

THE FOLLY OF SINNERS IN MAKING A MOCK AT SIN.

PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

WE are not generally to expect any connexion, either of sense or sentences, in this Book of the Proverbs. Other parts of scripture are like a rich mine; where the precious ore runs along in one continued vein: but this is like a heap of pearls; which, though they are loose and unstrung, are not therefore the less excellent or valuable.

The text which I have now read, is one of them: an entire proposition in itself, without relation to, or dependence upon, any context.

In it, we have these things considerable.

I. The character or periphrasis of wicked and ungodly men: and they are said to be such, as "make a mock at sin."

II. Here is the censure passed upon them by the all-wise God, and the wisest of men: they are fools for so doing: "Fools make a mock at sin."

I. *Their character*: they "make a mock at sin."

The words are plain and obvious: only the phrase, of making a mock, may seem subject to some ambiguity and various acceptations; and, indeed, the scripture useth it in divers senses.

Sometimes, it signifies an abusing of others, by violent and lewd actions: so we read that "the Hebrew servant,"

says Potiphar's wife, "came in unto me, to mock me:" Gen. xxxix. 17. Sometimes, it signifies an exposing of men to shame and dishonour: so the wise man tells us, "Wine is a mocker:" Prov. xx. 1. Sometimes, it signifies an imposing upon the credulity of others, things that seem incredible and impossible: so we read in Genesis, when Lot had declared to his sons-in-law the destruction of Sodom, it is said, "he seemed with them as one that mocked:" Gen. xix. 14. Sometimes, it is taken for a failing in our promises; and, thereby, defeating and frustrating the expectations of others: and, thus, Herod is said to be "mocked by the wise men:" Matt. ii. 16.

But none of these are at all congruous to our present purpose, nor applicable to the words of the text.

There are, therefore, two other acceptations of this expression, frequently occurring in the Holy Scriptures.

i. This word "mock" is commonly taken for *scoffing, or bitter taunting at others.*

Thus our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ suffered the flouts and derisions of an insolent rabble, who "set him at nought, and mocked him," as St. Luke speaks: chap. xxiii. 11. Thus those blessed martyrs and confessors, that followed his steps are said to have endured the "trial of cruel mockings," as the apostle tells us: Heb. xi. 36. And, indeed, this is the difference, between a wise re-prover and a bitter mocker: that the words of the one are like 'balm,' both soft and sanative; but the words of the other are like 'sharp swords,' which cut deep into the minds of men, and commonly make them rankle into hatred and malice. And, doubtless, there are very many spirits, which can sooner put up an injury done them, than a cutting, bitter scoff; because nothing expresseth so much contempt, nor shows so much how despicable we account them, as a fleeing gibe.

ii. Mocking may be taken for *slighting, and making no account of; looking upon things or persons, as trivial and inconsiderable.*

And thus it is used in Job, where the horse is said to "mock at fear," when he rusheth into the battle, and is not terrified: but rather enraged by all the horrors of war, when "the quiver rattleth against him, the glitter-

ing spear and the shield: " Job. xxxix. 22, 23. And so it is said of the Leviathan, Job xli. 27, 29. " He laugheth at the shaking of a spear: for he esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood."

II. In either of these two senses, may the words of the text be taken: when they tell us, they are *fools* that " make a mock at sin."

For sin may be considered, either as committed by others, or as committed by ourselves: and it is egregious folly to make a mock of either: so as to sport at the one, or to slight the other.

They are fools, that make a mock at other men's sins; so as to turn them into a matter of jest and raillery.

They are fools, that make a mock at their own sins; so as to think the commission of them a slight and inconsiderable thing.

I shall very briefly speak of the first, and so pass on unto the second particular.

i. They are fools, *that make a mock at other men's sins, so as to make them a matter of mirth and pastime.*

This, indeed, is sport for devils; all whose recreation and hellish solace, is the sin and wickedness of men. The damnation of souls is the sport of hell: and thou, who canst rejoice in their joy, deservest likewise to howl under their woes and torments.

