls; but let them bear the blame whose souls refuse to be comforted, or who do not take the way appointed for comfort; who do not go through with their repenting and believing. David owns that the reason why he wanted comfort, and was in pain, and agitated, was because he *kept silence*. He was not so free with God as he might and should have been; but when he said, *I will confess my transgression unto the Lord*, he was forgiven, and all was well, Ps. xxxii. 3—5.

Those do both God and Christ, and themselves and others, a deal of wrong, who look upon him with whom they have to do in religion, as one that seeks an occasion against them, and counts them for his enemies, and is extreme to mark what they think, or say, or do amiss; whereas he is quite otherwise, is slow to anger, swift to mercy, and willing to make the best of those whose hearts are upright with him, though they are compassed about with infirmity: he will not always chide; he does not delight in the death of *them that die*, but would rather they should *turn and live*, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Nor does he delight in the tears of them that weep, does not *afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*, (Lam. iii. 33.) much less his own children, but would rather they should be upon good grounds comforted. Religion then clears itself from all blame, which some may take occasion to cast upon it, from the uncomfortable lives which some lead that are religious.

III. But it will require some more pains to reconcile this truth of the *pleasantness of religious ways*, with (that which the word of God itself tells us of) the difficulties with which the ways of religion are attended. We value not the misapprehensions of some, and the misrepresentations of others, concerning religious ways; but we are sure the word of God is of a piece with itself, and does not contra-

dict itself. Our Master has taught us to call the way to heaven a narrow way, *ὁδὸς στενὴ καὶ ῥηλεὴς*,—an afflicted way, a distressed way; and we have in Scripture many things that declare it so. And it is true; but that does not contradict this doctrine, "That the ways of Wisdom are pleasant:" for the pleasantness that is in Wisdom's ways, is intended to be a balance, and is very much an over-balance, to any thing in them which is in any way distasteful or incommensurable. As for the imaginary difficulties, which the sluggard dreams of, "A lion in the way," "A lion in the street," we do not regard them: but there are some real difficulties in it, as well as real comforts; for *God hath set the one over against the other*, (Eccl. vii. 14.) that we might study to comport with both, and might sing, and sing unto God, of both, Psal. ci. 1.

We will not, we dare not, make the matter better than it is, but will allow there is that in religion which at first view may seem unpleasant; and yet doubt not but to show that it is reconcilable to, and consistent with, all that pleasure which we maintain to be in religion, and so, to take off all exceptions against this doctrine. *Amicæ Scripturarum lites; utinam et nostræ!*—It were well if we could agree with one another, as well as Scripture does with itself.

There are four things which seem not well to agree with this doctrine, and yet it is certain they do.

1. It is true, that to be religious, is to live a life of repentance, and yet, religious ways are pleasant notwithstanding. It is true, that we must mourn for sin daily, and reflect with regret upon our manifold infirmities; sin must be bitter to us, and we must even loathe and abhor ourselves for our corruptions that dwell in us, and the many actual transgressions that are committed by us. We must renew our repentance daily, and every night must make some sorrowful reflections upon the transgressions of the day. But then,

(1.) It is not walking in the way of Wisdom that creates us this sorrow, but our trifling in that way, and our turning aside out of it. If we would keep close to these ways, and pass forward in them as we ought, there would be no occasion for repentance. If we were as we should be, we should be always praising God, and rejoicing in him; but we make other work for ourselves by our own folly, and then complain that religion is unpleasant; and whose fault is that? If we would be always loving and delighting in God, and would live a life of communion with him, we should have no occasion to repent of that; but if we leave the fountain of living waters, and turn aside to broken cisterns, or the brooks in summer, and see cause (as doubtless we shall) to repent of it, we may thank ourselves.

What there is of bitterness in repentance, is owing not to our religion, but to our defects and defaults in

religion; and it proves, not that there is bitterness in the ways of God, but in the ways of sin, which make a penitential sorrow necessary, for the preventing of a sorrow a thousand times worse; for sooner or later sin will have sorrow. If repentance be bitter, we must not say, this is occasioned through being godly, but through being sinful; Jer. iv. 18. *This is thy wickedness, because it is bitter*. If by sin we have made sorrow necessary, it is certainly better to mourn now, than *mourn at the last*, Prov. v. 11. To continue impenitent, is not to put away sorrow from thy heart, but to put it off to a worse place.

(2.) Even in repentance, if it be right, there is a true pleasure, a pleasure accompanying it. Our Saviour has said of them, who thus mourn, not only that they shall be comforted, but that *they are blessed*, Matt. v. 4. When a man is conscious to himself that he has done an ill thing, and what is unbecoming him, and may be hurtful to him, it is incident to him to repent of it. Now religion has found a way to put a sweetness into that bitterness. Repentance, when it is not from the influence of religion, is nothing but bitterness and horror, as Judas's was; but repentance, as it is made an act of religion, as it is one of the laws of Christ, is pleasant, because it is the raising of the spirit, and the discharging of that which is noxious and offensive.

Our religion has not only taken care, that penitents be not overwhelmed with an excess of sorrow, (2 Cor. ii. 7.) and swallowed up by it; that their sorrow do not work death, as the sorrow of the world does; but it has provided, that even this bitter cup should be sweetened: and therefore we find that under the law, the sacrifices for sin were commonly attended with expressions of joy; and while the priests were sprinkling the blood of the sacrifices to make atonement, (2 Chr. xxix. 24, 26.) the Levites attended with *psalteries and harps*, for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets. Even the day to afflict the soul is the day of atonement; and when we receive the atonement, *we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rom. v. 11. In giving our consent to the atonement, we take the comfort of the atonement.

In sorrowing for the death of some dear friend or relation, thus far we have found a pleasure in it, that it has given vent to our grief which our spirits were full of; so in sorrow for sin, the shedding of just tears is some satisfaction to us. If it is a pleasure to be angry, when a man thinks with Jonah, that he *does well to be angry*; much more is it a pleasure to be sorry, when a man is sure he does well to be sorry. The same word in Hebrew, *aru* signifies both *consolari* and *penitere*, both to comfort and to repent, because there is comfort in true repentance.

(3.) Much more after repentance, there is a plea-

are attending it, and flowing from it. It is a way of pleasantness, for it is the way to pleasantness. To them that mourn in Zion, that sorrow after a godly sort, God has appointed *beauty for ashes*, and *the oil of joy for mourning*, Isa. lxi. 3. And the more the soul is humbled under the sense of sin, the more sensible will the comfort of pardon be; it is wounded in order to be healed: the jubilee trumpet sounded in the close of the day of soul-affliction, (Lev. xxv. 9.) which proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of release; and an acceptable year it is indeed, to those who find themselves tied and bound with the cords of their sin.

