

A SERMON

PREACHED AT HABERDASHERS' HALL, JULY 13, 1712,

ON OCCASION OF THE

DEATH OF THE REV. RICHARD STRETTON, M. A.

WITH A CONCISE ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE.

2 CORINTHIANS viii. 16.

But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you.

A THANKSGIVING text may seem very improper for a funeral sermon; especially for one who was so useful in his generation; who lived justly respected, and dies justly lamented. I confess it would have been very seasonable upon this occasion to call you, for God by this and other the like providences calls us all, calls us aloud, (whether we will hear, or whether we will forbear,) to weeping and to mourning; not for those who are gone to the regions of bliss and joy above, weep not for them, but for ourselves and for our children, that are left behind in these lower regions of sin and woe. Even when our Saviour said, with an air of triumph, *Now I am no more in the world*, he said with an air of tenderness, *But these are in the world*; to teach us, though not to envy those who have got the victory, yet to pity ourselves, and one another, who are yet in the conflict. And such an instance of stupidity it is, that God is justly and highly displeased at it, if when righteous and merciful men perish, and are taken away from our world, we do not consider it, and lay it to heart; for though it is a good to come in the other world that they remove to, a promised good, it is an evil to come in this world that they remove from, a threatened evil, in the apprehension of which it becomes us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. The removal of good men may be looked upon as an ill omen; when they are commanded off who stood in the gap, we have reason to fear the breaking in of a deluge of judgments upon us; and God hereby gives fair warning to a careless

world, to prepare accordingly. We know what followed the calling of Lot out of Sodom, and of Noah into the ark.

But is it our duty in every thing to give thanks: whatever the will of God's providence is, this is the will of his precept in Christ Jesus concerning us; and it is such a duty as will well consist with all the instances of holy gracious mourning—even when we sorrow for sin, our own and others', yet we must rejoice in God, and have our heart disposed to his praises. That mourning is either not from a right principle, or exceeds due bounds, and is the sorrow of the world, that puts us out of tune for thanksgiving. When we are ever so much burthened with the sense of guilt, we ought to say, *But thanks be to God*, there is rest in Christ; when we mourn for our afflictions, we may say, *But thanks be to God*, we are out of hell; nay, and *thanks be to God* these afflictions are designed to further us in our way to heaven. The truth is, we never want matter for praise, if we did not want a heart; and our comfort in God would be more abundant, if we did abound more in thanksgiving to God. And, therefore, I hope you will not think this text at all unsuitable to this solemn occasion. Holy Job in his griefs blessed the name of the Lord, who had graciously given that which he had now taken away, Job i. 21. and who, even in taking away, he was sure neither did him any wrong, nor meant him any hurt. And our blessed Saviour, when he wept over the grave of Lazarus whom he loved, lifted up even his weeping eyes to heaven, and said, *Father, I thank thee*, John xi. 35, 41.

Upon such an occasion as this, the removal of good men and good ministers by death, such as while they lived were blessings to the world, and instru-

ments of good to us, we may find matter for praise and thanksgiving, upon the account both of their present happiness and their past usefulness.

1. We may look up, and give thanks to God for what they are. For those who sleep in Jesus, we have reason to sorrow not only not as those who have no hope, but as those who have much comfort and satisfaction, to be a balance and allay to the sorrow. We have lost a useful good man, you here have lost a faithful minister, I and many others have lost a faithful friend; but, thanks be to God, our loss is his gain, for so death is to them to whom to live is Christ, it is great gain, quick gain, everlasting gain; it is his blessedness, for so death is to them who die in the Lord. He rests from his labours, from the toil both of services and sufferings; with the body all its burthens are put off, and the soul has obtained its discharge from that work-house, from that prison-house, is set at liberty, is at peace, is at rest, and its business is no longer, as it was here, its labour. The best employments of the best souls, while they are here in the body, are their labours, like Adam's tilling the ground, after he had sinned, in the sweat of his face; but the employments of holy souls in their separate state, are, like Adam's dressing the garden in his innocent estate, which he did without labour, and with complete and constant pleasure. But that is not all; thanks be to God, he not only rests from his labours, but his works follow him; now he is freed from the toil of them, he receives the reward of them. They who work in the Lord's vineyard, and there bear the burthen and heat of the day, when the evening comes, not only retire to their repose, but receive their penny. Poor Job puts both together when he speaks of the servant's earnest desire, both of the shadow and of the reward of his work, Job vii. 2.

Look up therefore, and see with an eye of faith that joy of our Lord, that fulness of joy into which this good and faithful servant is now entered, that glory, that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, with which he is now crowned; and then you will see reason to rejoice with him, and to glory with him, and to say, *Thanks be to God*, who has given him the victory. If we loved him we would rejoice, and bless God for the happy exchange he has made, because he is gone to the Father; and as Christ said, *My Father is greater than I*, that is, my state with my Father will far excel my present state in glory, so we may say of him and others who have fought the good fight, and finished their course, it is better with them where they are than where they were.

It is more a matter of thanksgiving when the lives of good men, though still great blessings to others, yet are become, through the decays and infirmities of age, burthens to themselves, and their souls begin to grow weary of them; which was the case here.

Though old age carries with it both dignity and opportunity, though the hoary head be a crown of glory, yet, even when it is found in the way of righteousness, the days are called *evil days*, and the years such as a man has little *pleasure in*. When the *light is darkened*, the *clouds return after the rain*, the *keepers of the house tremble*, and the *strong men bow themselves*; then to *put off the earthly house of this tabernacle*, when it is thus gone out of repair, and remove to the *building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, is a blessed exchange: thanks be to God, that one we loved so well has made that exchange. You lately heard him groaning being burthened, but now he is triumphing in his release, now he is singing Hallelujahs to him who sits on the throne. You lately saw him even dragging the chain of life, compassed about with infirmities, and full of pains; but now he is eased, now he is comforted, now he is full of delights, and is made to drink of the river of divine pleasures. You lately saw him weak, and scarce able to set one foot before another, but now he is among those who mount up with wings like eagles, who run and are not weary, who walk and are not faint.

This is the more to be rejoiced in, because it is a satisfaction to the longings of a gracious soul; it is what it has often wished for, what it has been long waiting for; and the longer it has continued in the body, the more welcome will the release, the exchange, be. It has often looked through the lattice, and cried, *Why are his chariot wheels so long a coming?* How then does it triumph now, as that good man did, "He is come, he is come!" Canaan was a pleasant land indeed to those who had been forty years wandering in a wilderness. Though hope deferred, hope of heaven deferred, maketh the heart sick, yet when at length the desire comes, it is so much the more a tree of life. Now, thanks be to God, for the happy removal of our Christian friends from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy, from the remainders of sin to the perfection of holiness, from the toilsome and hazardous services of Christ's camp on earth, to the pleasant and glorious services of his court in heaven. And, especially, thanks be to God for the good hope we any of us have through grace that we shall be with them shortly, shall be for ever with them. And if we have this hope in us, let us purify ourselves as they are pure.

2. We may look back, and give thanks to God for what they were. And that is the matter of thanksgiving which the text leads us to, and which therefore I must enlarge upon.

When those who have been in their day and place useful to us, to others, to many, and serviceable to the glory of God, are removed, and we see the end of their conversation, one of the great duties required of us is to give thanks to God that ever we had such friends, that by his grace they were made blessings

to us, and that they were continued to us so long. This is a duty we are apt to forget, when God in his providence has made breaches upon our comforts, and to think that our sorrow for the death of our dear relations will be our excuse for the omission; whereas, if at such a time we would intermix thanksgivings for former mercies with our complaints of present losses, it would redound very much both to God's glory and to our own comfort.