We justly condemn it, as a most barbarous and inhuman custom amongst the ancient Romans, who brought many selected pairs of miserable men into their public theatres, only to delight the spectators with their blood and death. But this was an innocent recreation, in comparison of thine, who takest pleasure to see thy poor brother wounding and stabbing, yea damning his precious soul.

Go, laugh at a wretched man upon the rack, or upon the wheel: laugh at the odd, distorted postures of epileptics; or the convulsive motions of dying and expiring men: sport thyself with their writhed looks, and antic shapes of misery. This is far more civil, more humane, more pious, than to make those sins thy mirth, which will be thy brother's eternal woe and anguish.

What thinkest thou? Couldst thou look into hell, that place of torment: couldst thou see there all the engines

of God's justice and the devil's cruelty, set on work in the eternal torture of those, who perhaps once made as light of their own sins, as thou dost of other men's; wouldst thou think this a pleasant spectacle? Wouldst thou sport and divert thyself, to see how they wallow in fire and brimstone, or how they circle and twist themselves in unquenchable flames? Certainly, such a sight as this would affect thee with a cold horror and a shivering dread. And how then canst thou sport thyself, to see thy brother damning himself, since it would fright thee to see him damned?

Believe it, sirs, the sins, that now abound in the world, challenge our tears and pity. We ought to mourn and repent for those, who do not, who will not repent for themselves. It is a sad and a doleful sight, to see so many every where dishonour God, disgrace their natures, and destroy their souls: to see some come reeling home, disguised in all the brutish shapes that drunkenness can put upon them, ready to discharge their vomit in the face of every one they meet: others, frantic with wrath and rage, and, like a company of madmen, flinging about "firebrands, arrows, and death:" Prov. xxvi. 18: to see such woeful transformations, and the dire effects that sin and wickedness have caused in the world. Certainly, he, that can entertain himself with mirth at these things, hath not only forsworn his religion, but his humanity; and may, with much more reason, make the miseries of poor distracted people, chained up in Bedlam, to become his sport and pastime.

I know it will be here pretended, that, surely it can be no such great crime to explode and hiss sin off the stage; nay, it were a proper means to keep men from being generally so wicked, could we but make wickedness more ridiculous in them.

But, alas! vice is now-a-days grown too impudent to be laughed out of countenance: and those methods of a scurrilous mockery, which some plead for, as rendering vice ridiculous, have, I doubt, only made it the more taking and spreading; and encouraged others to be more openly sinful, by teaching them to be the more wittily vile and wicked. Few will be deterred from sinning,

when they think they shall but gratify others, by making sport for them; and stir up, not their indignation and abhorrence, but their mirth and laughter.

It is true, we read that Elijah mocked the idolatrous worshippers of Baal: and his scoffs and taunts at them were very biting and sarcastical; and cut them much deeper, than they are said to cut themselves. But this he did in a serious and zealous reproving of their sins; not in a jocular and sportive merriment.

There are two things in sin, *impiety* and *folly*. We may lawfully enough scorn the one, while we are sure to hate and detest the other: and a due mixture of both these together, scorn and detestation, are very fit to enkindle our zeal for God; and may oftentimes be a requisite temper for him, who is to reprove confident and audacious sinners. But, to laugh and sport at others' wickedness, and to make the guilt and shame of others our mirth and recreation, is both unchristian and inhuman; and we may as well laugh at their damnation, as at that which will lead them to it. Thus to make a mock at sin, is to make our very mocks to be our sins; and argues us, not only profane, but foolish: for this is to laugh and rejoice at our own stain and dishonour, and to abuse our own nature; that nature, which is common to us, as well as others; that nature, which, were it not debased with sin, renders us but "a little lower than the angels."