True penitents go weeping, it is true, but it is to *seek the Lord of hosts*, (Jer. l. 4, 5.) to seek him as *their God*, and to enter into covenant with him: and let their *hearts rejoice that seek the Lord*, (Ps. cv. 3.) for they shall find him, and find him their bountiful rewarder. They sorrow not as those that have no hope, but good hope that their iniquities are forgiven; and what joy can be greater than that of a pardon to one condemned?

2. It is true, that to be religious is to take care, and to take pains, and to labour earnestly, (Luke xiii. 24.) and yet *Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness*. It is true, we must strive to enter into this way, must be in an agony, so the word is. There is a violence which the kingdom of heaven suffers, and the *violent take it by force*, Matt. xi. 12. And when we are in that way, we must *run with patience*, Heb. xii. 1. The bread of life is to be eaten in the sweat of our face; we must be always upon our guard, and keep our hearts with all diligence. Business for God and our souls is what we are not allowed to be slothful in, but *servant in spirit, serving the Lord*, Rom. xii. 11. We are *soldiers of Jesus Christ*, and we must *endure hardness*, must *war the good warfare*, till it be accomplished, 2 Tim. ii. 2.

And yet even in this contention there is comfort. It is work indeed, and work that requires care; and yet it will appear to be pleasant work, if we consider how we are strengthened for it, and encouraged in it.

(1.) How we are strengthened for it, and animated with strength in our souls to go on in it, and go through with it. It would be unpleasant, and would go on very heavily, if we were left to ourselves, to travel in our own strength; but if we be actuated and animated in it by a better spirit, and mightier power than our own, it is *pleasant*. If God *work in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure*, (Phil. ii. 13.) we shall have no reason to complain of the difficulty of our work; for God *ordains peace for us*, true peace and pleasure, by *working all our works in us*, Isa. xxvi. 12.

We may sing at our work, if our minds be by the Spirit of God brought to it, our hands strengthened for it, and our infirmities helped, (Rom. viii. 26.)

and particularly our infirmities in prayer; that by it we may fetch in strength for every service, strength according to the day. Daniel at first found God's speaking to him a terror, he could not bear it; but when one like the appearance of a man came and touched him, (who could be no other than Christ the Mediator,) and put strength into him, saying, *Peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong*; it was quite another thing with him, then nothing more pleasant, *Let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me*, Dan. x. 17—19.

Though the way to heaven be up-hill, yet, if we be carried on in it as upon eagle's wings, it will be pleasant; and those are so that wait upon the Lord, for to them it is promised that they *shall renew their strength*. That is pleasant work, though against the inclination of our corrupt natures, for the doing of which we have not only a new nature given us, inclining us to it, and making us habitually capable of application to it, but actual supplies of grace sufficient for the doing of it promised us, (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.) by one who knows what strength we need, and what will serve, and will neither be unkind to us, nor unfaithful to his own word. And it is observable that when God, though he eased not Paul of the thorn in the flesh, yet said that good word to him, *My grace is sufficient for thee*; immediately it follows, *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong*. Sufficient grace will make our work pleasant, even the hardest part of it.

(2.) How we are encouraged in it. It is true, we must take pains, but the work is good work, and is to be done, and is done by all the saints, from a principle of holy love; and that makes it pleasant, (1 John v. 3.) as Jacob's service for Rachel was to him, because he loved her. It is an unspeakable comfort to industrious Christians, that they are working together with God, and he with them; that their Master's eye is upon them, and a witness to their sincerity: he *sees in secret*, and will *reward openly*, Mat. vi. 6. God now accepts their works, smiles upon them, and his Spirit speaks to them good words and *comfortable words*, (Zech. i. 13.) witnessing to their adoption. And this is very encouraging to God's servants, as it was to the servants of Boaz, to have their master come to them, when they were hard at work, reaping down his own fields, and with a pleasant countenance say to them, *The Lord be with you*, Ruth ii. 4. Nay, the Spirit says more to God's labourers, *The Lord is with you*.

The prospect of the recompence of reward, is in a special manner encouraging to us in our work, and makes it pleasant, and the little difficulties we meet with in it to be as nothing. It was by having an eye to this that Moses was encouraged not only to bear the reproach of Christ, but to *esteem it greater riches than the treasures of Egypt*, Heb. xi. 26. In

all labour there is profit; and if so, there is pleasure also in the prospect of that profit, and according to the degree of it. We must work, but it is to work out our salvation, a great salvation, which, when it comes, will abundantly make us amends for all our toil. We must strive, but it is to enter into life, eternal life. We must run, but it is for an incorruptible crown, the prize of our high calling. And we do not run at an uncertainty, nor fight as those that beat the air; for to him that *sows righteousness there is a sure reward*, (Prov. xi. 18.) and the assurance of that harvest will make even the seed-time pleasant.

3. It is true, that to be religious, is to deny ourselves in many things that are pleasing to sense: and yet Wisdom's ways are *pleasantness* notwithstanding. It is indeed necessary, that beloved lusts should be mortified and subdued, corrupt appetites crossed and displeased, which, to the natural man, is like *plucking out a right eye, and cutting off a right hand*, Mat. v. 29. There are forbidden pleasures that must be abandoned, and kept at a distance from: the flesh must not be gratified, nor *provision made to fulfil the lusts of it*, (Rom. xiii. 14.) but on the contrary, we must *keep under the body, and bring it into subjection*, (1 Cor. ix. 27.) we must *crucify the flesh*, must kill it, and put it to a painful death. The first lesson we are to learn in the school of Christ, is to deny ourselves, (Matt. xvi. 24.) and this must be our constant practice; we must use ourselves to deny ourselves, and thus *take up our cross daily*.

Now will not this spoil all the pleasure of a religious life? No, it will not; for the pleasures of sense, which we are to deny ourselves, are comparatively despicable, and really dangerous.

(1.) These pleasures we are to deny ourselves are comparatively despicable: how much soever they are valued and esteemed by those who live by sense, and know no better, they are looked upon with a generous contempt by those who live by faith, and are acquainted with divine and spiritual pleasures. And it is no pain to deny ourselves in these pleasures, when we know ourselves entitled to better, more rational, and noble, and agreeable; the delights of the blessed spirits above.

The garlic and onions of Egypt were doated upon by those that knew not how to value either the manna of the wilderness, or the milk and honey of Canaan, Numb. xi. 5. So the base and sordid pleasures of sense are relished by the depraved and vicious appetites of the carnal mind. But when a man has learned to put a due estimate upon spiritual pleasures, those that are sensual have lost all their sweetness, and are become the most insipid things in the world; have no pleasure in them, in comparison with that far greater pleasure which excelleth.

Is it any diminution to the pleasure of a grown man, to deny himself the toys and sports which he

was fond of when a child? No, when he became a man, he put away those childish things; he is now past them, he is above them, for he is acquainted with those entertainments that are manly and more generous. Thus mean and little do the pleasures of sense appear to those that have learned to delight themselves in the Lord.

