

A Discourse upon Providence.

Matth. x. 29, 30.

Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

But the very Hairs of your Head are all numbred.

THe Mystery of God's Providence, next to that of Man's Redemption, is the most Sublime and Inscrutable. 'Tis easie in both to run our selves off our Reason. For as Reason confesseth it self at a loss when it attempts a search into those Eternal decrees of electing Sinners to Salvation, and designing Christ to save them, so must it likewise when it attempts to trace out all those entangled Mazes and Labyrinths wherein the Divine Providence walks. We may sooner tire reason in such a pursuit than satisfy it, unless it be some kind of satisfaction when we have driven it to a Non-plus, to relieve our selves with an *is so*; O the depth of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments and his ways past finding out! This knowledge therefore being too wonderful for us, I shall not presume to conduct you into that secret Place, that pavillion of Clouds, and surrounding Darkness where God sits holding the Rudder of the World, and steering it through all the Floatings of Casualty and Contingency to his own foreordained ends, where he grasps and turns the great Engine of Nature in his hands, fastening one Pin, and loosening another, moving and removing the several Wheels of it, and framing the whole according to the Eternal Idea of his own under-

standing. Let us content us, to consider so much of God's Providence as may affect us with comfort in reflecting on that particular care which he takes of us, rather than with wonder and astonishment by too bold a prying into those hidden methods whereby he exerciseth it.

Our Saviour Christ in this Chapter giving Commission to his Apostles, and sending them forth to preach the Gospel, obviates an Objection they might make, concerning the great danger that would certainly attend such an undertaking. To send them upon such an hated employment, would be no other than to thrust them upon the Rage and Malice of the World, to send them forth as Sheep into the midst of Wolves, who would doubtless worry and devour them; sure we are to have our Message derided, our Persons injured, and that holy name of thine on which we summon them to believe, Blasphemed and Reviled; and tho our word may prove a word of life to some few of the Hearers, yet to us who are the Preachers of it, it will prove no other than Death. A vile and wretched world the whilest, when the Gospel of Peace and Reconciliation shall thus stir up Enmity and Persecution against the Embassadors, who are appointed to Proclaim it!

Now to this our Saviour Answers.

First, By shewing what the extent of their Adversaries power is, how far it can reach, and what mischief it can do when God permits it to rage to the very utmost. And this he doth in the 28th. Verse, the verse immediately foregoing the Text: *Fear not them who kill the Body, but are not able to kill the Soul.* Or as St. Luke expresseth it, Chap. 12. 4. *They can kill the Body, but after that, have no more they can do.* Alas, are such Men to be feared, who when they do their worst, can only destroy your worst part, which if they do not, yet Accidents or Diseases will? What, are your Bodies but Cloggs to your Spirit, and Prisons to your Souls? And certainly those Enemies are not very formidable,

midable, who when they most think to hurt you, only knock off your Clogg, or break open your Prison and let your Souls escape to their desired liberty.

Secondly, Our Saviour answers that though they can Kill the body when God permits them ; yet they cannot so much as touch it without his permission. And this he doth in the words of my Text, by shewing how punctual and particular God's providence is, even over the smallest, and those that seem the most trifling occurrences of the World; a Sparrow, whose price is but mean, two of them valued at a Farthing, which some make to be the tenth part of a *Roman* penny, and was certainly one of their least Coins, whose life therefore is but contemptible, and whose flight seems but giddy and at random ; yet it falls not to the ground, neither lights any where without your Father. His all-wise providence hath before appointed what bough it shall pitch on; what grains it shall pick up, where it shall lodge, and where it shall build, on what it shall live, and when it shall die. And if your Fathers providence be so Critical about the small concernments even of Sparrows; fear not ye, for you are of more value than many Sparrows, yea, of more value than many Men.

Our Saviour adds, The very hairs of your head are all numbred: God keeps an account even of that stringy Excrement. He knows how many fall off, and the precise number of those that remain : and no wonder that he knows the number of our Sins, which are far more.

Hence we learn that God governs the meanest, the most inconsiderable, and contemptible Occurrences in the World by an exact and particular Providence. Do you see thousand little Motes and Atomes wandring up and down in a Sun-beam? It is God that so peoples it; and he guides their innumerable and irregular strayings. Not a Dust flies in a beaten Road ; but God raiseth it, conducts its uncertain motion, and by his particular care conveys it to the certain

certain place he had before appointed for it, nor shall the most fierce and tempestuous wind hurry it any farther. And if God's care and providence reacheth thus to these minute things, which are but as it were the circumstances of Nature; and little accessaries to the World, certainly Man who is the head and Lord of it, for whose sake and service other Creatures were formed, may very well be confident that God exerciseth an especial and most accurate providence over him, and his affairs.

By this you see what the subject is intended to treat of, even the over-ruling and all disposing providence of God, not a Sparrow, not a hair of your heads falls to the ground without your Father.

But before I proceed farther, I must take notice of two things in the words.

First, That our Saviour speaking here of the providence of God, ascribes to him the name of our Father: God hath many names and titles attributed unto him in the Scriptures; as Father, Lord, Creator, Redeemer, Judge, King and God. But God is a word that denotes his Essence, Lord is a title of his Dominion, Creator marks out his omnipotence, Redeemer commends his Love, Judge is a name of fear and astonishment, and King is a title of Royal Majesty: But this indearing name of Father signifies unto us his providence, for from him as from a Father do we expect and receive guidance and government.