What a fair and glorious creature was man, before sin debased and sullied him! A friend to his God; lord of the creation; made "a little lower than the angels," being a-kin to them, though of a younger house and meaner extract; adorned with all both natural and divine perfections, till sin despoiled him of his excellency, and made him, who was almost equal to the angels, worse than the very brutes that perish, sottish and miserable. And canst thou laugh and sport thyself at that, which hath ruined and undone thee, as well as others? Thy nature is blemished and corrupted, as much as theirs. When we look abroad in the world, and observe the abominable wickednesses that are every where committed; the murders, uncleannesses, blasphemies, drunkenness, and all those prodigies of impiety, that every where swarm amongst

men; how "by swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing and committing adultery, they break out, until blood toucheth blood:" Hos. iv. 2. what else see we now in all this, but the woeful effects of our own corrupt nature? Here we see ourselves unbowelled; and discover what we ourselves are, at the price of other men's sins: for, "as in water, face answereth to face; so doth the heart of man to man:" Prov. xxvii. 19. We have, therefore, more reason to lament the sins and miscarriages of others, than to make a sport and mock at their wickedness: since we ourselves are the very same; and prone enough, without the restraining grace of God, either to imitate or exceed them.

Hence, then,

1. Consider *what an accursed, horrid thing it is, to tempt others to sin, only that thou mayest afterwards make sport with them, and raise a scene of mirth out of the ruins of their souls.*

I wish this were not as common a practice, as it is damnable. See what dreadful woes God denounceth against such, by the prophet: Hab. ii. 15, 16: "Woe unto him, that giveth his neighbour drink; that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on his nakedness;" his shame and dishonour. "Thou art filled with shame, for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory." Hence have these devils (for that name belongs to them, who do his work) invented all those artifices of excess and drunkenness, to draw on others to debauch themselves and their reason, that they may have matter to laugh at their sottish actions, and to boast how many they have made to fall under the puissance of their riots. But, certainly, if there be a hell, as it is certain there is; or if that hell were not made in vain, as it was not; these wretched sinners can expect nothing else, but to have their portion therein with those devils, whose industrious factors they have been: and, there, the cup of God's right hand, a cup of pure wrath and unmixed fury, shall be given them; and they shall be forced to drink it off, to the very dregs.

2. Hence *think how desperately impious, wicked wretches they are, who sin only to make others sport; that buffoon themselves into hell, and purchase the pleasing of others with the dreadful damnation of their own souls.*

And yet how frequent is this in the world! How many are there, that will neither spare God, nor heaven, nor scripture, nor religion, nor common modesty, if they come but in the way of a jest! Nothing, how sacred, how venerable soever it be, can escape them, if they can but turn it into drollery. I need not mention what tropes and metaphors men have found out to talk lasciviously by: almost every one is perfect in that piece of rhetoric. Nor what strange, monstrous lies some will aver openly, to raise either mirth or wonder in company. And that, which is worst of all, is, that the holy Bible is become a mere jest book with them; a common-place for wit and merry discourse; and the devil again speaks scripture out of these men's mouths: they know no more of it, than what they abuse; and all their meditations and comments upon it, are only how such and such passages may be ingeniously perverted and turned into burlesque, to heighten the mirth of the next profane company they meet. Impious wretches! that dare to violate the most tremendous mysteries of religion; and expose their God to scorn, his oracles to contempt, and their own souls to eternal perdition; only for a little grinning and sneering of a company of vain, yea mad fools, who think they commence wits by applauding blasphemy! But these wits, as they are profane and impious, so they prove themselves very fools, thus to sport themselves to death: their laughter is rather spasmodical and convulsive, than joyous: a "risus sardonicus," caused by venom and poison: they go down merrily to hell, and frolic themselves into perdition.

And, thus, I have done with the first sort of fools; namely, those, that make a sport and mock at other men's sins.

ii. The second particular is to show, that they are fools, *who make a mock at their own sins: so as to think the commission of them but a slight, inconsiderable matter.*

And here I shall show you, that wicked men do generally account sin a small, slight matter;—what it is, that

induceth and persuadeth them to account so slight of it; —their gross and inexcusable folly, for so accounting of it.