(2.) They are really dangerous, they are apt to take away the heart. If the heart be set upon them, they blind the mind, debauch the understanding and conscience, and in many quench the sparks of conviction, and of that holy fire which comes from heaven, and tends to heaven. They are in danger of drawing away the heart from God, and the more they are valued and coveted, the more dangerous they are, of piercing us through with many sorrows, and of drowning us in destruction and perdition: to deny ourselves in them is but to avoid a rock, upon which multitudes have fatally split.

What diminution is it to the pleasure of a safe and happy way on sure ground, which will certainly bring us to our journey's end, to deny ourselves the false and pretended satisfaction, of walking in a fair but dangerous way, that leads to destruction? Is it not much pleasanter travelling on a rough pavement, than on a smooth quicksand? Where there is a known peril, there can be no true pleasure, and therefore the want of it is no loss or uneasiness.

What pleasure can a wise or considerate man take in those entertainments, in which he has continual reason to suspect a snare and a design upon him, any more than he that was at a feast could relish the dainties of it, when he was aware of a naked sword hanging directly over him by a single thread? The foolish woman, indeed, calls the *stolen waters sweet, and bread eaten in secret pleasant*, (Prov. ix. 17, 18.) But those find no difficulty or uneasiness in denying them, who know *that the dead are there, and her guests are already in the depths of hell*. Therefore, however the corrupt heart may find some reluctance in refusing those forbidden pleasures, we may say of it, as Abigail did of David's denying himself the satisfaction of being revenged on Nabal; afterwards this shall be *no grief unto us, nor offence of heart*, 1 Sam. xxv. 31.

4. It is true, that *through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God*, (Acts xiv. 22.) that we must not only deny ourselves the pleasures of sense, but must sometimes expose ourselves to its pains; we must take up our cross when it lies in our way, and bear it after Christ. We are told, that *all, that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution*, at least they must expect it, and get ready for it; bonds and afflictions abide them, losses in their estates, hinderances in their preferment, reproaches and contempts, banishments, deaths must be counted upon: and will not this spoil the pleasure of religion? No, it will not; for,

(1.) It is but *light affliction* at the worst, that we are called to suffer, and *but for a moment*, compared with the *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* that is reserved for us, (2 Cor. iv. 17.) with which the *sufferings of this present time* are *not worthy to be compared*, Rom. viii. 18. All these troubles do but touch the body, the outward man, and the interests of it, they do not at all affect the soul: they break the shell, or pluck off the husk, but do not bruise the kernel.

Can the brave and courageous soldier take pleasure in the toils and perils of the camp, and in jeopardising his life in the high places of the field, in the eager pursuit of honour, and in the service of his prince and country? And shall not those who have the interests of Christ's kingdom near their hearts, and are carried on by a holy ambition of the honour that comes from God, take a delight in suffering for Christ, when they know that those sufferings tend to his honour, and their own hereafter? They that are *persecuted for righteousness sake*, that are *reviled*, and have *all manner of evil said against them falsely*, because they belong to Christ, are bidden not only to bear it patiently, but to rejoice in it, and to be *exceeding glad, for great is their reward in heaven*, Matt. v. 11, 12. Every reproach we endure for Christ, will be a pearl in our crown shortly.

(2.) As those *afflictions abound* for Christ, so our *consolations in Christ do much more abound*, 2 Cor. i. 5. The more the waters increased, the higher was the ark lifted up; the more we suffer in God's cause, the more we partake of his comforts; for he will not be wanting to those whom he calls out to any hardships more than ordinary for his name's sake. The Lord was with Joseph in the prison, when he lay there for a good conscience; and those went from the council rejoicing, that were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's name; were honoured to be dishonoured for him, Acts v. 41.

Thus the extraordinary supports and joys which they experience, who patiently suffer for righteousness sake, add much more to the pleasantness of the ways of Wisdom, than the sufferings themselves do, or can, derogate from it; for the sufferings are human, the consolations are divine. They suffer in the flesh, but they rejoice in the spirit; they suffer for a time, but they rejoice evermore; and *this their joy no man taketh from them*.

CHAPTER VII.

THE APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE.

CONCERNING this doctrine of the pleasantness of religious ways, I hope we may now say, as Eliphaz does of his principle, *Lo! this, we have searched it,*

so it is, (Job v. 27.) it is incontestably true, and therefore we may conclude as he does, *Hear it, and know thou it for thy good*; know thou it *for thyself*, so the margin reads it; apply it to thyself, believe it concerning thyself, not only that it is good, but that *it is good for thee, to draw near to God*, Ps. lxxiii. 28. Then only we hear things and know them for our good, when we hear them and know them for ourselves.

Three inferences, by way of counsel and exhortation, we shall draw from this doctrine.

1. Let us all then be persuaded, and prevailed with, to enter into, and to walk in, these paths of Wisdom, that are so very pleasant. This is what I principally intend in opening and proving this truth: most people would rather be courted than threatened to their duty. Much might be said to frighten you out of the ways of sin and folly, but I would hope to gain the same point another way, by alluring you into the ways of wisdom and holiness. This comes to invite you to a feast which the Lord of hosts has, in the gospel, made to all nations, (Isa. xxv. 6.) and to all in the nations, and to you among the rest, for none are excluded, that do not by their unbelief exclude themselves; *a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined*; delights for souls, infinitely transcending the delicacies of sense. You are welcome to this feast: come, for all things are now ready. *Come, eat of Wisdom's bread, and drink of the wine that she has mingled*, Prov. ix. 5.

Is a life of religion such a sweet and comfortable life? Why then should not we be religious? If such as these be the ways of Wisdom, why should not we be travellers in those ways? Let this recommend to us a life of sincere and serious godliness, and engage us to conform to all its rules, and give up ourselves to be ruled by them. It is not enough to have a good opinion of religion, and to give it a good word; that will but be a witness against us, if we do not set ourselves in good earnest to the practice of it, and make conscience of living up to it.

I would here, with a particular and pressing importunity, address myself to you that are young; to persuade you, now in the days of your youth, now in the present day, to make religion your choice and your business; and I assure you, if you do so, you will find it your delight. May God, by his grace, convince you of the real comforts that are to be had in real godliness, that you may be drawn cheerfully to Christ with these cords of a man, and held fast to him with these bands of love. *My son*, (says Solomon to his little scholar, Prov. xxiv. 13, 14.) *eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honey-comb, which is sweet to thy taste*. He does not forbid him the delights of sense, he may use them soberly and moderately, and with due caution; but remember that, *so shall the knowledge of Wisdom be to thy soul, when thou hast found it: thou hast better pleasures*

than these to mind and pursue, spiritual and rational ones : and instead of being made indifferent to those, we should rather be led to them, and quickened in our desires after them, by these delights of sense, which God gives us to engage us to himself and his service.