Secondly, Whereas nothing comes to pass without our Heavenly Father, this may be understood three ways; without his permission, without his ordination, and concurrence, without his over-ruling and directing it to his own ends.

First, No evil comes to pass without his permissive providence.

Secondly, No good comes to pass without his ordaining and concurring providence.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Nothing whether good or evil comes to pass without the over-ruling Providence of our Father, guiding and directing it to his own ends. But concerning this distinction of permissive, concurring and over ruling Providence, I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter. My work at present shall be,

First, To describe unto you what the providence of God is in the general notion thereof.

Secondly, To prove that all affairs and occurrences in the World, are guided and governed by Divine Providence.

Thirdly, To answer some puzzling questions and doubts concerning the Providence of God, and some objections that may be made against it.

First, Let us see what providence is. Take it in this description: Providence is an Act of God, whereby according to his eternal and most wise Counsel, he preserves and governs all things, and directs them all to their ends, but chiefly to his own glory.

This providence consisteth in two things. Preservation and Government of his Creatures.

First. One remarkable Act of the Providence of God is the preservation of his Creatures in their beings, He preserves them,

First, In their species and kind, by the constant succession of them one after another; so that though the individuals of them are mortal and perish, yet the species or kind is immortal. There is no kind of Creature that was at first made by God, but it still continueth to this very day, and shall so do to the end of the World. And truly it is the wonderful Providence of God thus to perpetuate the Creation; that whereas we see an imbred enmity in some sorts of Creatures against others, yet his Wisdom so sways their mutual antipathies, that none of them shall ever prevail to a total Extirpation and Destruction of the other.

Secondly, He preserves them likewise by his providence in

in their individual and particular beings, while they have a room to fill up, and an Office to discharge in the Universe. Each Fly and Worm, as well as Man (who is but the greater Worm of the two) hath a work to do in the World; and till that be finish'd God sustains its being: Nor shall the weakest Creature be destroyed, within the prefixed time that God hath set to its duration. There are none of us here alive this day but have abundant cause thankfully to acknowledge the powerful and merciful providence of God in preserving us in, and rescuing us from many dangers and deaths to which we stood expost. It is only his Visitation that hath hitherto preserved our Spirits, and to his never failing providence we owe it that such frail and feeble Creatures, who are liable to be crush'd before the Moth, liable to so many diseases and accidents, have yet a name among the Living, and have not yet failed from off the face of the Earth.

Secondly, As God preserves, so he governs all things by his providence; and this Government consists in two things. Direction of the Creatures actions, and distribution of rewards and punishments according to the Actions of his rational Creatures.

First, God by his governing providence directs all the Actions of his Creatures, yea, and by the secret, but efficacious illapse and penetration of the Divine Influence; he powerfully sways and determines them which way he pleaseth. And from this part of his Providence, brancheth forth his permission of Evil Actions, and his concurrence to good, both by the assistance of his common and likewise of his special Grace; and lastly, his general influence into all the Actions of our Lives; all which we are inabled to perform by the Almighty power of the Divine Providence, which as at first it bestowed upon us natural faculties; so by a constant concurrence doth exite and assist those faculties to their respective operations.

Secondly,

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Secondly, God by his governing providence distributes rewards and punishments according to our actions: And this part of his providence is oftentimes remarkable even in this present Life, when we see retributions of Divine Mercy and Vengeance, signally proportioned according to Mens demerits, but the more especial manifestation and execution of it is commonly adjourned to the Life to come; and then all the seeming inequalities of God's dispensations here will be fully adjusted in the eternal recompence of the Godly, and eternal punishment of the wicked and impenitent.

Now by this Almighty providence God over-rules and sways all things to his own glory. There is nothing comes to pass, but God hath his ends in it, and will certainly make his own ends out of it; though the World seem to run at random, and affairs to be hudled together in blind confusion and rude disorder; yet God sees and knows the Concatenation of all causes and effects, and so governs them, that he makes a perfect harmony out of all those seeming Jarrings and Discords. As you may observe it in the wheels of a Watch, though they all move with contrary motions one to the other, yet they are useful and necessary to make it go right: so is it in these inferiour things, the proceedings of Divine providence, are all regular and orderly to his own ends, in all the thwartings and contrarieties of second causes. We have this express'd in that mysterious Vision, *Eccles. i. 18.* where the providences of God are set forth by the Emblem of a Wheel within a Wheel, one intersecting and crossing another; yet they are described to be full of eyes round about. What is this, but to denote unto us, that though providences are as turning and unstable as Wheels; though they are as thwart and cross as one Wheel within another, yet these Wheels are all Nailed round with Eyes; God sees and chules his way in the most intricate and intangled providences that are; and so governs

all things, that whilst each pursues its own inclination, they are all over-ruled to promote his glory. This is providence, the two great parts of which are preservation and Government; and the great end of both these the glory of the Almighty and All-wise God. And this is it which our Saviour speaks of when he tells the *Jews*, *John* 5. 17. *My Father worketh hitherto (viz. in preserving and governing his Creatures) and I work.*