1. *That wicked men do generally account sin a small, inconsiderable matter, may appear from these three things.*

(1.) *Slight provocations and easy temptations, are sufficient to make them rush boldly into the commission of sin.*

Any slight inconsiderable gain, and transitory, fading, washy pleasure; yea, oftentimes, a mere gallantry and humour of sinning; is enough to make them venture upon any crime, that the devil or their own wicked hearts shall suggest to them. Yea, those very things, for which they would scarce suffer a hair of their heads to be twitched off, are yet forcible enough, to persuade them to lie or swear: sins, that murder and destroy their precious souls for ever! What is this, but a plain demonstration, that they account sin a mere trifle; and look upon it as a small and slight thing, to offend the most high God?

(2.) *It is very hard and difficult, to work these men to any true sorrow and compunction for their sins.*

Turn the mouth of all the terrible threatenings, that God hath denounced in his holy word against them; and let them thunder out all the woes and curses, that are in the magazine of God's justice against them; yet these wicked wretches are not startled at it; but still hold fast their confidence and boldness, when they have lost their innocency and integrity, and cannot nor will not be persuaded that God should be so angry and incensed for such small matters.

(3.) *If they are at all moved with these things, yet they think that a slight and formal repentance will suffice to make amends for all.*

They pacify their consciences, and think they appease God also, by crying him mercy; and find it as easy a matter to repent of their sins, as it is to commit them. And therefore, certainly, these men must needs have very slight thoughts of sin, who can be so easily tempted to commit it, and are so hard to be brought to repent of it: or, if they do, yet is it so slightly and superficially, as if they feared the amends would be greater than the injury.

2. I come now to the second thing: and that is, to

show *what it is, that induceth and persuadeth wicked men, to make so light of their sins.*

Now there are these two things, that make sinners to account their sins slight and trivial matters.

(1.) *Because they see so few instances of God's dread wrath and vengeance executed on sinners in this life :* and those rare ones, that are extant and visible, they impute rather to chance, than to the retribution of divine justice.

And, therefore, upon their own impunity and the impunity of others, they conclude, that certainly sin is no such heinous thing as some sour, tetical people would fain persuade the world to believe : and so they cry Peace, Peace, to themselves, though they go on in the frowardness of their hearts, adding iniquity to sin : Deut. xxix. 19. Because God so long winks at them, they conclude him blind ; or, at least, that he doth not much disallow those sins, which he doth not presently punish. Indeed, it would be somewhat difficult to answer this argument, were this present life the appointed time of recompence : no ; but God reserveth his wrath and vengeance to a more public and more dreadful execution of it, than any can be in this life. Though now thou feelest no effects of God's wrath ; yet, believe it, the storm is but all this while gathering : but, when thou launchest forth into the boundless ocean of eternity, then, and perhaps never before then, will it break upon thee in a tempest of fury, and drown thy soul in perdition and destruction.

(2.) Another thing, that makes wicked men think so slight of sin, is, that *it cannot affect God with any real injury :* for, as he is not benefited by our services, so he is not wronged by our iniquities.

It is true, could our sins reach God, could they dethrone him or rend off any of his glorious attributes from his immutable essence, there might then be great reason why God should so severely revenge them, and we for ever detest and abhor them : but since his glory is free from any stain, and his being from any wrong and prejudice, our sins are nothing to him ; nor is there any reason we should judge them heinous and provoking.