The age of youth is the age of pleasure ; you think you may now be allowed to take your pleasure ; O that you would take it, and seek it there, where alone it is to be had, and that is, in a strict observance of the laws of virtue and godliness. Would you live a pleasant life ? begin betimes to live a religious life, and the sooner you begin, the more pleasant it will be : it is best travelling in a morning. Would you rejoice, O young people ! in your youth, and have your hearts to cheer you in the days of your youth ? (Eccl. xi. 9.) do not walk in the way of your corrupt and carnal hearts, but in the way of God's commandments ; for he knows what is good for you, better than you do yourselves : do not walk in the sight of your eyes, for the eyes are apt to fly upon that which is not, (Prov. xxiii. 5.) but live by faith, that faith, which, being the *substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*, will lead you to that which is ; for *Wisdom makes those that love her to inherit substance, and fills their treasures*, (Prov. viii. 21.) and thence arises their true satisfaction.

That which I would persuade you to, is, to walk in the way of Wisdom, to be sober-minded, to be thoughtful about your souls and your everlasting state, and get your minds well-principled, and well-affected, and well-inclined. *Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get Wisdom, and, with all thy getting, get understanding*, Prov. iv. 7. That of which I would persuade you, is, the pleasantness of this way ; you cannot do better for yourselves, than by a religious course of life. *My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine* ; (Prov. xxiii. 15, 16.) *yea, my reins shall rejoice if thy lips, out of the abundance of thy heart, speak right things* ; but that is not all, not only my heart shall rejoice, but thy own shall.

I wish you would see, and seriously consider, the two rivals that are making court to you for your souls, for your best affections, Christ and Satan, and act wisely in disposing of yourselves, and make such a choice as you will afterwards reflect upon with comfort. You are now at the turning time of life ; turn right now, and you are made for ever. Wisdom says, (Prov. ix. 4.) *Whoso is simple, let him turn in to me* ; and she will cure him of his simplicity : Folly says, *Whoso is simple, let him turn in to me* ; and she will take advantage of his simplicity : now let him come, whose right your hearts are, and give them him, and you shall have them again more your own.

That you may determine well between these two competitors for the throne in your souls,

(1.) See the folly of carnal, sinful pleasures, and abandon them ; you will never be in love with the pleasures of religion till you are persuaded to fall out with forbidden pleasures. The enjoyment of the delights of sense suits best with that age, the appetite towards them is then most violent ; mirth, sport, plays, dainties, are the idols of young people ; they are therefore called *youthful lusts*. The days will come, the evil days, when they themselves will say they have *no pleasure in them*, like Barzillai, (2 Sam. xix. 35.) who, when he is old, can no more relish what he eats and what he drinks. O that reason, and wisdom, and grace, might make you as dead to them now, as time and days will make you after a while.

Will you believe one that tried the utmost of what the pleasures of sense could do towards making a man happy ? He said of laughter, *It is mad*, and of mirth, *What doth it ?* and that *sorrow is better than laughter*, Eccl. ii. 2. and vii. 3. Moses knew what the pleasures of the court were, and yet chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to continue in the snare of them ; (Heb. xi. 25.) and you must make the same choice ; for you will never cordially embrace the pleasures of religion, till you have renounced the pleasures of sin. Covenant against them, therefore, and watch against them.

If you would live, and go in the way of understanding, you must forsake the foolish, (Prov. ix. 6.) take heed of the way both of the *evil man*, and of the *strange woman* ; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away, Prov. iii. 12, 16. Look upon sinful pleasures as mean, and much below you ; look upon them as vile, and much against you ; and do not only despise them, but dread them, and hate even the garments spotted with the flesh.

(2.) Be convinced of the pleasure of Wisdom's ways, and come and try them. You are, it may be, prejudiced against religion as a melancholy thing, but, as Philip said to Nathanael, (John i. 46.) *Come and see*. Believe it possible, that there may be a pleasure in religion which you have not yet thought of. When religion is looked upon at a distance, we see not that pleasure in it, which we shall certainly find when we come to be better acquainted with it. Peter Martyr, in a sermon, illustrated it by this comparison, (and it proved a means of the conversion of the Marquis of Vico,) " He that looks upon persons dancing at a distance, would think they were mad ; but let him come nearer, and observe how they take every step by rule, and keep time with the music, he will not only be pleased with it, but inclined to join with them."

Come and take Christ's yoke upon you, and you will find it easy ; try the pleasure there is in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, and in converse with spiritual and eternal things ; try the pleasure of seriousness and self-denial, and you will find it

far exceeds that of vanity and self-indulgence. Try the pleasure of meditation on the word of God, of prayer and praise, and sabbath-sanctification, and you will think that you have made a happy change of the pleasure of vain and carnal mirth for these true delights.

Make this trial by these four rules :

[1.] That man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him. Our pleasures will be according to that which we pitch upon and pursue as our chief end : if we can mistake so far, as to think it is our chief end to enjoy the world and the flesh, and our chief business to serve them, the delights of the sense will relish best with us ; but if the world was made for man, certainly man was made for more than the world ; and if God made man, certainly he made him for himself. God then is our chief good, it is our business to serve and please him, and our happiness to be accepted of him.

And if so, and we believe so, nothing will be a greater pleasure to us, than that which we have reason to think will be pleasing to him. If we do, indeed, look upon God as our chief good, we shall make him our *chief joy*, our *exceeding joy*. If we consider that we were made capable of the pleasure of conversing with God in this world, and seeing and enjoying him in another ; we cannot but think that we wretchedly disparage ourselves, when we take up with the mean and sordid pleasures of sense as our felicity, especially if we forego all spiritual and eternal pleasures for them ; as certainly we do, and give up all our expectations of them, if we place our happiness in these present delights ; and we are guilty of a greater absurdity than that which profane Esau was guilty of, who, *for a mess of pottage, sold his birth-right*, Heb. xii. 16.

[2.] That the soul is the man, and that is best for us, that is best for our souls. Learn to think meanly of this flesh, by which we are allied to the earth and the inferior creatures ; it is formed out of the dust, it is dust, and it is hastening to the dust ; and then the things that gratify it, will not be esteemed of any great moment : *Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats, but God shall destroy both it and them ;* and therefore let us not make idols of them.

But the soul is the noble part of us, by which we are allied to heaven, and the world of spirits ; those comforts therefore which delight the soul, are the comforts we should prize most, and give the preference to, for the soul's sake. Rational pleasures are the best for a man.

[3.] That the greatest joy is that which a stranger doth not intermeddle with, Prov. xiv. 10. The best pleasure is that which lies not under the eye and observation of the world, but which a man has and hides in his own bosom, and by which he enjoys himself, and keeps not only a peaceable, but a comfortable, possession of his own soul, though he does

not by laughter, or other expressions of joy, tell them the satisfaction he has. Christ had *meat to eat which the world knew not of*, (John iv. 32.) and so have Christians, to whom he is the bread of life.