Secondly, The second General propounded, was to demonstrate to you, That all things in the World are governed by the Divine Providence. The Old Philosophers among the *Heathens*, had very different notions concerning the Government of the World. Some held that all things were governed by an imperious and inevitable fate to which God himself was Subject: So *Chrysippus*, and the *Stoicks*. Others thought that all was left to blind chance, and whatsoever came to pass here below was only casual and fortuitous; so the *Epicureans*: Others that the great God regarded only the more glorious affairs of Heaven, but had committed the care of Earthly concerns unto inferiour Spirits as his under Officers and Deputies: So most of the *Platonists*, though their master was Orthodox. Others, that God's providence reached only to the great and important matters of this World; but that it was too much a disparagement to his infinite Majesty to look after the motion of every Straw and Feather, and to take care of every trivial and inconsiderable Occurrence in this World. So speaks *Cicero* in his Book *de natura Deorum*, *Magna Dei curant, parva negligunt.* [*vide Ariani Epistlet. lib. 1. cap. 12.*] How much better is that most excellent saying of *St. Austin*, *Tu sic curas unumquemque nostrum, tanquam solum cares, & sic omnes tanquam singulos.* God takes as much care of every particular, as if each were all, and as much care of all, as if all were but one particular.

And

And to demonstrate this all-disposing providence of God, I shall take two ways.

First, From the consideration of the nature and perfection of the Deity.

Secondly, From the contemplation of that beauty and order which we may observe in the World.

It is most necessary that we should have our hearts well Establish'd in the firm and unwavering belief of this truth, that whatsoever comes to pass, be it good or evil, we may look up to the hand and disposal of all, to God; and if it be good, may acknowledge it with praise; if evil, bear it with patience; since he dispenseth both the one and the other; the good to reward us, and the evil to try us.

Now first, To demonstrate it from the being and nature of God.

This I shall do in these following Propositions, which I shall lay down as so many steps and gradations.

First, That there is a God is undoubtedly clear by the light of Nature. Never was there any People so barbarous and stupid, but did firmly assent to this truth without any other proof than the deep impress upon their hearts, and the observation of visible objects, that there was a Deity. 'Tis neither a Problem of reason, nor yet strictly an Article of Faith, but the unforced dictate of every Man's Natural Conscience; where Conscience is not violently perverted, and under the force of those vices, whose interest it is that there should be no God. Never was there any Nation that worshipp'd none, but their great sottishness was, that they worshipp'd many.

Secondly, As all confess there is a God, so likewise that this God must necessarily have in himself all perfections, as being the first Principle and Source of all things. All these perfections of Wisdom, Power, Knowledge, or the like, that we see scattered up and down among the Creatures, must all be concentred in God; and that in a far more

eminent degree, because whatever is found in Creatures is but derived and borrowed from him, and therefore it must needs follow, that because it is of more perfection to be infinite in each perfection, therefore God is infinite in them all.

Thirdly, Among all the perfections that are dispersed among the Creatures, the most excellent is knowledge and understanding: For this is a property that agrees only to Angels and Men, who are the top and flower of the Creation; and therefore certainly this perfection of the Creatures is to be found in God: yea, and that infinitely. His knowledge and wisdom therefore is infinite.

Fourthly, His knowledge being thus infinite, he both knows himself, and all other things in himself.

First, God perfectly knows himself, he knows the boundless extent of his own being, and though he be infinite and incomprehensible to all others, yet is he finite and comprehended to himself: and hence it follows,

Secondly, That he knows particularly all other things. For if he knew himself perfectly, he must needs know all things besides himself; because none can perfectly know himself, that doth not fully know all that his power and strength can reach unto. But now there is nothing which the power of God cannot reach, for by his power he Created all things. And therefore knowing his own Essence which is the cause of all, he knows every thing in the fecundity of his Essence. Thus we have demonstrated it from the principles of Reason, that God necessarily knows all things. But providence denotes more than knowledge. And therefore,

Fifthly, This knowledge that is in God, is not like that which we acquire; 'tis not a knowledge that depends upon the objects known, and forms Ideas from the contemplation of things already existing. But it is like the knowledge of an Artificer which causeth and produceth the

the things it comprehends. God knows them before they are; and by knowing them brings them to pass. God knows all things saith St. *Austin, de Trinitat. 15. Not because they are, but therefore they are because God knew them.* So that his eternal knowledge and understanding gives being to every thing in the World.

Sixthly, It appertains to him who gives being to a thing to preserve and govern it in its being. And therefore God giving being to all things, he also doth maintain and provide for them. 'Tis the very Law of Nature that he hath imprinted upon all his Creatures, to provide for their own Off-spring. We see with what solicitous affection and tenderness, even brute and irrational Creatures do it. We are all the Off-spring of God, and he our common Parent. And therefore certainly he who hath inspired such Parental care in all things else, doth himself much more take care to give Education to all to which he hath given being.

Thus you see is proved that God's Providence reacheth unto all things. It might likewise be demonstrated from God's omnipresence. He is present every where, with, and in all his Creatures, and certainly he is not with them as an idle and unconcerned spectator, but as the director, and governour of their Actions. But I shall proceed to the second sort of Arguments to prove the Divine providence.