We have now parted with one who faithfully served his generation according to the will of God, that in the sphere wherein divine providence had placed him was long a burning and shining light; of whom it might be said, as of Jehoiada, (who for this reason had honour done him at his death,) *that he had done good in Israel*, 2 Chron. xxiv. 16. Now, thanks be to God for him, and for all that good which God wrought in and by him.

But there is something more particular which I had an eye to in the choice of the text on this occasion: all who knew good Mr. Stretton, know this of him, that he was a very zealous active man to promote works of charity; that he was very liberal himself, and industrious to excite and engage the liberality of others; he was one who devised liberal things, and laid out himself in them, who had cases of compassion much at heart, relating both to the souls and bodies of men, and with pleasure took pains to get suitable relief for them. This was the grace, this the service, in which he was eminent, in which he excelled, and which made him a very great blessing to many. Now this is that for which Titus is here praised, that he was an active man among the Corinthians to press and promote a charitable collection and contribution, that now was going round among the churches of the Gentiles, for the relief of the poor saints in Judea; who were at this time great sufferers, both by the iniquity and in the calamity of their country: or rather, God is here praised, who made Titus instrumental in that good work among the Corinthians; as others were in other places.

I. It is here mentioned to the praise of Titus, that he had in his heart an earnest care for the Corinthians, and for their well-doing.

II. It is mentioned to the praise of God, that he put into his heart an earnest care for them; and so made him a blessing to them.

Now these two will very much consist together, the praising of Titus, and the praising of God for Titus. There is a debt of honour owing to those whom God makes use of as the instruments of his providence or grace in kindness to us or others; *Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same*. St. Paul was far from giving flattering titles to any, and yet in this chapter he calls the brethren who were employed in this service, *The messengers*, the apostles, *of the churches, and the glory of Christ*. And often in

his epistles he takes occasion to give a good character, and a good report, of those who had done well. If the good report Demetrius has, be founded in truth, St. John also is ready to bear record, and to attest it. But this must not intrench upon the honour due to God only; the praise must pass through the instruments to God, and in him all must centre, as the apostle here takes care it should; *Thanks be to God, which put this earnest care into the heart of Titus for you*.

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Observe, what service he did, was from a principle within, from something in his heart; there is the treasure, there is the fountain, whence the words and actions are fetched, or rather, flow; if that be well fixed, and well furnished, all is well done. What is said of the servants of men, is true of all the servants of Christ, when they do the will of God acceptably, when they do it from the heart, for then with good will they do service. It was St. Paul's comfort that he served God *with his spirit in the gospel of his Son*. Nor is any work of piety or charity properly a good work, unless it be a heart work; if *I give all my goods to feed the poor*, and have not *love seated in my heart*, it profits nothing.

It was a principle of care that actuated him in this service. The word *Σπουδή* signifies a close application and intention of mind to the business he was employed in, a concern to have it done well, fear lest there should be any mistake or miscarriage in it, diligence, industry, and expedition, in the prosecution of it. What Titus found to do for the glory of God, and the good of the souls of men, he did it with all his might, and made a business of it. We translate it an *earnest care*, his heart was upon, and he left no stone unturned to bring it to a good issue.

It was the same earnest care; some copies read it *Τοσαύτην*—*such an earnest care*, so great, so active, so constant; such a care as you were witnesses of the fruit of. But most copies read *Τὴν αὐτὴν σπουδὴν*—*the same earnest care*; he had the same care for them that he had for other churches to whom he was nearer related, and with whom he was better acquainted; or he had the same care that St. Paul himself had, who therefore calls him his partner, v. 23.

Now in the care, the earnest care, that Titus had for the churches, we are to consider him both in general, as a minister of the gospel, and in particular, as an agent in the work of charity.

1. Let us consider him as an evangelist, for so Timothy, and he, and many others were. He was an assistant to the apostles, both in planting churches, and in watering those that were planted, in forming them, and setting in order the things that were wanting in them; not fixed to one place, for then we should not find him employed in the same work in so many places as we do; but like Paul, like Christ

himself, he went about doing good, and he gave himself wholly to it; he did it with an earnest care both to do much good, and to do it well, and to do it effectually, and to good purpose. Paul commends Timothy, another evangelist, for this, that he did *naturally care for the state of souls*; ^a for the state of the churches; and Epaphroditus, another evangelist, for this, that he *longed after them all*, ^b and had a *great zeal for them*.^c They were men who had their heart in their work, and laid the success of it near their hearts.

That which Titus is here commended for, is the *earnest care* he had for those of the church of Corinth, and for their spiritual welfare. And concerning this we may observe,

(1.) Though Titus was not under any particular obligation to the Corinthians, as their settled pastor, yet he had an earnest care for them, and they were very much influenced by his care, and were very observant of what he said to them. He did not ask, What are they to me? nor was he asked, what he had to do to concern himself about them. For our Saviour has taught us in the parable of the good Samaritan, that we must look upon him as our neighbour, whom we have opportunity of showing kindness to, or receiving kindness from, without distinction of nations in the world, or congregations in the church, further than prudential considerations, and the rules of good order, may direct. God is no respecter of persons in his bounty, nor must we be so in ours. Titus has an earnest care in his heart to make himself a blessing wherever he comes, and such should we have; we must study to serve some good purpose in every place where providence casts our lot; which is the meaning of Solomon's similitude, *If the tree fall towards the south, or towards the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall be*, and be of some use or other. The more extensive our usefulness is, the more it resembles his goodness whose tender mercies are over all his works. Wherever we see a human face, we may conclude there is a human soul, and if we can do any thing, we must have compassion upon it, and help it, remembering who it was that said, *Am I my brother's keeper?* Did we duly consider the worth of precious souls, we would have an earnest care for them. We should look upon those about us, though they be all of them strangers to us, as our fellow-creatures, and partakers of the same nature with us, as our fellow-christians, and partakers of the same grace with us; they are or may be so, and then remember that our rule is, *As we have opportunity, to do good to all men, but especially to them that are of the household of faith*.

(2.) Though Titus had many to take care of, many churches that he visited and interested himself in

the affairs of, yet his care for each of them was an earnest care. The stream of his pious concern run broad, and yet it run deep; he loved many, and yet he loved much; and herein he walked as he had blessed Paul for an example, who took upon him daily the care of all the churches, and yet had such a tender affection for particular believers, that if any one were weak, it weakened him, if any one were offended, it made him burn. The extensiveness of his care abated nothing of the earnestness of it. When Paul said, that he would gladly spend and be spent for the Corinthians, he immediately adds concerning Titus, that he *walked in the same spirit, walked in the same steps*.

Some are made remiss and careless by the greatness of their undertaking, they grasp at too much, and then think that will excuse them in their neglects; but the more Titus had to do, the more closely and vigorously he applied himself to it; that though he could not be in two places at once, yet he might do two days' work in one by a double diligence. What a great deal of good work may a good man do in his place, if he go on in it with an earnest care, like that of Titus here; a care to time things aright, to improve opportunities, to do the work of God with as little noise as may be, and to avoid every thing that is foreign to our business, or diverting from it. We should have an earnest care to husband well the thoughts of our heart, and the minutes of our time, that neither of them be idled away, and suffered to run waste, and then what a great deal of good might we bring about. Though a wise man would not thrust himself into a hurry of business, nor have more irons in the fire than he can look after, yet a good man would covet a fulness of business, according as his capacity is, that whenever his Master comes he may be found doing.

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for our sloth, but rather a spur to our diligence. Others are busy, let not us be idle; though we have but two talents, though we have but one to trade with, if we be diligent and faithful, we shall have as sure a reward as those who are intrusted with five.