[4.] That all is well that ends everlastingly well. That pleasure ought to have the preference, which is of the longest continuance. The pleasures of sense are withering and fading, and leave a sting behind them to those that placed their happiness in them ; but the pleasures of religion will abide with us ; in *these is continuance*, (Isa. lxiv. 5.) they will not turn with the wind, nor change with the weather, but are meat which endures to everlasting life.

Reckon that the best pleasure which will remain with you, and stand you in stead, when you come to die : which will help to take off the terror of death, and allay its pains. The remembrance of sinful pleasures will give us killing terrors, but the remembrance of religious pleasures will give us living comforts in dying moments. They that live in Belshazzar's revels, may expect to receive the summons of death, with the same confusion that he did, when *the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another* ; (Dan. v. 6.) but they that live in Hezekiah's devotions, may receive them with the same composure that he did, when with a great deal of satisfaction he looked back upon a well-spent life : *Now, Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with an upright heart*, Isa. xxxvii. 3.

2. Let us, that profess religion, study to make it more and more pleasant to ourselves. We see how much is done to make it so ; let us not receive the grace of God herein in vain. Let them that walk in Wisdom's ways, taste the sweetness of them, and relish it. Christ's service is perfect freedom ; let us not make a drudgery of it, nor a toil of such a pleasure. We should not only be reconciled to our duty, (as we ought to be to our greatest afflictions, and to make the best of it,) but we should rejoice in our duty, and sing at our work. If God intended that his service should be a pleasure to his servants, let them concur with him herein, and not walk contrary to him.

Now in order to the making of our religion increasingly pleasant to us, I shall give seven directions.

(1.) Let us always keep up good thoughts of God, and carefully watch against hard thoughts of him. As it is the original error of many that are loose and careless in religion, that they *think God altogether such a one as themselves*, (Ps. l. 21.) as much a friend to sin as themselves, and as indifferent whether his work be done or no ; so it is the error of many that are severe in their religion, that they think God, like themselves, a hard master ; they have such thoughts of him, as Job had in an hour of temptation, when he looked upon God as seeking occasions against him, numbering his steps, and watching over his sins, and taking him for his enemy ; (Job xiii.

24. and xiv. 16.) as if he were extreme to mark iniquities, and implacable to those who had offended, and not accepting any service that had in it the least defect or imperfection.

But the matter is not so, and we do both God and ourselves a great deal of wrong, if we imagine it to be so; what could have been done more than God has done, to convince us that he is gracious and merciful, *slow to anger*, and ready to forgive sin when it is repented of? *I said, I will confess mine iniquity unto thee, and thou forgavest*; (Ps. xxxii. 5.) and he is ready to accept the services that come from an upright heart. *He will not always chide, nor contend for ever*. So far is he from taking advantage of us, that he makes the best of us: where the spirit is willing, he accepts that, and overlooks the weakness of the flesh. Let us deal with him accordingly; look upon God as Love, and the God of love, and then it will be pleasant to us to hear from him, to speak to him, to converse with him, and to do him any service.

It is true, God is great, and glorious, and jealous, and to be worshipped with reverence and holy fear; but is he not our Father, a tender, gracious father? Was not God, in Christ, *reconciling the world to himself*, (2 Cor. v. 19.) and to all his attributes and relations to us, by showing himself willing to be reconciled to us, notwithstanding our provocations? See him, therefore, upon a throne of grace, and come boldly to him; and that will make your service pleasant.

(2.) Let us dwell much, by faith, upon the promises of God. What pleasant lives should we lead, if we were but more intimately acquainted with those declarations which God has made of his good will to man, and the assurances he has given of his favour, and all the blessed fruits of it, to those who serve him faithfully? The promises are many, and exceeding great and precious, suited to our case, and accommodated to every exigence; there are not only promises *to* grace, but promises *of* grace, grace sufficient; and these promises are all *Yea* and *Amen* in Christ.

What do these promises stand in our Bibles for, but to be made use of? Come then, and let us apply them to ourselves, and insert our own names in them by faith. What God said to Abraham, *I am thy shield*, (Gen. xv. 1.) I am *El-shaddi*, a *God All-sufficient*; (Gen. xvii. 1.) what he said to Joshua, *I will never fail thee nor forsake thee*, (Josh. i. 5.) he says to me. What he says to all that love him, that *all things shall work for good to them*, (Rom. viii. 28.) and to all that *fear him*, that *no good thing shall be wanting to them*, (Ps. xxxiv. 10.) he says to me; and why should not I take the comfort of it?

These promises, and the like, are *wells of salvation*, from which we may *draw water with joy*; and *breasts of consolation*, from which we may *suck*, and

be satisfied; they will be both our *strength*, and our *song* in the *house of our pilgrimage*. So well-ordered is the covenant of grace in all things, and *so sure*, (2 Sam. xxiii. 5.) that if, having laid up our portion in it, and so made it all our salvation, we would but fetch our maintenance from it, and so make it all our desire and delight, we should have in it a continual feast, and should go on our way rejoicing, Ps. cxix. 111.

(3.) Let us order the affairs of our religion with discretion. Many make religion unpleasant to themselves, and discouraging to others, by their imprudent management of it; making that service to be a burthen by the circumstances of it, which in itself would be a pleasure; doing things out of time, or tasking themselves above their strength, and undertaking more than they can go through with, especially at first; which is like *putting new wine into old bottles*, (Matt. ix. 17.) or like *over-driving the flocks one day*, Gen. xxxiii. 13. If we make the yoke of Christ heavier than he has made it, we may thank ourselves that our drawing in it becomes unpleasant. Solomon cautions us, (Eccl. vii. 16.) against being *righteous overmuch*, and making ourselves *otherwise*, as that by which we may destroy ourselves, and put ourselves out of conceit with our religion; there may be over-doing in well-doing, and then it becomes unpleasant.

But let us take our religion as Christ has settled it, and we shall find it easy. When the ways of our religion are ways of Wisdom, then they are ways of pleasantness; for the more wisdom the more pleasantness; and that Wisdom dwells with prudence. Wisdom will direct us to be even and regular in our religion, to take care that the duties of our general and particular calling, the business of our religion, and our necessary business in the world, do not interfere or intrench upon one another. It will direct us to time duty aright; for every thing is beautiful and pleasant in its season, (Eccl. iii. 11.) and work is then easy, when we are in frame for it.

(4.) Let us live in love, and keep up Christian charity, and the spiritual communion of saints; if we would be of good comfort, we must be of one mind, (2 Cor. xiii. 11.) and therefore the apostle presses brotherly love upon us, with an argument taken from the consolations in Christ, (Phil. ii. 1.) that is, the comfort that is in Christianity. As ever you hope to have the comfort of your religion, submit to that great law of it, *Walk in love*: for, *Behold, how good, and how pleasant, it is*, (how good in itself, and pleasant to us,) *for brethren to dwell together in unity*. The more pleasing we are to our brethren, the more pleasant we shall be to ourselves.