And those are taken from the consideration of the frame and *Compages* of the World, the beauty and harmony which we see in Nature. The World is a Book wherein we may clearly read the wonderful Wisdom of God. There is no Creature that doth not proclaim aloud, that God is the wise Creator and Governour of it. Who hath Gilded the Globe of the Sun and put on his Rays? Who hath set its bounds, and measured out its race, that it should without failing, without error or mistake, know how to make its daily and Annual

Annual returns, and divide out times and seasons to the World? Who hath given a particular Motion to all the Voluminous Orbs of Heaven, and beat out a path for every Star to walk in? Who hath swathed in the great and proud Ocean, with a Girdle of Sand, and restrains the Waves thereof, that though they be higher than the Land, yet they shall not overflow it? Who poiseeth the oppositions and contrarieties that are in Nature in so even a balance, that none of them shall ever prevail to a total Destruction of the other? Who brings up the great Family of brute Beasts without tumult and disorder? Do not all these great and wonderful works speak forth the watchful Providence of God; who as he makes them by his word, so still governs them by his Power? Therefore whatsoever we receive beneficial from them, whatsoever seems to provide for our necessities or conveniencies; it is God that hath so dispensed the Government of the World as to make it serviceable. If the Heavens turn and move for us, if the Stars as so many burning Torches light us in the obscurity of the Night; if the Angels protect and defend us, let us acknowledge all this from the Providence of God only. It is he that turns the Heavens round their Axis: He lights up the Stars, he commands the Angels to be Ministring Spirits, Guards, and Centinels about us. If the Fire warm us, the Air refresh us, the Earth support us, it is God that hath kindled the Fire, that hath spread forth the Air, stablish'd the Earth upon the Pillars of his own decree that it should not be shaken. And let us know too that when we want these Creatures for our sustentation, if the Heavens, if the Angels, if the Earth, if the Sea, if all things should fail us, yea, bandy and set themselves against us, yet God who provides for us by them, can also if he please provide for us without them.

Thus we have dispatch'd the two general inquiries, and have described and demonstrated unto you the Divine Providence. The

The third which remains, is to answer some questions and doubts which may be made, and have indeed been strongly urged against the Government of the World by Providence.

As First, If the World be governed by Providence, whence comes it that wicked and ungodly Men flourish and prosper? that God shines upon their Tabernacles, and drops fatness upon all their paths? Whereas on the contrary the Godly are often exposed to Poverty, Contempt, Reproaches, persecuted by Men, afflicted by God. Would it not be as agreeable to the Divine goodness, to cast abroad the Wealth, the Pomp, and Glory of this World with an undeciding hand, leaving Men to scramble for them as they can, as that he should with a particular and studied care advance those who contemn him, and crush those who humbly trust and depend upon him? Can I think the World is governed by the Providence of a just God, when usually unjust Men govern the World under him? When swaggering Sinners, who despise him have power likewise to controul others? Is it Wisdom to put a Sword into that hand which will turn the point of it against the giver? Or Justice to impower them to all those Acts of Rapine, Violence, and Oppression, which they commit? And shall we call that Providence which is neither wise nor just? One hath an unexhausted store to supply his dissolute Luxury and Riot, another scarce necessities to maintain a poor Life spent in the commands of God. Here a wicked *Dives*, who worshipped no other God but his own Belly, feasts deliciously every day; whilest a Godly *Lazarus* starves at this glutton's Gate, and entertains the Dogs with licking of his Sores. And what, doth God's particular care furnish the glutton's Table with dayly excess, who will not give the remaining Scraps to God's Children? If there be Divine Providence in this, what is become of the Divine Equity? This inequality of Affairs seems to per-

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swade that it is not the Holy and Righteous God of Heaven, but rather the God of this World, that Governs the concerns of it, and that he spoke truth, when he told our Saviour, *Luke 4. 6. The Power and Glory of this World is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it.*

Now to Answer this. First, This quarrel is not only of late commenced against Heaven; but it hath been the complaint of all Ages. It raised controversies among the very Heathens themselves, some of them upon this ground denying, and others again by whole treatises defending the Government of the World by Providence. And no wonder it should puzzle them, since the very best of God's Saints and Servants have likewise stumbled at this stone of offence. Thus the Psalmist, *Psalms. 73. 2, 3, &c. As for me my Feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipt: For I was envious at the Foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the Wicked.* So likewise the Prophet Jeremy, *Jer. 12. 1. Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgment: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?* This therefore is an old grief, which in all Ages of the World hath been complained of. And though at first sight it seems to confute the Providence of God, yet if we more narrowly consider it, 'tis a strong confirmation of it. For since vertue and goodness is so despicable a thing in the World; since holy and good Men have been always injured and persecuted, certainly were there not an all-wise providence that finds out ways and means of its own to counterpoise these disadvantages, and to preserve them amidst the rage and hatred of their implacable Enemies, long ere this there had been none of them left, either to have suffered, or complained. Were there no other argument to prove that God governs the World, this would suffice, even, That his Servants have been continually oppressed in it, yet never could be rooted

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out of it. Though Men and Devils have combined together against them, and God (as they have complained) hath deemed to abandon them; yet such a fenceless and forlorn generation as this, hath been hitherto, and shall still be preserved to the very end of the World. Doth not this speak forth the Power and care of Almighty God, thus to keep a bush unconsumed in the midst of fire? to preserve fuel untouch'd in the very embraces of flames?