It is true, O sinner, thy sins can never invade God's

essence : that is infinitely above the attempts of men or devils. But, yet, every wicked wretch would, if he could, dethrone God. Sinners would not have him be so holy, nor so just, as he is ; not so holy in hating of their sins, nor so just in punishing of them : that is, they would not have him to be God ; for it is necessary that God should be as he is. Sinners do really contradict God's purity, rebel against his sovereignty, violate his commands, defy his justice, provoke his mercy, despise his threatenings, and hinder the manifestations of his glory to the world. And is all this nothing ? Every sinner hath so much poison and venom in him, that he would even spit it in the face of God himself, if he could reach him : but, because God is in himself secure from their impotent assaults, sin shows its spite against him in what it can ; defaceth his image wherever it comes ; abolisheth all structures and lineaments of God in the soul ; and would banish his name, his fear, his worship from off the face of the whole earth. And, therefore, thou, who art guilty of this rebellion against the great Majesty of heaven, canst thou yet think thy sins to be slight and inconsiderable ; and not worth, either the cognizance or the vengeance of the Almighty ? Believe it, the day is coming, and will not tarry, when that guilt, which thou now carriest so peaceably in thy bosom ; and which, like a frozen and benumbed serpent, stirs not, nor stings not ; shall, when heated with the flames of hell, fly in thy face, and appear in all its native and genuine deformities and horror, and overwhelm thy soul with everlasting anguish and torment : and, then, but too late, then wilt thou exclaim against thyself, as being worse than a fool or madman, for thinking so slightly of and making a mock at that, which hath eternally ruined and destroyed thee.

3. And, having thus showed you briefly, that wicked men do make light of sin, and the inducements that tempt them to it, I shall now show you *their great and inexcusable folly in so doing.*

And, certainly, never was any insensate man, never any that was wholly abandoned by his reason and understanding, guilty of a greater folly than this is ; for

(1.) *Is it not most egregious folly and madness, for any to do that, which yet they hope they shall live to repent that ever they did?*

This is such a folly, as all the extravagancies of fools could never match: and yet this, most wicked men are guilty of. They boldly rush into sin, only upon this presumptuous confidence, that they may hereafter be sorry that now they did it. In which, their folly is doubly notorious; —in that they venture upon a certain guilt, in hope of an uncertain repentance; —and in that they take up their unprofitable sins, upon so great and burdensome an interest.

[1.] *In that they venture upon a certain guilt, in hopes of an uncertain repentance.*

For, either God may cut thee off, O sinner, in the very act of that sin, which thou intendest to repent of hereafter: or, if he afford thee time for repentance, he may withhold his grace; and, in his just and righteous, but yet fearful judgment, seal thee up under hardness and impenitency, that thou shalt go on, treasuring “up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath:” Rom. ii. 5. And if either of these, through the righteous judgment of God, should happen unto thee, what a deplorable fool wilt thou prove thyself to be, that sinnest out of hopes of repentance, and of a repentance which perhaps will never be granted! Alas! how many hath God, in his signal vengeance, cut off, by some remarkable stroke; with an oath, or curse, or blasphemy in their mouths, scarce fully pronounced! How many, with their drunken vomits in their very throats! How many, while their souls have been burning with their lustful embraces, have even then been cast into hell, and burnt up with everlasting fire! Or, if vengeance should spare thee for a while, O sinner, yet thou knowest not how soon it will strike thee. It is great folly to expect the warning of a sick bed: death often surprises by sudden casualties, or by some diseases as sudden as casualties; and there are many ways of dying, besides consumptions, agues, and dropsies, the lingering forerunners of an approaching dissolution. But, if God should cast thee down upon a sick bed, he may justly visit thee, who hast neglected thy soul in thy health, with such distempers as may make thee not only unfit, but

such as may render thee incapable of doing thy last kind office for it. It is folly to expect the admonition of old age. Alas! the almond-tree doth not every where flourish: Eccl. xii. 5. and it is not one, to many thousands, that lays down a hoary head in the bed of the grave: Prov. xvi. 31. But, grant thou couldst be assured of the continuance of thy life; yet, is it not egregious folly, to sin in hope of repenting; when every act of sin will make thy repentance the more difficult, if not impossible? the older thou growest, still the more desperate is thy case: for thy sins will be the more rooted and habituated in thee, and thy heart the more hardened to resist the grace of God: so that, upon all accounts, thy repentance is most uncertain; and, the longer thou continuest in sin, still the more unlikely and improbable. And then judge, thou thyself, whether it be not extreme madness and folly, to make so light, or no account of sinning, because thou makest account of repenting.