You here have lost a minister who had a care, an earnest care, for souls, and for their welfare in both worlds.

[1.] His care began at the right end, for it was in the first place about his own soul, and the prosperity and salvation of that. This charity must begin at home. Paul's charge to Timothy is, *Take heed to thyself* first, that thou mayst *save thyself*, 1 Tim. iv. 16. and those are not likely to do any thing to purpose for the souls of others, who are regardless of their own, to show others the way to heaven, who walk not in it themselves. In vain were we made keepers of the vineyards, if our own vineyards we have not kept. You are witnesses for him who is gone, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblamably he walked among you; that his conversation in the world was in simplicity and godly sincerity, with plainness and integrity, and, as became an Israelite indeed, without guile; not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, as one whose earnest care it was, and the top of his ambition, to approve himself to God, and to be accepted of him. Of him his praise was, and not of men.

His concern for his own spiritual and eternal welfare expressed itself very much when he saw the day approaching, in his earnest desire to make sure work for another world: after serious inquiries into the state of his own soul, he said with a pleasing earnestness, to one who found him musing, and it seemed to be the result of many thoughts, "Well, if we stand in a covenant relation to God as ours, all is safe and well." He often expressed the admiring sense he had of the free grace of God in Christ to his soul; ascribed all the glory of his comforts and hopes to that grace, and in a dependance upon that, enjoyed a holy security and serenity of mind. Though he still maintained a godly jealousy of himself, and a humble fear lest he should seem to come short, yet he finished joyfully with this word, and it was one of the last words he was heard to say, *I know, the Lord is my rock, and my God*. The assurance of this was it that enabled him to bid death welcome, and even in that darksome valley to fear no evil. Those cannot sink who have the Lord for their rock, to stay themselves upon; those cannot but be happy, eternally happy, who have him for their God. And can you say, my brethren, can you say upon good grounds, that the Lord is your rock, and your God? Have you covenanted with him, and devoted yourselves to him, and do you make it your constant care and business to please

him? Your ministers have souls to save as well as you, and upon the same terms; and they call you to build upon no other foundation, but what they build upon themselves; to venture in no other vessel, but what they themselves venture in, into another world. O that the comfort which those have found in their dying moments, who have by faith made the Lord their rock, their God, might engage you all this day to avouch him for yours, and now to commit your spirits into his hand, to be sanctified and ruled by the word and Spirit of his grace. and then you may cheerfully at death commit your spirits into his hand to be received into everlasting habitations, may do it with a triumphant confidence, knowing whom you have believed, even one who is able to keep what you have committed to him against that day; if the Lord be your rock, and your God, he will be so to death, through death, and beyond death, and you may glory in him.

[2.] He had an earnest care for that particular congregation which was under his charge; you here can witness for him that he had a concern for your souls, and greatly longed after you all, even *travailed in birth again to see Christ formed in you*. He had indeed *curam animarum*—the cure of souls, and did not make his charge a sinecure. You know how constant he was with you, how rarely he was absent from you, scarce one Lord's day in a year; how he was in his element when he was in your service, and how solicitous to do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. You know how he laboured among you, even when he laboured under the burthens of old age, and how lively he was in praying and preaching, even when in other things his natural force was so much abated. He had sometimes observed to his friends, that his work and his strength kept pace together; when he went into the pulpit he seemed to have fresh supplies of strength and vigour, and to forget his weakness, but when he had done his work he became as at other times; which, as it was an evidence that his heart was in his work, so it was an instance of the fulfilling of the promises, *As the day, so shall the strength be*; and *They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; shall still bring forth fruit in old age, even when the youths faint and are weary, to show that the Lord is upright*. What other proofs he gave of his earnest care for your souls, in visiting you, conversing with you, and watching over you, you would do well to recollect, that now you have lost him, you may still be gainers by his labours (if love among you).

[3.] He had an earnest care for other congregations, and for the progress and success of the work of God in them. He had an earnest care for many congregations in this city, for their supply, their order, and the preservation of peace and love in them. One instance that I must not omit is, the earnest care he took about the morning-lecture, every day.

kept up a fortnight at a place, and then removing to another: he has been long (as I have heard) the principal person who has concerned himself about it, and been active in it, to put it into a method, and to direct the removals of it; wherein he has done good service to the interests of religion in your city; for I hope wherever it comes it brings a blessing along with it, and many souls have had cause to bless God for it. And I trust, now he is gone, God will put the same earnest care into the heart of some or other for the keeping up of that good work, that it may not suffer damage by his removal. Nor did his care confine itself to this city, and the congregations here, but he had an earnest care for many places in the country, at a great distance, to see them well provided for, and ministers conveniently settled. And though, being indisposed to travel, he seldom went in person into the country, yet by letter and applications here in this centre, he showed what a conflict he had, as Paul speaks, for many who never saw his face in the flesh, that their hearts might be comforted, and knit together in love. He was always ready to advise young ministers, and assist them with his interest, many of whom, therefore, with good reason called him Father, and will bless God who put such a care into his heart for them. Thus he did good at a distance, thus he did lasting good, the fruit whereof remains; and such good, large souls will covet to do. Those who have opportunity of helping young people into the world, of helping them into business, and do it, do good service not only to their own, but to the next generation; much more do they so, who forward the best employment, wherein the honour of Christ, and the welfare of the souls of men, is so nearly interested, and so help to preserve the best entail.

Let us now see what improvement we may make of this part of Titus's care as a minister, thus in some measure copied out.

1. It sets a good example before ministers, whose hearts should in like manner be full of earnest care about the work they have to do, and the great trust committed to them; and happy were it for the church, if they were all thus. The ministry requires an earnest care, so great and important is the undertaking, and so many the difficulties that are to be grappled with, and got over: nothing will be brought to pass in it by a loose, careless, desultory mind, that has a habit of trifling.

Let those who enter upon the work of the ministry seriously examine themselves, whether they can and will take care, and take pains, for if not, they will have reason to fear lest the work suffer by falling into their hands. The Hebrew phrase for being consecrated is, having *the hand filled*: those who are employed to minister in holy things, Exod. xxviii. 41. have their hands full of work, and therefore need to have their heads and hearts full of care. Let

those who are engaged in this work, make a business of it, or they make nothing of it. Mr. Perkins took it for his motto, *Minister verbi es, hoc age—Remember this, thou art a minister of the word*. We must take heed to the ministry we have received, that we fulfil it; must be in care to pray well, and preach well, and live well, in care to find out profitable matter, and acceptable words, words upon the wheels; in care to find out the truth, to understand it ourselves, to deliver it aright, and accommodate it to the capacities of those we speak to, must be in care to give good instructions, to set good examples, and at all times speak and act with circumspection. There is need of an earnest care in watching over ourselves, and over the flock, that we may approve ourselves to our Master, may guard against the tempter, that none of the souls committed to our charge may perish, or if they do, that their blood may not be required at our hand. The charge we have received, the necessities and worth of souls, the shortness and uncertainty of our opportunities of service, the many eyes that are upon us, especially his who is all eye, and above all, the account we must shortly give to the chief Shepherd, forbid us to trifle, and oblige us to go on in our work with an earnest care.

2. It lays an engagement upon people, who have been or are under the care, the earnest care, of faithful ministers. You here have long been well taken care of, and well provided for, the dresser of your vineyard has, through grace, done his part, and now he is removed, suffer the word of exhortation.