Secondly, God doth chastise his own People, and prosper the wicked, that he might thereby rectifie our Judgments, and teach us not to account adversity the greatest Evil, nor yet prosperity the chiefest Good. For certainly were they so, only the Righteous should enjoy the Grandeur, Pomp, and Glory of this World, and only the wicked and ungodly become miserable. Concerning this, *St. Austin*, speaks excellently in his 70th. Epistle, "Worldly things, saith he, are in themselves but indifferent, and good and evil only as they are improved, but least they should be thought always evil, therefore God sometimes gives them to those who are good, and least they should be thought the highest and the chiefest good, they are sometimes given to those who are evil. And a like saying to this hath *Seneca*, in his Book *de provident. cap. 5*. There is no such way to traduce the Riches, the Honours, the Pleasures of this Life, those vain nothings which are so earnestly desired, and eagerly pursued by the most, no such way to beat down their price in the esteem of all wise and good Men, as for God to bestow those upon the vilest, which he sometimes denies to the best and Holiest.

Thirdly. When God bestows any temporal good thing upon wicked and ungodly Men, he gives it as their Portion; and when he brings any calamity on his own Children, he inflicts it for their tryal. Is it not ordinary that a Servant receives more for wages, than a Son may have for the present at his own command? God is the
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Father, and bountiful maintainer of the whole Family both in Heaven and Earth; a Father to the Faithful, a Lord and Master over all. He may give his Slaves large wages, when his own Children possibly have not so much in hand. Is he therefore hard or unjust? No: The inheritance is theirs, and that is kept in reversion for them. What wicked Men possess of this World, is all that ever they can hope for. Why should we grudge them filled bags, or swelling Titles! 'Tis their whole Portion. They now receive their good things. Hast thou Food and Cloathing? That is Childrens fare: Envy not ungodly Men, who flaunt it in the Gallantry of the World. They have more than you; but 'tis all they are like to have. The Psalmist gives us an account of their Estate, *Psal. 17. 14. They are the Men of this World, who have their Portion in this Life, whose bellies God filleth with his hid Treasure*: whereas thou, O Christian, who possessest nothing, art Heir apparent of Heaven, Coheir with Jesus Christ, who is the heir of all things, and hast an infinite Mass of Riches-laid up for thee: So great and infinite that all the Stars of Heaven are too few to account it by. You have no reason to complain of being kept short; for all that God hath is yours: Whether Prosperity or Adversity, Life or Death, all is yours. What God gives is for your comfort, what he denies or takes away is for your tryal; it is for the increase of those graces which are far more gracious than any temporal enjoyment. If by seeing wicked and ungodly Men flow in wealth and ease, when thou art forced to struggle against the inconveniencies and difficulties of a poor Estate, thou hast learnt an Holy contempt and disdain of the World, believe it God hath herein given thee more, than if he had given thee the World it self.

Fourthly, God doth many times even in this World expound the mystery of his Providence, by the fatal and dreadful overthrow of those wicked Men whom he for a while suf-

suffered to prosper. *The triumph of the wicked*, saith, *Job*, 20. 5. *is short*. At longest it is but short, because measured out by a short Life. Now is their triumph, hereafter their torment: But many times God brings them to ruine even in this Life. He turns the Wheel of Providence and makes it pass over those who but a while before set vaunting a top of it. And then wilt thou doubt whether God governs the World by Providence? Wilt thou doubt whether God be just in suffering wicked Men to prosper and flourish? God lifts them up on high, only that he may cast them down with the more terrible fall. When the workers of iniquity prosper (saith the Psalmist *Psalms*. 97. 2.) it is that they might be destroyed for ever. Now when God comes thus to execute Judgment upon them those who questioned the Providence of God in their advancement, will the more glorifie it in their downfall. The Righteous shall see it and be glad, and shall say, verily there is a reward for the Righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth in the Earth, *Psalms* 58. 11.

Fifthly, If God doth not clear up this inequality of his providence in this Life, yet he will certainly do it at the day of Judgment. And indeed the strange dispensation of Affairs in this World, is an Argument that doth convincingly prove that there shall be such a day, wherein all the *Involucra* and intanglements of providence shall be clearly unfolded. Then shall the riddle be dissolved, why God hath given this and that profane wretch so much Wealth, and so much power to do mischief. Is it not that they might be destroyed for ever? Then shall they be called to a strict account for all that plenty and prosperity for which they are now envied: and the more they have abused, the more dreadful will their condemnation be. Then it will appear that God gave them not as mercies, but as snares. 'Tis said *Psalms*. 11. 6. *That God will rain on the wicked Snares, Fire, and Brimstone, and an horrible tempest*. When

he scatters abroad the desirable things of this World: Riches, Honours, Pleasures, &c. then he rains snares upon them: and when he shall call them to an account for these things, then he will rain upon them Fire and Brimstone, and an horrible tempest of his wrath and fury. *Dives* who carowed on Earth, yet in Hell could not obtain so much as one poor drop of Water to cool his scorch'd and flaming Tongue. Had not his excess and intemperance been so great in his Life, his fiery thirst had not been so tormenting after Death. And therefore in that sad Item that *Abraham* gives him, *Luke* 16. 5. he bids him remember, that thou in thy Life time receivest thy good things, and likewise *Lazarus* Evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou tormented. I look upon this as a most bitter and a most deserved Sarcasme, upbraiding him for his gross folly, making the trifles of this Life his good things: *Thou hast received thy good things, but now thou art tormented.* Oh, never call *Dives's* Purple and delicious fare good things, if they thus end in torments! Was it good for him to be wrapt in Purple, who is now wrapt in Flames? Was it good for him to fare deliciously, who was only thereby fatted up against the day of slaughter? Could you lay your Ears to Hell Gates, you might hear many of the Grandees and Potentates, the great and Rich ones of this World Cursing all their Pomp and Bravery, and wishing they had been the most despicable of all those whom they once hated, oppress'd and injured: And as it will appear at that day that none of the enjoyments of this World are good to wicked Men; so that none of those Afflictions and Calamities which good Men suffer are Evil. *Lazarus's* Sores are not Evil, since now every Sore is turned into a Star. His lying prostrate at the Rich Misers door is not Evil, since now he lies in *Abraham's* Bosom: And this day all these intricacies of Providence will be made plain, and we shall have other apprehensions of things, than