[2.] But, suppose it were most infallibly certain, that thou shalt repent; yet *none but fools, will take up the pleasures of sin upon the sorrow, anguish, and bitterness of a true and hearty repentance.*

Dost thou seriously consider what repentance is? It is not a transitory wish; a warm sign; or a languishing "Lord, have mercy," in a distress, or on a sick bed: and yet even these cannot be without judging and condemning themselves for fools, when they sinned. No: but repentance is the breaking of the heart: a rending of the very soul in pieces. The usual preparatives to it are ghastly fears and terrors, sharp and dreadful convictions, that will even search thy very bowels, break thy bones, and burn up thy very marrow within thee. More especially doth God deal thus terribly with veteran, old, confirmed sinners; making repentance more bitter to them than to others, that they may see and confess themselves fools, in indulging themselves in their sins, in hopes of repenting for them. Say, then, when the devil and thine own lusts tempt thee to any sin; say, 'If I commit this sin, either I shall repent of it, or I shall not: if I never repent of it, as it is a hazard whether I shall or no, what is there in sin, that can recompense the everlasting pain of dam-

nation? if I shall repent, what is there in the sin, that can recompense the anguish and bitterness of repentance?' This is such an unanswerable dilemma, that all the craft and subtlety of hell can never solve. And, if we could but always keep this fixed in our minds, it were impossible that ever we should make light of sin. While thou thus arguest, thou arguest solidly and wisely: but, to say 'I will sin, because perhaps I may repent,' is quite below the meanest capacity, that ever owned the least glimpse of sense and reason.

(2.) *Is it not folly to make a mock at that, which will be sure to pay thee home, and to make a public mock and scorn of thee to the whole world?*

How many have their sins and vices made infamous among men! They are a shame and a reproach to all, that are but of a civil and sober converse; and as much lost to reputation, as they are to virtue. But however, certainly all wicked and ungodly men shall be made a public scorn and derision to all the world, both God, angels, and men. God will mock at them: he tells them so expressly: for so the wise man speaks: Prov. i. 25, 26. "Because ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh: when you fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh like a whirlwind." All their sins and deeds of wickedness shall then be exposed to the open view and contempt of saints and angels, who shall subscribe to the righteous doom of their condemnation. Devils will then upbraid their folly; and triumph, that they have outwitted them into the same most miserable and deplorable state with themselves. Think now, O sinner, how wilt thou be able to hold up thy guilty head, and thy amazed and confounded face? Whither, oh whither canst thou cause thy shame to go, when men and angels shall point and hiss at thee; and thy folly shall be proclaimed as loud as the last trumpet, which heaven and earth and all the world shall hear?

(3.) *Is it not the foolishness of folly itself, to make light of that which will for ever damn thee?*

Art thou such an idiot, as to account hell a trifle, and damnation itself a slight matter? What is it then, that

makes thee think sin so small and trifling a thing? For hell, and death, and eternal wrath are certainly entailed upon it. Consider what a most cutting reflection it will be to thee in hell, when thou shalt for ever cry out upon and curse thyself for a wretched fool, that ever thou shouldst make light of those sins which would damn thee. What was there in them, for which thou hast forfeited heaven and everlasting happiness; but only a little impure, brutish pleasure? And, now that it is passed and gone, what remains of them; but only the bitter remembrances? Certainly, thou wilt, ten thousand times, and for ever, call thyself an accursed fool for so doing, when it is too late to help it. Be persuaded therefore now, to be wise betimes for your souls: else you also will, when there is no redress, curse your own folly, that hath brought upon you all those extremities of woe and anguish.