Nothing makes our lives more uncomfortable than strife and contention; *Woe is me that I dwell among those that hate peace*, Ps. cxx. 5. It is bad being among those that are disposed to quarrel, and worse

having in ourselves a disposition to quarrel. The resentments of contempt put upon us, are uneasy enough, and contrivances to revenge it much more so. And nothing makes our religion more uncomfortable, than strifes and contentions about that. We forfeit and lose the pleasure of it, if we entangle ourselves in perverse disputings about it.

But by holy love we enjoy our friends, which will add to the pleasure of enjoying God in this world. Love itself sweetens the soul, and revives it, and, as it is the loadstone of love, it fetches in the further pleasure and satisfaction of being beloved, and so it is a heaven upon earth; for what is the happiness and pleasure of heaven, but that there love reigns in perfection? Then we have most peace in our bosoms, when we are most peaceably disposed towards our brethren.

(5.) Let us be much in the exercise of holy joy, and employ ourselves much in praise. Joy is the heart of praise, as praise is the language of joy; let us engage ourselves to these, and quicken ourselves in these. God has made these our duty, that by these all the other parts of our duty may be pleasant to us; and for that end we should abound much in them, and attend upon God with joy and praise. Let us not crowd our spiritual joys into a corner of our hearts, nor our thankful praises into a corner of our prayers, but give both scope and vent to both.

Let us live a life of delight in God, and love to think of him as we do of one whom we love and value. Let the flowing in of every stream of comfort lead us to the fountain; and in every thing that is grateful to us, let us taste that the Lord is gracious. Let the drying up of every stream of comfort drive us to the fountain; and let us rejoice the more in God for our being deprived of that which we used to rejoice in.

Let us be frequent and large in our thanksgivings. It will be pleasant to us to recount the favours of God, and thus to make some returns for them; though poor and mean, yet such as God will graciously accept. We should have more pleasure in our religion, if we had but learned in *every thing to give thanks*, (1 Thess. v. 18.) for that takes out more than half the bitterness of our afflictions, that we can see cause even to be thankful for them; and it infuses more than a double sweetness into our enjoyments, that they furnish us with matter for that excellent heavenly work of praise; *Sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant*; comfortable, as well as comely, Ps. cxxxv. 3.

(6.) Let us act in a constant dependence upon Jesus Christ. Religion would be much more pleasant, if we did but cleave more closely to Christ in it, and do all in his name. The more precious Christ is to us, the more pleasant will every part of our work be; and therefore believing in Christ is often

expressed by our rejoicing in him, Phil. iii. 3. We may rejoice in God, through Christ, as the Mediator between us and God; may rejoice in our communion with God, when it is kept up through Christ; may rejoice in hope of eternal life, when we see this life in the Son: *He that hath the Son of God, has life*, that is, he has comfort, 1 John v. 11, 12.

There is that in Christ, and in his undertaking and performances for us, which is sufficient to satisfy all our doubts, to silence all our fears, and to balance all our sorrows. He was appointed to be the consolation of Israel, and he will be so to us, when we have learnt not to look for that in ourselves, which is to be had in him only, and to make use of his mediation in every thing wherein we have to do with God. When we rejoice in the righteousness of Christ, and in his grace and strength, rejoice in his satisfaction and intercession, rejoice in his dominion and universal agency and influence, and in the progress of his gospel, and the conversion of souls to him, and please ourselves with prospects of his second coming, we have then a joy, not only which no man takes from us, but which will increase more and more; and of the *increase of Christ's government*, (and therefore of that peace,) *there shall be no end*, Isa. ix. 7. Our songs of joy are then most pleasant, when the burthen of them is, *None but Christ, none but Christ*.

(7.) Let us converse much with the glory that is to be revealed. They that by faith send their hearts and best affections before them to heaven, while they are here on this earth, may in return fetch thence some of those joys and pleasures that are at God's right hand. That which goes up in vapours of holy desire, though insensible, in groanings which cannot be uttered, will come down again in dews of heavenly consolations, which will make the soul as a watered garden.

Let us look much to the end of our way, how glorious it will be, and that will help to make our way pleasant. This abundantly satisfies the saints, and is the fatness of God's house on earth, Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9. This makes them now to *drink of the river of God's pleasures*, that *with him is the fountain of life*, whence all these streams come, and *in his light* they hope to *see light*, everlasting light. By frequent meditations on that rest which remains for the people of God, (Heb. iv. 3.) we now enter into that rest, and partake of the comfort of it.

Our hopes of that happiness through grace would be very much strengthened, and our evidences for it cleared up insensibly, if we did but converse more with it, and the discoveries made of it in the Scripture. We may have foretastes of heavenly delights, while we are here on earth, clusters from Canaan, while we are yet in this wilderness, and there is no pleasure comparable to that which these afford. That is the sweetest joy within us, which is borrowed

from the joy set before us. And we deprive ourselves very much of the comfort of our religion, in not having our eye more to that joy. We rejoice most triumphantly, and with the greatest degrees of holy glorying, when we *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*, Rom. v. 2. In this our heart is glad, and our glory rejoices, Ps. xvi. 9.

3. Let us make it appear, that we have, indeed, found Wisdom's ways to be pleasantness, and her paths peace. If we have experienced this truth, let us evidence our experience, and not only in word, but in deed, bearing our testimony to the truth of it. Let us live as those who believe the sweetness of religion, not because we are told it, but because we have tasted it, 1 John i. 1.

If so be then, to borrow the apostle's words, (1 Pet. ii. 3.) *we have tasted that the Lord is gracious*, if we have, indeed, found it a pleasant thing to be religious;

(1.) Let our hearts be much enlarged in all religious exercises, and all instances of gospel-obedience. The more pleasant the service of God is, the more we should abound in it. When God enlarges our hearts with his consolations, he expects that we should run the way of his commandments, that we should exert ourselves in our duty with more vigour, and press forward the more earnestly towards perfection.

This should make us forward to every good work, and ready to close with all opportunities of serving God, and doing good; that which we take a pleasure in, we need not to be twice called to. If indeed the hearts of those rejoice that seek the Lord, (as in Ps. cv. 3.) then when God says, *Seek ye my face*, how steadily should our hearts answer at the first word, *Thy face, Lord, will we seek*; (Ps. xxvii. 8.) and how glad shall we be, when it is said, *Let us go to the house of the Lord*! Ps. cxxii. 1. This should make us forward to acts of charity, that there is a pleasure in doing good; and we shall reflect with comfort upon it, that we have done something that will turn to the honour of God and our own account.

This should make us lively in our duty; and fix the heart in hearing the word, and in prayer and praise. Those that take delight in music, how does it engage them! How do all the marks of a close application of mind appear in their countenance and carriage! And shall not we, by our attending on the Lord without distraction, make it to appear, that we attend upon him with delight, and are in our element when we are in his service? Let this be my rest for ever: here let me dwell all the days of my life.