(1.) Examine yourselves how you have improved under his care, his earnest care, for you, and whether your profiting has appeared in any proportion to the opportunities you have enjoyed; whether your growth in knowledge and grace has been answerable to the care that has been taken of you, and the pains that has been taken with you. What are you the better for all the good sermons you have heard here, all the sacraments you have received, and all the helps you have had for your souls, in season and out of season? You have had among you an aged witness for Christ, and his truths and ways; to you *days have spoken*, and the *multitude of years* has been *teaching you wisdom*, wherein you have had advantages above most of your neighbours; and it may justly be expected, that you should be above others a solid, serious, judicious people: and is it so? Many times *three years* God has come among you *seeking fruit*, and what has he found? Seeking fruit in your closets and families, in your callings and converse, the fruits of righteousness, and have you not frustrated his expectations? With some, perhaps, when he *looked for grapes, behold wild grapes*. Consider now with yourselves, whether you were the joy of your minister that is gone, or his grief. Whether by your fruitfulness you recompensed his care of you, or by your loose and careless walking you ill

requited him for it. Are any of you yet barren in this vineyard, yet cumbering the ground? O that you would be alarmed by the death of your minister! You are all strangers to me, but you are known to God. And O that his word, which is quick and powerful, might take hold of your consciences! While your minister was with you he interceded for you, as well as laboured with you, *Lord, let the barren fig-tree alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it:* and is it yet barren? Know then, that the death of your minister is a call to you to bring forth fruit at length, and then all shall be well; but if his life and labours having been in vain, his death be so too, you will have the more to answer for when the day comes that you will be cut down. He is now gone to give up his account; let each of you think, what account can he give of me? If he give up his account with grief, that will be, as the apostle speaks, *unprofitable for you*. But I hope there are those, there are many among you, in whom he saw the fruit of his labour, and his earnest care, whom he thanked God for, as they for him, and who will be his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord. And what a joyful meeting will there be between him and them in that day.

(2.) If ministers have and should have such an earnest care for your souls, should not you much more have an earnest, a more earnest, care for your own souls? You are nearest to yourselves, and this is one talent you are each of you intrusted with; you have a precious soul to take care of: and what care do you take of it? What provision do you make for it? for its present cure and comfort, and for its future bliss? What care do you take to secure it from the enemies and evils to which it is exposed, and to supply its necessities? This is the charge given to every one of you, *Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently*.—Keep thy heart above all keepings. Be in care to get necessary food and clothing for your souls, rest and refuge for them, and a portion for them that will last as long as they must last. Commit the keeping of them to Jesus Christ, as those who are in care to have that done for them which none but he can do. The care your ministers have taken, and do take, for your souls, though they are accepted of God in it, if they be sincere, yet it will be no advantage to you, if you take not care for your own souls, nay, it will come into the account against you, as an aggravation of your carelessness.

(3.) If ministers must have this earnest care for the souls of those under their charge, surely parents and masters of families ought to have some care, to have an earnest care, for the spiritual welfare of those under their charge, their children, their servants, to restrain them from that which would be to the prejudice and ruin of their souls, and to provide that for them which is necessary to their well-being. You are in care for their bodies, to provide what is

fit for them, you would think yourselves worse than infidels if you did not; and are not their souls more precious, and is not provision for them more necessary? Nature has put into your hearts an earnest care for their temporal lives, O that grace might in like manner principle you with a concern for their spiritual lives! Be in care to teach them the knowledge of God, that they may not perish through ignorance, in care by the most proper methods to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts; in care to make good your undertaking for them when you presented them to baptism, which was to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; in care that they may not perish through any default of yours. There are many who are forward to condemn ministers for their neglects, who therein do but condemn themselves; who are non-residents in their own houses, or are blind and dumb there in the things of God, and are in no care that they and their houses should serve the Lord. But you, I hope, are of those who look well to the ways of their household, as those who must give an account of that stewardship.

2. We now come to consider Titus as an active instrument at this time in a work of charity that was on foot: and though ordinarily it was not fit that they who gave themselves to the word and prayer should serve tables, and therefore the collection and distribution of the church's alms was committed to the deacons, who, to speak in the language of the Old Testament, had care of *the outward business of the house of God*; yet in an extraordinary case the apostles themselves were employed in service of that kind. We read of relief sent to the brethren who were in Judea, sent to the elders or ministers of the respective congregations, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, Acts xi. 29, 30. and of a contribution made by them of Macedonia and Achaia, for the poor saints at Jerusalem, Rom. xv. 26. It was in the promoting and carrying on of this good work that Titus discovered this earnest care for the Corinthians.

(1.) It is easy to apprehend, that herein he showed an earnest care for the poor saints at Jerusalem, for whose use this collection was made, and a great concern for them, that they should be speedily and plentifully relieved in their present distress; and they would have reason to say, *Thanks be to God, that put into the heart of Titus this care for us*, and our families, for otherwise we might have perished. Titus heard what straits they were reduced to, and as one who put his soul into their souls' stead, laid out himself to get supply for them. Though Titus was a Greek, and was never circumcised, as Timothy was, and upon that account the saints at Jerusalem (many of whom retained too great an affection for the ceremonial law) were perhaps cool towards him, yet he was active to do them service, as Paul also

was, though he was the apostle of the Gentiles, and saw some reason to doubt whether the service he had for Jerusalem would be accepted of the saints there; for as our love, so our liberality, must not be confined to those who are just of our own sentiment and way, but in this instance, as well as others, we must be governed by a catholic charity, and as we have opportunity, must do good to all men, but must in a particular manner distribute to the necessities of saints. We may suppose, that this relief being sent to the elders, was intended chiefly for their support, because the people were poor, and persecuted, and in many places but few, and could not maintain them; so that it seems to have been not only an act of charity to the poor, but an act of piety towards God, being intended for the support of the gospel, and the recompence of those who had suffered loss for Christ's sake; for they were the believing Hebrews who had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods, Heb. x. 34. This was the good work that Titus had this earnest care to help forward.

And it was good work of this kind that our deceased friend and father did abound in, did abide in to the last. He was himself ready to every good work, and willing to communicate to his power, yea, and beyond his power; what he did himself in charity he concealed, as much as possible, from those about him, and was so far from boasting of it, that, according to our Saviour's rule, his left hand knew not what his right hand did: and he was not only liberal, but he devised liberal things, and had projects for doing good; his head was still working that way, as one who looked not on his own things only, or chiefly, but on the things of others; of others' souls, of others' bodies. I have been told that it was very much by his influence and management, that the fund which is kept up by many of the well-disposed congregations in this city, for the assistance and encouragement of ministers in the country, whose congregations are poor, was first set on foot: and there are many in all parts of the kingdom whose loins, nay, whose souls, bless him, and the many others, both ministers and people, who promote and supply it, and bless God for him and them. If a cup of cold water given to prophets, to disciples, in the name of disciples and prophets, shall in no wise lose its reward, what a full reward shall be given from the Lord our God to those by whose generous liberality families of prophets are helped with food for the body, and congregations of disciples with food for the soul. And I have had opportunity of observing (and I think it was praise-worthy, and very exemplary) his diligent and constant attendance, not only upon the meetings for the prudent and regular distribution of that charity, but upon the week-day lecture, where he could have oppor-

tunity of meeting with ministers, to whom, or by whom, he might be serviceable; which showed how much his heart was upon it to do good. He was very active, as I am informed, in furnishing poor ministers, and candidates for the ministry, with useful books: a great deal of money, and time, and pains, he bestowed this way; and herein his earnest care reached as far as the north of Scotland, large sums being procured by him for the erecting of libraries there: and an excellent method it was, both for the diffusing of knowledge to distant places, and the preserving of it to future ages. In his labours for carrying on that and other pious designs, he was indefatigable to the last, and his diligence kept pace with his earnest care. He had had an acquaintance with divers parts of the kingdom; was born in Leicestershire; the first fruits of his ministry were at Petworth in Sussex; from that place he was thrown out (from a curacy there) at the Restoration. But upon that, Providence cast his lot in Yorkshire, where he continued about seventeen years, and then removed to this city. And what a blessing he was to that county, by his extensive beneficence, and care for them, after his removal hither, I am told, there are many who will witness, who never saw his face.