than what we have at present. Now we call Prosperity, Riches, and Abundance, Good things; and Want, and Affliction, Evil. But when we come to consider these with relation to Eternity, the true standard to measure them by, then Poverty may be a Mercy, and Riches a Judgment; God may bless one by Afflictions, and Curse another by Prosperity: he may bestow more upon us in suffering us to want, than if he should give us the store and treasures of all the Earth. And certainly whatever our thoughts of it are now, yet within awhile this will be the Judgment of us all. When we are once lodged in our Eternal State, then we shall acknowledge that nothing in this World deserved the name of good; but as it promoted our eternal Happiness, nor of evil, but as it tends to Eternal misery.

And thus you see this grand Objection answered, and the Providence of God cleared from that injustice which we are apt peevishly to impute unto it.

Other doubts are of less moment, and therefore shall be brieflier resolved.

As Secondly, If God's Providence ordains all things to come to pass according to the immutable Law of his purpose, then what necessity is there of Prayer?

We cannot by our most fervent Prayers alter the least circumstance, or punctilio in God's Decrees. If he hath so laid the method of his Providence in his own Counsels as to prepare mercies and blessings for us, our Prayers cannot hasten, nor maturate them before their time: Or if he determine by his Providence to bring Afflictions upon us, our Prayers cannot prevent, nor adjourn them beyond their prefixed time. Now to this *Aquinas* 2. 29. 83. *Art. 2.* Answers well, that the Divine Providence doth not only ordain what Effects shall come to pass, but also by what means and causes, and in what order they shall flow. God hath appointed, as the effect it self, so the means to accomplish it. Now Prayer is a means to bring to pass that which God hath determined shall be. We do not

Pray.

Pray out of hope to alter God's Eternal purposes, but we Pray to obtain that which God hath ordained to be obtained by our Prayers : We ask that thereby we may be fit to receive what God hath from all Eternity determined to give by Prayer, and not otherwise. And therefore when we lie under any Affliction, if we languish under pain or sickness, if we are pinch'd by Want or Poverty, if we are oppress'd by the injuries and persecutions of others, Prayer is necessary, because as God by his Providence hath brought these things upon us, so likewise possibly the same Providence hath determined not to remove them, till we earnestly and fervently Pray for our deliverance from them. And therefore when God had promised great mercies to the Jews, he tells them by the Prophet *Ezek. 36. 37. Tet will I for this be enquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them.* Prayer therefore doth not incline God to bestow that which before he was not resolv'd to give, but it capacitates us to receive that which God will not give otherwise.

Thirdly, Another Objection may be this. If Providence ordereth and disposeth all the Occurrences of the World, then there can nothing fall out casually and contingently.

I Answer. In respect of God it is true, there is nothing casual nor contingent in the World. A thing may be casual in respect of particular causes ; but in respect of the universal, and first cause nothing is such. If a Master should send a Servant to a certain place, and command him to stay there till such a time, and presently after should send another Servant to the same, the meeting of these two is wholly casual in respect of themselves, but ordained and foreseen by the Master that sent them. So is it in all fortuitous events here below : They fall out unexpectedly as to us, but not so as to God ; he foresees and he appoints all the vicissitudes of things, and all the surprises of hu-
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mane Accidents. So that you see there may be contingencies in the World, though God's Providence be most particular and punctual.

Fourthly, Some may object that this would destroy the liberty of Man's will, and subject all things to a fatal necessity, even humane actions themselves. For if Man can do nothing but what God hath by his Providence fore-appointed shall be done, how then is Man free either to do, or not to do?

This question requires much more time to answer it at large than I can allow it. Some seeing it a very difficult thing to reconcile Providence and Liberty, have presumed to deny that Providence intermeddles at all in such affairs as depend upon the free will of Man. And of this opinion Tully seems to have been; for which St. Austin chastiseth him as injurious to God; when he saith, *Voluntatem dum faceret liberam, fecit Sacrilegam*. I shall not here stand to distinguish of a necessity of Coaction, and a necessity of Infallibility, and that the Providence of God doth not bring upon the will a necessity of Coaction, but only of infallibility, which very well consists with the liberty of the will. All that I shall at present answer, is, That God doth indeed efficaciously determine the will to do what it doth, yet this determination leaves it in a perfect State of liberty, because the liberty of the will doth not so much consist in indifferency to Act, or not to Act, as in a rational spontaneity. When we do what we have an appetite to do upon grounds that to us seem rational, then we Act freely. Now though God doth absolutely sway the will which way he pleaseth, yet he never forceth it contrary to its own inclinations. For that to which God determines it by his Providence seems at that present most rational to be done: and upon that representation of good in the Object, the will embraceth it and acts accordingly. So that, its Providence is not violated by any boisterous and compulsive.

compulsive sway, that the first cause hath over it, but God attracts it with such a powerful and insinuating sweetness, that though the will can incline to nothing but what it seems to have reason for; yet withall it wills nothing but what God by Providence over-rules it unto. So *Austin De Civitate Dei*, lib. 5. Cap. 9. *Nos dicimus & Deum scire omnia antequam fiant, & voluntate nos facere quicquid à Nobis non nisi volentibus fieri sentimus & novimus.* Though God foresees and decrees all things before they are, yet we do that with a free will, which we do not otherwise than willingly.