This should keep us constant and unwearied in the work and service of God. What is really our delight, we are not soon weary of. If we delight in approaching to God, we shall seek him daily, and make it our daily work to honour him. If medita-

tion and prayer be sweet, let them be our daily exercise; and let this bind our souls with a bond to God, and the *sacrifice as with cords to the horns of the altar*. With this we should answer all temptations to apostasy: "Shall I quit so good a master, so good a service? Entreat me not to leave Christ, or to turn from following after him; for *it is good to be here*." *Here let us make tabernacles*, (Matt. xvii. 4.) *Whither else shall we go*, but to him that has the *words of eternal life*.

(2.) Let our whole conversation be cheerful, and melancholy be banished. Are the ways of religion pleasant? Let us be pleasant in them, both to ourselves, and to those about us. As for those who are yet in a state of sin and wrath, they have reason to be melancholy; let the sinners in Zion be afraid, be afflicted, joy is forbidden fruit to them; what have they to do with peace? *Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy as other people, for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, Hos. ix. 1.

But those who, through grace, are called out of darkness into a marvellous light, have cause to be cheerful, and should have hearts to be so. *Arise, shine, for thy Light is come*, Isa. lx. 1. Is the Sun of Righteousness risen upon us? Let us arise, look forth as the morning with the morning. That comfort which Christ directs to our souls, let us reflect back upon others. And as our light is come, so is our liberty. Art thou *loosed from the bands of thy neck*? *O captive daughter of Zion, awake, awake, put on thy strength, put on thy beautiful garment, and shake thyself from the dust, arise and sit down, O Jerusalem*, Isa. lii. 1, 2.

Though vain and carnal mirth is both a great sin, and a great snare, yet there is a holy cheerfulness and pleasantness of conversation, which will not only consist very well with serious godliness, but greatly promote it in ourselves, and greatly adorn it and recommend it to others. *A merry heart* (Solomon says) *does good like a medicine*, (Prov. xvii. 22.) and make fat the bones; while a broken spirit does hurt like a poison, and dries the bones. Christians should endeavour to keep up a cheerful temper, and not indulge themselves in that which is saddening and disquieting to the spirit; and they should show it in all holy conversation, that those they converse with may see, they did not renounce pleasure, when they embraced religion.

I am sure none have so much reason to rejoice as good people have, nor so much done for them to encourage their joy; and therefore, (to allude to that of Jonadab to Amnon,) *Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?* 2 Sam. xiii. 4. Are we in prosperity? Therefore let us be cheerful, in gratitude to the God of our mercies, who expects that we should *serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart, in the abundance of all things*, (Deut. xxviii. 47.) and justly takes it ill if we do not.

Tristis es, et felix? Sciat hoc Fortuna caveto,
Ingratum dicet te (Lupe) si scierit. *Mari.*

In the midst of prosperity are you sorrowful? Beware that Fortune hear it not; if she be informed of it (Lupe) she will call you ungrateful. Mari.

Are we in affliction? Yet let us be cheerful, that we may make it appear that our happiness is not laid up in the creature, nor our treasures on earth. If it is the privilege of Christians to rejoice in tribulation, let them not throw away their privilege, but glory in it, and make use of it. Let the joy of the Lord, which has infused itself into our hearts, diffuse itself into all our converse. *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy*, (Eccl. ix. 7.) *and drink thy wine*; nay, if thou shouldst be reduced to drink mere water, drink it *with a merry heart*, if thou hast good ground to hope that in Christ Jesus, God now accepts thy works: and this joy of the Lord will be thy strength.

(3.) Let us look with contempt upon the pleasures of sense, and with abhorrence upon the pleasures of sin. The more we have tasted of the delights of heaven, the more our mouths should be put out of taste with the delights of this earth. Let not those who have been feasted with the milk and honey of Canaan, hanker after the garlic and onions of Egypt.

Let us keep at a distance from all forbidden pleasures; there is a hook under those baits, a snake under the green grass; a rock under those smooth waters, on which multitudes have split. We must so dread the drunkard's pleasure, as not to *look upon the wine when it is red*, (Prov. xxiii. 31.) so dread the pleasures of the adulterer, as not to *look upon a woman to lust after her*; (Matt. v. 28.) for these pleasures of sin not only are but for a season, but at the last they bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. Either spiritual pleasures will deaden the force of the pleasures of sin, or the pleasures of sin will spoil the relish of spiritual pleasures.

Let us keep up a holy indifference even to the lawful delights of sense, and take heed not to love them more than God. The eye that has looked at the sun, is dazzled to every thing else. Have we beheld the beauty of the Lord? Let us see and own how little beauty there is in other things. If we be tempted to do any thing unbecoming us, by the allurements of pleasure, we may well say, "Offer these things to those that know no better; but we do, and will never leave fountains of living water for cisterns of puddle water."

(4.) Let not our hearts envy sinners. Envy arises from an opinion that the state of others is better than our own, which we grudge and are displeased at, and wish ourselves in their condition. Good people are often cautioned against this sin: *Be not thou envious against evil men, nor desire to be with them*; (Prov. xxiv. 1. Ps. xxxvii. 1.) for if there be all this pleasure in religion, and we have expe-

rienced it, surely we would not exchange our condition with any sinner, even in his best estate.

Envy not sinners their outward prosperity, their wealth and abundance, which put them into a capacity of having all the delights of sense raised to the highest pitch of pleasure; though they lie *upon beds of ivory*, (Amos vi. 4, 5, 6.) and *stretch themselves upon their couches*, and *eat the lambs out of the flocks*, and *the calves out of the midst of the stall*, though they *chant to the sound of the viol*, *drink wine in bowls*, and *anoint themselves with the chief ointments*; yet those have no reason to envy them, whose souls dwell at ease in God; who are fed with the bread of life, the true manna, angels' food, and drink of the water of life freely; that make melody with their hearts to the Lord, and are made to hear from him joy and gladness; and have received the anointing of the Spirit. If we have relished the delights of religion, we shall say as David, *Let us not eat of their dainties*, Ps. cxiv. 4.

Envy not sinners the liberty they take to sin; that they can allow themselves in the full enjoyment of those pleasures which we cannot think of without horror; but have not we then the enjoyment of those pleasures which are infinitely better, and which they are strangers to? We cannot have both, and of the two, are not ours, without dispute, preferable to theirs; and why then should we envy them? Their pleasures are enslaving, ours enlarging; theirs debasing to the soul, ours ennobling; theirs surfeiting, ours satisfying; theirs offensive to God, ours pleasing to him; theirs will end in pain and bitterness, ours will be perfected in endless joys; and what reason then have we to envy them?