(2.) It is as true, though not so easily apprehended, that Titus showed as earnest a care for the Corinthians, whom he persuaded to do good, as for the saints at Jerusalem, whom he desired that this good might be done to. He appeared in this matter no less solicitous for those whom he applied himself to, than for those whose cause he pleaded. The churches of Macedonia had been very forward in bringing in their quota to this contribution, even their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality; and this is called the *grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia*. The good work they did for God, was the effect of a good work he wrought in them, and that was an evidence of his good will towards them, and therefore is called *his grace bestowed on them*; for it is certain, instead of making God our debtor by any service we do to him, the more we do for him the more we are indebted to him for putting us into a capacity, and giving us an opportunity, to honour him, and especially for inclining our hearts to do it, and accepting of us in the doing of it.

Now Titus had an earnest care for the Corinthians, that they who came not behind in any gift, might not come behind in this gift;^d he was in care that they should not be slow in their contributions, because Paul had boasted of them, that *Achaia was ready a year ago*;^e and in care that they should not be illiberal in them, but that what was gathered should be considerable: he was in care that they should give like themselves.

The Corinthians were generally a rich people, and lived great; whence it became a proverb, *Non cuius homini contingit adire Corinthum*—*Every man cannot pretend to live at Corinth*. Now Titus was jealous of them, lest they should pinch their charity to feed their luxury, and therefore laid out himself among them, to persuade them to give handsomely upon this occasion, that it might not be said they had much, but they spent it upon themselves; they were rich in wealth, but poor in good works. He was in care they should give like other churches, and so preserve their reputation, and keep up the figure they made among the churches. The particular kindness he had for this church of Corinth, did not put him upon contriving how he might excuse them from this good work, or make it easy to them, that it might be the more kind to him; but on the contrary, because he loved them, he was very earnest with them to do more than otherwise they would have done.

And thus this good man whom we have parted with, besides the good works he did at his own expense, laid out himself to provoke others to love and to good works, to persuade them to it, and to bring about great designs of good by the assistance of many, which could not be compassed by one. He had an acquaintance with many considerable families, both in city and country, and an interest in them; which he improved not for himself, but for the public good. All who knew him valued him for his tried integrity, and that great plainness and sincerity which was remarkable in him; whatever he did, like Gaius, he did it faithfully, both to the brethren and to strangers; and, therefore, what was put into his hands for the carrying on of any good work, was deposited with an entire satisfaction. He used to say, that he kept up his acquaintance with persons of estate and figure as long as he could improve it for the doing of good, and when it would no longer be made to serve that purpose, he let it drop; "for," said he, "I'll never adore a gilded post."

Now my text leads me to observe, that herein appeared his earnest care for those whose assistance he procured in works of charity; as much for their *doing well*, as for the *well doing* of those whom he procured assistance for. All agree that those he begged for have lost a friend, but I must tell you, that those he begged of have a great loss of him too; they have lost one who, even in that, was a true friend, and one who had an earnest care for them. I doubt it will be hard to convince people of this. I fear there are many to whom their friends and ministers are scarce welcome, when they come to recommend objects of charity to them, and press them to give liberally where the case is urgent; they are glad to see them, but not when they come on that errand. If they come to visit them when they are sick, to advise them

when they are in distress, or to be any ways helpful to them, they take it as an instance of their earnest care for them; but if they come to them as Titus did to the Corinthians, to beg money of them for the poor saints, they are so far from looking upon it as an instance of their care for them, that they receive them with a stiffness and shyness, as if they came to impose upon them, and to pick their pockets; and if they do give, it is not with that cheerfulness that God delights in.

I would endeavour therefore, for the amending of this matter, to make it out that those are to be accounted your friends, who, with prudence and discretion, propose to you proper objects of charity, and press you to give liberally to them, or for the encouragement of any work of piety; you are to take it kindly, and to reckon it an instance of their earnest care for you. Consider, it is not for themselves that they are thus solicitous, nor in hopes to make any advantage of it to themselves or their own families; nay, on the contrary, it may be a loss and damage to themselves; for with some, at least, the more they implore their interest for others, the less they have to implore upon their own account. They do not herein seek their own things, but as the apostle here did, they studiously avoid that which might give occasion to any to blame them, in this abundance which is administered by them: they hope indeed to obtain an interest in God's blessing, and the saints' prayers, in both which they desire you may come in for a share. It is no pleasure to them to be troublesome to you, and those for whose supply they do solicit you, many times they are no more obliged to than you are, nor more concerned for than you ought to be, so that you have no reason to take unkindly the application they make to you. Nay, it is really for you, that they have this earnest care. Do they propose to you a pressing opportunity to do good? Do they follow it with a pressing importunity? You ought to take it as a kindness to yourselves, and to thank God that he has put that earnest care in their hearts for you. For,

[1.] They would have you to do that which is your duty, a plain, necessary, and great duty, which God requires of all those whom he has intrusted with this world's goods. To love mercy is the good you are as much obliged to as to do justly. To relieve and succour the widows and fatherless in their affliction, is an essential branch of pure religion and undefiled. It is a necessary proof of the love both of God, and of your neighbour, dwelling in you. You are God's tenants, and this is the rent you have to pay, a quit-rent, not a rack-rent, and you are to account it a kindness to have your rent called for, for you will get nothing by going behind-hand. You are stewards of the manifold grace of God, and you must lay out your Lord's goods among your Lord's servants, and as he directs, and whoever assists you

n doing so, is your friend, and has a care for you. It is your duty to honour the Lord with your substance, and thus you are put into the way of doing it.

Ministers must charge them that are rich in this world, who have more than just a necessary subsistence for themselves and their families, with what they have to spare to do good, and to communicate. You ought to give alms of such things as you have, and to be ready to every good work. Put us not to prove that it is your duty to give just so much, and to such a person, when it is plain it is your duty as you have opportunity to do good to all men, and to give God his dues out of what he has given you; of which under the law he appointed the priests and the poor to be his receivers. Now those who devise liberal things for you, are in care for you, that you may not omit your duty, or be found in the neglect of it; because omissions are sins, and must come into judgment, and particularly the omission of this duty; for you know very well, those who in the great day are bid to depart with a curse, have this charged upon them, *I was hungry, and you gave me no meat, I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink.* And are not they kind to you, who do all they can to prevent your falling under that charge, and perishing under that doom? Say not, if they did not trouble you with their representations, you should not know it, and that would serve for an excuse; for if you do not know who are objects of charity, because you would not, but discountenanced those that recommended them to you, it is all one as if you did know it, and would not relieve them; *If thou sayest, Behold, we know it not, doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it, and he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it?*

The duty of giving to works of piety and charity, is what we are naturally backward to; we would willingly keep what we have, and our corrupt hearts can easily find out excuses to shift it off; and therefore we have the more need to be called to it, and to have even pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance, and provoked by the zeal of others, and their forwardness. Those who have themselves an earnest care to do their duty, will reckon those their best friends who have an earnest care to quicken them to it, and to help them to overlook those winds and clouds by which they are in danger of being driven off from sowing and reaping. It is a care for your precious souls, that they may not lie under guilt and wrath; a care like that of Paul's, *lest by some means the tempter have tempted you*, and a spirit of worldliness prevail over you, and so the labour of your ministers among you should be in vain. We have reason to be as thankful to God for their advice who excite us to duty, as David was for Abigail's, when she was instrumental to prevent his sin.