Fifthly, The last doubt and query is this: If God govern all Actions, and all Affairs, by an exact and critical Providence; how then comes it to pass that there is so much Evil, Villainy and Wickedness committed in it? The Disquisition of this is the more obscure and intricate, because it is hard to conceive how God, who is infinite goodness it self, should interest his Providence in what is so contrary to his Nature.

Now here we must affirm that there is no Evil whatsoever, whether it be of Sin, or of suffering, that comes to pass without the Providence of God. As for the Evil of punishment or suffering, it is clear, *Amos*, 3. 6. *Shall there be Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it?* But for the Evil of Sin it is not effectively from God; yet doth he by his Providence, for most Holy and wise ends, permit wicked Men to commit those sins which his Law prohibits, and his nature abhors. Though they refuse to be subject to the Written Law, yet they are and must be subject to the eternal Law of his own Councils, and there is not a sin they commit, but as his Authority condemns, and his purity hates it; so his Wisdom both suffers it to be, and over-rules it when it is, to his own ends. 'Tis true, all Men naturally are Slaves to their Lusts, but God holds their Chain in his own Hands; sometimes slackening it by
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his permission, and sometimes straitning it by his powerful restraint. And therefore to plead Providence the warrant of our Actions (a boisterous argument which of late hath been most used amongst us, until Providence it self had signally confuted it) is to plead that for the justification of our Actions without which they could not be sinful. Thus *Cain* killed his Brother by a Providence, and *Achan* Stole the Wedge of Gold, and *Judas* betrayed Christ, and the *Jews* Crucified him by a Providence, yea and all the Villainy that was ever acted under the Sun, was all brought forth out of the Cursed Womb of Mens Lusts, by the Providence of God, that is, by his permission to the Evil, and concurrence as to the Act: neither is this any stain at all to the infinite Holiness and Purity of his nature; for though we sin, if we hinder not the Commission of Sin in others when it is in our power to do it, because we are commanded and obliged to it both by the care we ought to have of his Honour, and the Charity we owe unto the Souls of others; yet no such obligation lies upon God, who may justly give Men over to their perverted inclinations. And though he can easily keep the most Wicked Man in the World, from rushing into those Sins which he daily commits, yet not being bound to interpose his power to hinder them, he permits them holily, and at last will punish them justly.

But the question is not so much whether God doth not by his Providence permit sin, as why he doth it. And *St. Austin* answers it excellently in that known saying of his; God, saith he, who is infinitely good, would never permit Evil were he not also infinitely wise, and knew how to bring good out of Evil. It is the primary object of his hatred, and that alone for which he hates wicked Men. As he is an Holy God, so he hates it, and as he is a wise God, so he permits it. And there is a twofold good for which God doth sometimes permit Evil.

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First, The manifestation of his own Glory.
 Secondly, The exercise of his Peoples Graces.

First, God by permitting sin manifests the glory of many of his Attribute. *Surely the wrath of Man shall praise thee*, saith the Psalmist, Psalm. 76. 10. Every Sin strikes at some of the Divine Attributes. One denies his Justice, another his Mercy; one his Power, another his Wisdom, and all are contrary to his Purity. But yet God hath in his own Councils such secret Screws and Wiers whereby he doth so wreath and invert these Pins, that eventually they advance what they seem directly to oppose. A Child perhaps would think when he sees an Husbandman cast Dung and Soil upon his Field, that it were but improvidently done thus to spoil the flourishing verdure and gayety of the Grass and Flowers. Why, that very Dung which covers them, makes them afterwards sprout up more fair and fresh. So God permits wicked Men to Dung the Earth with their filth, that those Attributes of his which seem to be buried under them, may afterwards spring up with the greater lustre and Glory. From hence he will reap the richer crop of praise to himself. Sometimes he glorifies the severity of his Justice, by hardening them in their Sins to their own destruction; sometimes the riches of his mercy, by calling the greatest and most flagitious Sinners to Repentance, and granting them Pardon; and always his infinite patience and forbearance in not executing present Vengeance upon those who so daringly provoke him. But although we cannot now so clearly, comprehend the advantages that God makes out of the Sins of Men, yet when we come to stand in the general Assembly at the day of Judgment; God will then comment upon, and explain the mysteries of his Providence, and make us understand how those Sins for which he will then

then condemn the World, put a gloss and shine upon his Attributes.