(5.) Let not our spirits sink, or be dejected, under the afflictions of this present time. We disparage our comforts in God, if we lay too much to heart our crosses in the world: and therefore, hereby let us evidence, that, being satisfied of God's loving-kindness, we are satisfied *with it*. Let us look upon that as sufficient to balance all the unkindnesses of men. They that value themselves upon God's smiles, ought not to vex themselves at the world's frowns. The light of God's countenance can shine through the thickest clouds of the troubles of this present time: and, therefore, we should walk in the light of the Lord, even when, as to our outward condition, we sit in darkness.

We manifest that we have found true delight and satisfaction in the service of God, and communion with him, when the pleasure of them will make the bitterest cup of affliction that our Father puts into our hand, not only passable but pleasant; so that, like blessed Paul, when we are as sorrowful, yet we may be always rejoicing, and may take pleasure in infirmities and reproaches, because, though, for the present, they are not joyous but grievous, yet when afterwards they yield the peaceable fruit of righte-

ousness, they become not grievous, but truly joyous. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest.*

(6.) Let the pleasure we have found in religion, dispose us to be liberal and charitable to the poor and distressed. The pleasing sense we have of God's bounty to us, by which he has done so much to make us easy, should engage us bountifully to distribute to the necessities of saints, according to our ability; not only to keep them from perishing, but to make them easy, and that they may rejoice as well as we. Cheerfulness that enlarges the heart, should open the hand too. Paul observes it concerning the churches of Macedonia, who were ready to give for the relief of the poor saints at Jerusalem, that it was the *abundance of their joy*, their spiritual joy, their joy in God, that *abounded unto the riches of their liberality*, 2 Cor. viii. 2.

When the people of Israel are commanded to *rejoice in every good thing* which God had given them, (Deut. xxvi. 11, 12.) they are commanded also to give freely to the *Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat and be filled*. And when upon a particular occasion they are directed to *eat the fat, and drink the sweet*, (Neh. viii. 10.) at the same time they are directed to *send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared*: and then the joy of the Lord will be their strength. By our being charitable, we should show that we are cheerful; that we cheerfully taste God's goodness in what we have, and trust his goodness for what we may hereafter want.

(7.) Let us do what we can to bring others to partake of the same pleasures in religion which we have tasted, especially those who are under our charge. It adds very much to the pleasure of an enjoyment, to communicate of it to others, especially when the nature of it is such, that we have never the less, but the more rather, for others sharing in it. What good tidings we hear, that are of common concern, we desire that others may hear them, and be glad too. He that has but found a lost sheep, *calls his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him*; (Luke xv. 6.) but he that has found Christ, and found comfort in him, can say, not only, Come, rejoice with me, but, Come, and partake with me; for yet there is room enough for all, though ever so numerous, enough for each, though ever so necessitous and craving.

When Samson had found honey in the carcass of the lion, (Judg. xiv. 8.) he brought some of it to his parents, that they might partake with him: thus when we have found a day in God's courts better than a thousand, we should invite others into those courts, by telling them what God has done for our souls, and how willing he is to do the same for theirs, if they, in like manner, apply themselves to him. When Andrew, with a surprising pleasure, finds the Messiah, (John i. 41, 45.) he cannot rest

till he has brought his brother Peter to him; nor Philip till he has brought his friend Nathaniel. They that are feasted with the comforts of God's house, should not covet to eat their morsel alone, but be willing to communicate of their spiritual things.

(8.) Let us be willing to die, and leave this world. We have reason to be ashamed of ourselves, that we, who have not only laid up our treasures above, but fetch our pleasures thence, are as much in love with our present state, and as loth to think of quitting it, as if our riches, and pleasure, and all, were wrapt up in the things of sense and time. The delights of sense entangle us and hold us here; these are the things that make us loth to die, as one once said, viewing his fine house and gardens. And are these things sufficient to court our stay here, when God says, *Arise, and depart, for this is not your rest*? Mic. ii. 10.

Let us not be afraid to remove from a world of sense to a world of spirits, since we have found the pleasures of sense not worthy to be compared with *spiritual pleasures*. When in old age, which is one of the valleys of the shadow of death, we can no longer relish the delights of the body, but they become sapless and tasteless, (as they were to Barzillai,) yet we need not call those *evil days*, and *years in which we have no pleasure*, if we have walked and persevered in Wisdom's ways; for if so, we may then in old age look back with pleasure upon a life well spent on earth, (as Hezekiah did,) and look forward with pleasure, upon a life to be better spent in heaven.

And when we have received a sentence of death within ourselves, and see the day approaching, the pleasure we have in loving God, and believing in Christ, and in the expressions of holy joy and thankfulness, should make even a sick-bed and a death-bed easy; *The saints shall be joyful in glory, and shall sing aloud upon their beds*, (Ps. cxlix. 5.) those beds to which they are confined, and from which they are removing to their graves, their beds in the darkness. Our religion, if we be faithful to it, will furnish us with living comforts in dying moments, sufficient to balance the pains of death, and take off the terror of it, and to enable us to triumph over it; *O death! where is thy sting*? Let us then evidence our experience of the pleasures of religion, by living above the inordinate love of life, and fear of death.

(9.) *Lastly*, Let us long for the perfection of these spiritual pleasures in the kingdom of glory. When we come thither, and not till then, they will be perfected; while we are here, as we know and love but in part, so we rejoice but in part; even our spiritual joys here have their damps and allays; we mix tears and tremblings with them: but, in heaven, there is a *fulness of joy* without mixture, and *pleasures for evermore*, without period or diminution. The servants of Christ will there enter into the joy

of their Lord, and it shall be *everlasting joy*, Isa. xxxv. 10.

And what are the pleasures in the way of Wisdom, compared with those at the end of the way? If a complacency in the divine beauty and love be so pleasant while we are in the body, and are absent from the Lord, what will it be when we have put off the body, and go to be present with the Lord? If a day in God's courts, and a few minutes spent there in his praises, be so pleasant; what will an eternity within the veil be, among them that dwell in his house above, and are still praising him? If the earnest of our inheritance be so comfortable, what will the inheritance itself be?

Now whenever there is grace, it will be aiming at, and pressing towards, its own perfection; it is a *well of water springing up to eternal life*; (John iv. 14.) this therefore we should be *longing for*. Our love to God in this world is love in motion, in heaven

it will be love at rest: O when shall that sabbatism come, which remains for the people of God? Here we have the pleasure of looking towards God; *O when shall we come and appear before him?* Our Lord Jesus, when at his last passover, which he earnestly desired to eat with his disciples, he had tasted of the *fruit of the vine*, speaks as one that longed to drink it *new in the kingdom of his Father*, Matt. xxvi. 29. It is very pleasant to serve Christ here, but to *depart and be with Christ, is far better*. *Now are we the sons of God*, (1 John iii. 2.) and it is very pleasant to think of it; but *it doth not yet appear what we shall be*: something there is in reserve, which we are kept in expectation of. We are not yet at home, but should long to be there, and keep up holy desires of that glory to be revealed, that we may be quickened, as long as we are here, to *press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling*.