[2.] They would have you do that which will be your honour, and which will put a reputation upon

you, and therefore it must be looked upon as an instance of their earnest care for your preferment. In acts of bounty and beneficence you resemble God, who *is good and doeth good*, and therefore does good, because he is good. None come nearer being perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, than those who are merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. Hereby you become blessings to your generation, and ornaments to the profession you make of religion; you give occasion to your ministers and friends to boast of you, as Paul did of these Corinthians, and to give thanks (2 Cor. ix. 2, 11.) to God for you: this is a virtue that is as much a praise as any other. It seems to have been a common saying of our Saviour's, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*; it is more honourable, and more comfortable; and therefore you are to reckon those your friends who would have you put in for a share in that blessedness.

You think you do yourselves honour with your abundance, when you lay it up in rich clothes, furniture, and equipage, or in splendid entertainments; with these you think you gain and keep up a reputation; but you would do yourselves much more honour with your abundance, if you spared something from those things, and laid it out in works of piety and charity, if you thus honoured God with it, and did good to others. I appeal to yourselves, which is the more honourable and desirable character, to have it said concerning you, "Such a one is a fashionable man, and lives great;" or, "Such a one is a charitable man, and does good." You reckon those have a real care of you who help to support and advance your credit in the way of trade and business, though it may put you to some expense; and is it not the fruit of a much more earnest care for you, to help to maintain your credit in this best and most gainful way of merchandise? If you forfeit the character of being ready to do good, you lose the opportunity of enriching yourselves with the true and most durable treasures.

[3.] They would have you do that which you will have comfort in, and advantage by, in this world, and therefore you are to reckon them your friends, who have a care for you. When you review your expenses, surely there is nothing you reflect upon with more pleasure and satisfaction, than that which you laid out in works of piety and charity; you may look upon it, not as upon that which you spend in housekeeping, it is gone, and you will hear no more of it, but as upon that which you have put into the best fund, ventured in the securest vessel, and set out to the best interest upon the best security, as *bread cast upon the waters*, which you shall find again after many days. Read Mr. Gouge's book, which he calls, "The surest and safest way of thriving," and you will look upon those as your truest well-wishers who forward you in any work of piety

or charity, as you do upon those who contribute any thing towards your outward prosperity.

Your liberally contributing to any good work will, perhaps, increase what you have in the world, will double it; what is so given is lent to the Lord, and he has given his promise that he will pay it again; and if he expects at his coming to receive his own with usury, no doubt he will so return us our own. However, it will make what we have *clean to us*, it will make it comfortable. Job mentions it as one of the brightest instances of his prosperity, that the *blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him*, and he *caused the widow's heart to sing for joy*. Many a prayer will be put up for you, by those who have an interest at the throne of grace, which you will have the benefit of, and yours, perhaps, when you are gone. It is used as an argument with the people to be kind to the priest, *that he may cause the blessing to rest on thine house*,[†] may do it by his prayers with and for thy family. Those therefore have an earnest care for you, who would not have you, for the saving of a little money, to forfeit that blessing, or come short of it.

4. They would have you do that which will be fruit abounding to your account in the day of recompence. If works of piety and charity be done from a pious, charitable principle, in faith, and in dependence upon Christ for the acceptance of them, though they cannot merit any thing at God's hand, for of his own we give him, yet he has graciously assured us, that they shall be rewarded in the resurrection of the just, for God is not unrighteous to forget them. You know when, and upon what account, it will be said, *I was hungry and you gave me meat, I was thirsty and you gave me drink*. If it be not repaid in this world, there is the more behind; the heavenly inheritance will make amends for all. Those who press you to good works are in care that you may not miss of this recompence, may not lose this good bargain, which will be so much to your advantage. They would have you to use your estates, so that with them you may make to yourselves friends, that when ye fail, ye may be received into everlasting habitations.

This was St. Paul's care for the Philippians; they were well-disposed to be kind to him, but they *lacked opportunity*, they wanted some friend to do that for them which Titus here did for the Corinthians, to make a collection among them for Paul's assistance, and to convey it carefully to him. Now Paul shows himself well pleased that at length Epaphroditus had done it; but he professes it was not so much upon his own account, that he might hereby be enabled to live the more comfortably in prison, *Not that I desire a gift*, I could live very contentedly without it; but chiefly upon their account, that they

might have the comfort and reward of it, in that day when all we now say and do will be called over again. *I desire fruit that may abound to your account*, that may be reckoned among the fruits of your righteousness, which shall be repeated in life eternal; when not a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, to a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall be left out of the account.

Now lay all this together, and then tell me whether those are not indeed your friends, and have not an earnest care for you, who call upon you to do good and to communicate. Look upon them then as your friends, and look pleasantly upon them when they come upon this errand; thank them that they will take the trouble of a good work so much upon themselves, and yet bring you in for sharers in the honour, comfort, and reward of it. Those who would so manage for you, in some advantageous undertaking for the world, so that you might have nothing to do but to pay in your money, and receive it again with great increase, you would reckon yourselves exceedingly obliged to. Nor think it enough to be courteous and civil to your almoners, and to give them a good look when they come a begging to you, but be free and generous in your almsgiving, and in what you contribute to every good work, that you may encourage those who have this earnest care of you to come to you again. God gives liberally and upbraids not; and so should we, that we may be like him. Remember, it is seed sown, and observe the husbandman's rule in sowing his ground, "Give it seed enough; for if you sow sparingly, you will reap accordingly." And now you have lost one who used to recommend objects of charity to you, be the more inquisitive after them yourselves; that you may in no wise lose your reward.

II. It is mentioned to the praise of God, that he put this earnest care into the heart of Titus for them; and thanks are given to him for it. Now thanks be to God, who by his providence brought Titus to Corinth, and by his grace excited and enabled him to do this good office there.

See how solicitous blessed Paul is upon all occasions to ascribe the glory of all the good that was done, whether by others or by himself, to the grace of God, and to own in it the influences and operations of that grace; *I laboured*, others laboured, yet not I, yet not they, *but the grace of God which was with me*, and was with them; for *by the grace of God I am what I am*, and they are what they are. The doctrine of free grace, which is pure gospel, he not only inculcates in his preaching and writing, but applies it, and speaks as one who did himself believe it, and was full of it; for he takes care to cast every crown at the feet of free grace, in that he boasts all

[†] Ezek. xlv. 30.

the day long, so as to exclude all other boasting; that he is made always to triumph; *Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory.* Now observe here,

1. That God can *put* things into men's hearts, beyond what was expected. He is the Sovereign of the heart, not only to enjoin it what he pleases by his law, but to influence it, and to infuse into it by his providence and grace as he pleases. He has access to men's hearts, knows what is in them, what would be in them, and can expunge and insert according to his own will, and they themselves not be aware of it. He can extinguish the sparks of wrath he finds there, and restrain them, can blow up the sparks of love he finds there into a flame. They are all in his hand, as the clay in the hand of the potter, and he fashioned them so as to serve his own purposes by them. The way of man is not in himself, he cannot think what he will, but the wise God can overrule him. If the hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord, to be turned as the rivers of water which way soever he pleases, though their hearts, of all men's, are most absolute, and arbitrary, and unsearchable, much more the hearts of inferior persons. Let no man boast of his free thought, when whatever devices are in men's hearts, it is not their counsel, but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. See in this how God governs the world, by the hold he has of the consciences of men, and his power to put things into their hearts, so that they shall accomplish his designs, as *his hand*, though *they mean not so, neither do their heart think so.*

2. That whatever good is in the heart of any, it is God that puts it there. If Titus have in his heart an earnest care for the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians, though he is a very good man, and one whom much good may be expected from, yet even this is not of himself, it is not to be called a natural affection, it is a gracious one, for the grace of God wrought it there, that grace which worketh in good men both to will and to do that which is good. Perhaps Titus was steering his course another way, when God put it into his heart to come to Corinth; or, when he came thither on this errand, perhaps he did not design to press the thing with any importunity, but only to propose it, and leave it to them to do as they would: but, quite beyond his own intention, God put it into his heart to be urgent in the matter, which had a wonderful good effect; put zeal into his heart for the carrying on of this good work, and then put words into his mouth wherewith to press it.