Secondly, God by permitting sin exerciseth the Graces of his People. The sins of others give us matter for the exercise of an Holy zeal; for God who is daily affronted by them, of an Holy Pity and Commiseration over those who like Mad-men wound, and gash, and destroy themselves: for the exercise of an Holy caution over our selves, least we be induced to sin after their Example. Our own Sins give us daily occasion to renew our Repentance to humble our Souls before God, to fortifie our resolutions, to double the guards we set upon our own hearts and ways, to watch over our selves more circumspectly, that we relapse not into the Commission of them again. Thus a true Christian may gain some advantage by his very falls. As Husbandmen make use of the very Thorns and Briars that grow in their Fields to stop the Gaps, and strengthen the fences about them, so should we improve our very Sins and failings, to fence our Souls that we lie not open to the like temptations for the future.

Thus, you see that God brings good out of all the Evil which he permits, he glorifies his own Attributes, and exerciseth his Peoples Graces. And thus you see likewise, God's Providence both Proved and Vindicated; asserted to be particular and punctual over all Occurrences that happen in the World, and cleared from all the Imputations of Injustice, that the Folly or Atheism of Man can lay against it. I shall conclude with two or three Inferences or Corollaries.

First, If the accurateness of God's Providence reach unto all the little concernments of the World, we may be well assured, that those which are the more considerable and important Occurrences of it, are all guided and governed by a special hand of Providence. And thus our Saviour himself urgeth as a strong encouragement for our

confidence and trust in God: *Not a Sparrow falls to the ground without your Father ; fear not ye therefore, you are of more worth than many Sparrows.* Yea, not an Hair of your head falls without a Providence, and think ye that the head it self shall? Certainly, God doth not like *Domitian*, busie himself about Flies, and neglect the great and weighty Affairs of his Government. And this is the reason of that question the Apostle Asks, *1. Corinth. 9. 9. Doth God take care for Oxen :* Yes, certainly he doth, nor did the Apostle intend to deny it, but thereby to inferr that certainly his care is much more particular towards us. This then may establish our hearts under any personal Sufferings or publick Calamities, when evil is upon our selves or the Nation, when Uproars and Confusions seem to reduce the World back to its Ancient Chaos, when Storms and Waves over-whelm the Ship, and we with the Disciples think our God asleep, and begin to cry out with the Psalmist, *Awake, O Lord, why sleepest thou :* Our God is not sleeping, but even then at the Helm, he Steers, he Governs and Guides all these Disorders, and will conduct the whole Tumult and Hurry of Affairs to his own Glory and our Good.

Secondly, If God's Providence hath the command and sway even over the Sins of Men, this then may be abundant matter of Peace and Satisfaction in the worst of times, when wickedness doth most of all rage and abound ; let us then consider, that if God permits them, he also can when he pleaseth Check, put a Stop and Period to their Rage and Madness. Their hands are Fettered by the adamantine Chains of a most strong Decree, which they can neither reverse nor exceed ; whatsoever they do, is but by permission ; a limited, and a limiting Permission. Our Saviour tells us, *Pilate, thou couldest have no power over me, except it were given thee from above.* The very power that Men have to Sin against God, is from God ; and therefore cer-
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tainly he will withdraw it, when it doth not work out his own ends. This was it that satisfied *David*, when *Shimei* pelted him with Stones and Curses, 2 Sam. 16. 10. *Let him alone, let him Curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David.*

Thirdly, Hence see to what we ought to ascribe it, that there is no more notorious wickedness committed in the World; when we hear of any prodigious Villainy, we are apt to wonder that ever such abominations should be incident to the Sons of Men. Wonder not at the matter as if any strange thing were happened to them, but rather wonder at the goodness of God which is the sole cause that such things as these are wonders. Were his permissive Providence as large as Mens lust are outrageous, these things would soon cease to be wonders, and become the common and ordinary practice of all Men. Why are not our Streets continually filled with Violence, Rapine, Murthers, and Out-cries? Whence is it that we enjoy our Possession, and our Lives in Safety? The wickedness of Men lies hard, and presseth upon God's restraints, and wheresoever there are any gaps in it, it breaks forth naturally and violently, and if this Dam and Mound of Divine Providence, were but broken down, it would break out till it had overflowed the whole face of the Earth, and covered it with a Deluge of Impiety and Profaneness. But that God who sets bounds to the raging of the Sea, and saith hitherto shall thy proud Waves come and no farther, doth by the same Almighty Providence, set bounds to the Lusts and Corruptions of Men, which are altogether as unruly, and curbs in the fury of their madness, which else would drown the whole World in Perdition and Destruction.

Fourthly, Lastly, This should teach us, to acquiesce and rest satisfied in every Providence of God, as that which will certainly in the end redound to his own Glory. When we see disorders and confusions abroad in the World, we are apt to.

to despond and to cry out, Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great Name, thy Honour, thy Glory lies bleeding, and suffers through the Sins of Men? Why, commit thy care to God: He will certainly so weild their Lusts, as that they shall bring about and effect his own ends. God is glorifying himself, even by these things; and why then should we be troubled? This thought kept alive on our hearts would cause us to rest satisfied amidst all the tumults we observe and hear of in the World. For though we know not how to unwind these ravelled dispensations to the bottom of his Glory, yet he can and will. There is an invisible and wise hand that moulds and fashions all; and though the parts by themselves may appear rude and unpolish'd, yet put the whole frame and series of Providence together, and that will appear most admirable and glorious.

Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, be honour and glory for ever, and ever, *Amen*.

The End of the first Sermon.