If we have an earnest care for our own souls, and for their spiritual and eternal welfare, it is God that puts it into our hearts, that gives it to us, so the word here used signifies, it is he that plants it in us; if we have an earnest care for the souls of others, particularly of theirs who are under our charge, we

have it from God, for we are not sufficient of ourselves so much as to think a good thought, much less fix a good principle, or form a good project, but all our sufficiency is of God. Whatever evil there is in our hearts, it is of ourselves, it is, like weeds in the garden, the spontaneous product of the corrupt soil; this God sees there, he foresees it, and can tell the sinner long before, *At such a time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought*; but it is not of his putting there; no, it is the good that is found there, all that, and only that, that God puts there. He will own that, and we must own him in it.

3. That Christ's ministers are in a particular manner all that, and that only, to his churches that he makes them to be. They are stars that shine with a borrowed light, and shed no other benign influences, but what are derived from the Sun of Righteousness. If they have a care, an earnest care, a natural care, for the souls committed to their charge, it is God who has put it into their hearts, it is his grace in them that makes them blessings to the places where they are, whether stately or occasionally; if they bring a seasonable word that reaches the conscience, and does good, it is God that puts it into their mouths, and gives them what they shall speak. Paul, that master-workman, says nothing of what he has wrought, but of what Christ has wrought by him. Wherefore look we then at Peter and John, and Paul and Apollos, Acts iii. 12. as though by their own power they did what they do? No, they are no more, no better, than what the free grace of God makes them. The most able, the most active, ministers, and the most famed for industry and success, if they were left to themselves, and to their own wisdom and strength, would be the unprofitable burthens of the earth; would be like Samson when his hair was cut, and the spirit of the Lord was departed from him, weak as other men, nay, and worse than other men, like salt which has lost its savour. We must therefore look up to God, by prayer, for that grace which is necessary to make the stewards of the mysteries of God both skilful and faithful; and lament the case of those careless ministers, who, like the ostrich, are hardened against the souls under their charge, as though they were not theirs, for it is a sign that God has deprived them of wisdom, and has not imparted to them understanding.

4. That the grace of God is particularly to be seen and owned in the progress and success of any work of charity, as this here, which Titus was active in among the Corinthians. In this we may be tempted to think there needs no more, but that common concurrence of the divine Providence which is necessary to the negotiating of every other affair; but it seems by this we have as much need of the working of the Spirit and grace of God, to enable us to give

alms well, as to enable us to pray and preach well. What is necessary to an act of beneficence, must be put into our hearts from on high, as well as what is necessary to an act of devotion. It is God who puts it into the heart of all the parties concerned to do their part in it: he puts an earnest care into the hearts of those who manage a work of charity, and a generous, liberal disposition into the hearts of those who contribute to it. And therefore the apostle concludes his account here of the liberality of the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, with praises to God, not only for giving them estates wherewithal to do good, but much more for giving them hearts to do good with them; *Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.* Grace to use what we have in the world to the glory of God, is an unspeakable gift, for which we ought to be very thankful. And we are taught the same by the example of David, who, when he found the princes and people generous in their subscriptions for the building of the temple, blessed God for it, as an admirable instance of his favour and grace, by which he put a great deal of honour upon them: but, *Who am I,* says he, *and what is my people, that we should be able to overcome that selfishness and narrow-spiritedness which is in our corrupt natures, and should offer so much, and so willingly, and cheerfully, after this sort; for all things come of thee.* Those therefore who have any good project upon the wheel, should look up to God for his grace to carry it on, otherwise it will be abortive. Those we persuade to do good, we should pray for, that God would incline their hearts to it, and then only our persuasions will prevail.

Let us now close all, with some inferences from these observations.

1. If this be so, then those who do good have nothing to glory in; for whatever good they do, it was God that put it into their hearts to do it, and therefore he must have all the glory. Boasting is hereby for ever excluded, for in the Lord alone we have not only righteousness for the remission of our sins, but strength and sufficiency for the performance of our duties. How absurd, how unjust, is it for us to be proud of any good we do, when without Christ we can do nothing; we cannot so much as be content with such things as we have, but through Christ strengthening us, much less do good with them.

This forbids us to trust to our own good works, as if by them we could merit any thing at the hand of God; we must not entertain such a thought, not only because none of our goodness extends to God, but because all our goodness is derived from him; and the more good we do, the more we are indebted to him for that grace by which we are enabled to do it, and the honour he puts upon us in employing us for him. We never speak a good word, or do a good work, but it comes from that good which God first put into our hearts, so that all being from him, all

must be to him; he *planted, he watered, and he gave the increase*, and therefore his must all the fruit be, and to his honour it must be devoted.

This obliges us, when we have done all, to say, *We are unprofitable servants*, not only because we have done no more than what was our duty to do, but because we have done no more than God enabled us to do. It obliges us also to say, that God is a good master, who works in us what he requires of us, and then graciously accepts and rewards his own work, as if it had been ours, so far is he from being that hard man who reaps where he had not sown. And then our services turn most to our honour, when we take care to transmit the honour of them to God. Nehemiah could not have put a greater reputation upon his undertaking to build up the walls of Jerusalem, than he did, when he said, it was what God had put in his heart to do at Jerusalem, Neh. ii. 12. and it magnifies Cyrus's proclamation of liberty to the captive Jews, more than the policy or the generosity of it, that *the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to issue out that proclamation*, Ezra i. 1.

This holy, good man we are now speaking of, whose works praise him in the gates, took care that the praise should not terminate in himself, but be transmitted to God, the Father of lights, and giver of every good gift. When a friend of his who visited him in his sickness, mentioned to him his great usefulness, and what comfort he might now have in reflection upon it, he humbly replied, "Alas, I have done but little service for God in my generation; I wish I had done more: but God is good and gracious." Whence I observe, that the comforts and hopes of dying Christians are founded upon God's goodness, not upon their own. Thus, when Nehemiah had done abundance of good service to the house of God, and the offices thereof, his prayer is, not *Reward me according to the greatness of my merit*, but *Spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy*. "I was but a pen in God's hand," (said good Mr. Baxter,) "and what praise is due to a pen?" Thus as God gives grace to the most humble, so he gives humility to the most gracious.

2. If this be so, then those who have any good done them, either for soul or body, must give thanks to God for it, who raised up those who were the instruments of it, and put it into their hearts to do it, and perhaps to do it with an earnest care. We ought indeed to acknowledge their kindness, and to be grateful to them, but that must be in token of our gratitude to God, who, in making them his agents, made them his receivers. But we must look above and beyond them, and give God thanks for them, and for all the kindnesses they have done us. Ezra has no sooner registered and enrolled the ample commission which Artaxerxes gave him in favour of the Jews, but immediately he adds, *Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as*

his into the king's heart. Which teaches us, to see and own all the bounty and benefit, all the service and supply, that comes to us by the hands of our friends, flowing originally from the hand of God. And it is the more to be observed, if it come by the hand of those who were unlikely, and unthought of, and that we least expected it from. If Elijah be entertained by a poor widow who has but a handful of meal for herself and her son; if the wounded man, who is looked upon but overlooked by a priest and Levite, from whom charity and compassion might have been expected, and was commonly had, be at length taken care of by an honest Samaritan, it must be said, *This is the Lord's doing*, God put it into their hearts; and therefore let us give God thanks for our benefactors, and all their benefactions.

When those are removed from us, who have long been upon any account blessings to us, good parents, good ministers, good friends, instead of murmuring and quarrelling with God, as if he had done us wrong, we ought to be very thankful to him that ever we had them, that they were so many ways useful to us, and were continued to us so long, though we were unworthy of the benefit and comfort we enjoyed by them, and had a thousand times forfeited it. And by these thanksgivings for their lives, let us balance and alleviate our sorrow for their deaths. Thanks be to God, who fitted them for service, and inclined them to it, and put into their hearts an earnest care for us, though perhaps there was nothing in us either deserving or promising, to recommend us to their care. God, who himself does good to the unworthy, puts it into the hearts of good men to do so too; to him therefore we must give thanks.

And these thanksgivings should sometimes look far back; and we should bless God for those who were in the days of old, either by their lasting writings, or by their lasting charities, blessings to posterity; they may not be prayed for, as our living benefactors may, and must be; they are not to be prayed to, as our ever-living Benefactor may, and must be; but the benefit we and others receive by the grace given to them, we may and must give thanks to God for, who put into their hearts an earnest care for those who should come after them. *If what is written, if what is done, be for the generation to come, it fitly follows, the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord.*

3. If this be so, let us hereby be engaged and quickened to do all the good we can in our places; to do the good the Corinthians did, that is, to contribute largely and freely for the support and encouragement of poor saints and poor ministers, according to the ability God has given us; to do the good Titus did, that is, to solicit the cause both of the necessitous, and of the deserving, and to procure assistance for them; to recommend works of piety and objects of charity, as factors in that blessed merchandise; to

bring the rich and poor to meet together: according as our capacity is, let us lay out ourselves to do good.

Hereby we shall evidence that God, by his grace, has put some good into our hearts, which the good we do is the fruit and product of, and by which the tree is known. If we be truly charitable, from a good principle, and for a good end, it will turn to us for a testimony, that the Spirit of God has been at work with our hearts, making us acceptable to our father in heaven, and making us meet for our home in heaven: and how can what we have been made to turn to a better or more comfortable account.

Hereby likewise we shall give occasion to many to praise God for us, and for the good which by his grace we are inclined and enabled to do. And how can we better serve the glory of God, and the comfort of his people, than by furnishing our friends with abundant matter for thanksgiving, (that sweet duty,) in which when we are employed, we have, if any where, a heaven upon earth. This was one thing for which Paul reflected with comfort upon his own conversion, that those who heard that a persecutor was become a preacher, glorified God in him. And therefore we must let our light shine before men, that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven. If it be an encouragement to charity, to think that we shall have the prayers of the poor, much more is it so to think that God shall have their praises. And so the blessing of him that was ready to perish shall not only come upon us, but shall return, as it ought, to him who is the fountain of all blessing; and when the widow's heart is made to sing for joy, it shall sing to the praise and glory of God.

4. This may be matter of comfort and support to us, when useful instruments are removed from us. That which made them useful was, that spirit of wisdom, holiness, and love that God gave them, and we are sure that he has the residue of the Spirit, the excellency of the Spirit, (so the word is,) with himself, and he can raise up men with the same spirit, with the same excellences of spirit, that shall do him as much service, if he pleases, and do it as well in their day, as those who are gone did in theirs. If God make the spirit of Elijah to rest upon Elisha, he shall be as much the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof, as ever Elijah himself was. And therefore let us not say, *The glory is departed from Israel*, though the hoary heads, who were so much a crown of glory to our tribe, be now in a manner all departed; no, while Zion's God is her everlasting glory, he will take care that Zion's sons shall some or other of them be in their turn a glory to her; *Instead of the fathers shall be the children*. When God has work to do, we are sure he will never want fit instruments to do it with.

It is certain, our fathers, the best and greatest of

them, were no more, no better, than what the grace of God made them, they took all occasions to own it themselves; and it is as certain, there is the same overflowing fulness of grace in Christ that ever there was, *grace for grace*, and the same way of deriving from it; as the *olive-tree is not withered*, so the *golden pipes* (Zech. iv. 12.) are not stopped up. We have therefore reason to hope, that the same God who put an earnest care into their hearts, will put the same into the hearts of those who are entered into their labours; and that grace which was sufficient for them, to carry them through the services and sufferings of their generation, will be sufficient for us too, who have the same work to do, and the same temptations and difficulties to grapple with; and will enable us at length to finish our course, as they did, with joy.

It was a petition which (as I am told) Mr. Stretton frequently put up to God in his prayers with his family, "Lord, grant that we may be useful while we are here, and that we may not be wanted when we are gone." God did make him useful while he was here, many ways useful, useful to the last; and continued long in his usefulness. A great gap is made

in our hedge by his death; but may we hope that many others shall be spirited to do the same work with the same earnest care, that in a little time we may be able to say, that in answer to the other part of his petition, *he is not wanted*? If God has mercy in store for your city, for the land of our nativity, he will raise up such men of serious piety, and catholic charity, who shall lay out themselves to do good in the world: I trust he has raised up some such; and that the mystical gloss which one of the rabbins puts upon those words, (1 Sam. iii. 3, 4.) *Ere the lamp of God went out, the Lord called Samuel*, has its accomplishment; "That is," says he, "ere God makes the lamp of one prophet to set he kindles another." God grant it may be so at this day in our land, and it would be a token of good to us, that God would not depart from us. Nay, if it be true, as certainly it is, that while the earth remains Christ will have a church in it, we may be sure that as one generation of such passes away, another generation, somewhere or other, shall come, to support the interests of pure and undefiled religion, that thus the name of Christ may endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

A CONCISE ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE OF THE REV. MR. RICHARD STRETTON.

HE was the son of Mr. William Stretton, of great Cleybrook, near Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, where he was born; but was descended from the Strettons of Stretton, in that county.

He was born about the year 1632, but the exact time of his birth could not be recovered for this reason; his father being a puritan, and the minister of his parish such a one as he could not with satisfaction bring his child to be baptized by, he procured one Mr. Moor to baptize him, who was a puritan minister in the neighbourhood; and so he was not registered in the church book.

He often spoke of it as an instance of God's goodness to him, that he enabled his father, though he had many children, to bring him up a scholar.

He had his academical education at New College in Oxford, and was chaplain of the college, as the noted Bishop Gunning had been some time before.

He commenced Master of Arts, July 9, 1658, (*præstitis exercitiis per statuta requisitis—having performed the requisite exercises*), as appears by a testimonial under the hand of the university register.

In the beginning of that year, having passed through not only his time, but his studies, in the university, he went to be assistant to Dr. Cheynel at Petworth in Sussex, a great living.

Soon after his settlement there he was publicly and solemnly ordained, and "set apart to the office of a preaching presbyter," (so the testimonial of his ordination runs) "and the work of the ministry, with fasting, prayer, and the imposition of the hands of six presbyters, in the parish church of Arundel, Oct. 26, 1658. He having given sufficient testimony of his competent age, of his unblamable life and conversation, of his diligence and proficiency in his studies, and of his fair and direct calling to the fore-mentioned place; and they upon examination finding him to be duly qualified and gifted for that holy office and employment."

He continued at Petworth till Michaelmas, 1660, when Dr. Cheynel was put out to make room for Dr. King, Bishop of Chichester. Mr. Stretton however staid and preached there till November, (as Dr. Calamy's account is,) having two friends, viz.