

THE
NATURE AND NECESSITY OF REGENERATION,
OR
THE NEW BIRTH.

JOHN iii. 5.

Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

THE former part of this chapter, in which division these words fall, reports the conference that passed betwixt Christ and Nicodemus. Their discourse is concerning the great mystery of the new birth; of which this night-disciple had but a dark and midnight conception. In the third verse, our Saviour startles him; and asserts, as he doth again in the text, the absolute necessity of this great change: "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In the verse following, Nicodemus objects against it; and thinks to refute the second birth, by such pitiful doting arguments, as might alone prove him twice a child: "Can a man," says he, "be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? No doubt but this learned rabbi thought he had brought a gravelling instance against this new doctrine of the new birth. Such

ignorant pieces are the most wise and learned, when they attempt by reason to search out those mysterious effects of God's Spirit, which cannot be known otherwise than by illumination and experience. Our Saviour, therefore, in the words of the text, takes off this gross and ill-conceited objection : and tells him, that he speaks not of a carnal, but of a spiritual regeneration and birth ; whereby we are begotten again to a lively hope, and are made the children of God : and so silenceth those impertinent impossibilities, on which Nicodemus insisted : " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God."

These words are a description of a Christian's new-birth : which is here set forth both by the efficient cause of it, water and the Spirit : and also by the absolute necessity of it unto eternal life ; without this no man can enter into the kingdom of God, that is, into heaven, the place where the throne of God's kingdom is established.

" To be " born of water and of the Spirit," may admit of a double interpretation : for either,—first, by water is meant baptism ; the element being put for the ordinance, which is the sacrament of our regeneration : and thus you have it in Eph. v. 26. where the church is said to be sanctified and cleansed, through " the washing of water. There is, indeed, a baptismal regeneration, whereby all, that are made partakers of that ordinance, are, according to scripture language, sanctified, renewed, and made the children of God, and brought within the bond of the covenant : but all this is but after an external manner ; as being, in this ordinance, entered members of the visible church. This external regeneration by water entitles none to eternal life ; but as the Spirit moves upon the face of these waters, and doth sometimes secretly convey quickening virtue through them.

Now if you take this being " born of water " to signify external regeneration in the ordinance of baptism, the question will be, how it can be verified, that, without this, none can " enter into the kingdom of God."

It was a mistake of some of the fathers, and among

them of St. Austin, who excluded all, both infants and adult, out of heaven, that died without baptism; although by no default of their own, but by an insuperable necessity; unless they were such as died martyrs, their being baptized with their own blood, as St. Austin speaks, serving them instead of baptism by water. But this opinion is unwarrantable, and contrary to the most received judgment of the church in the primitive times: who, if they had thought this baptismal regeneration was indispensably necessary to salvation, would not certainly have stinted and confined the administration of it only to two times of the year, Easter and Pentecost; thereby to bring upon themselves the blood of their souls, that should in that interim have died without baptism. Therefore that opinion was rather private, than the public judgment of the church, though learned men were of it.

Therefore, if you will understand baptism by being "born of water," if it be true that none are saved that are not "born of water;" we must distinguish of being unavoidably and inevitably deprived of the opportunity of baptism, and a wilful contempt of it: and, in this latter sense, must our Saviour's assertion be understood. He, that contemns being born by baptism, and out of that contempt finally neglects being baptized, shall never "enter into the kingdom of God:" but, for others, whom not contempt, but necessity, deprives of this ordinance, the want of it shall not in the least prejudice their salvation.

Secondly. To be "born of water and of the Spirit," may denote to us the manner of the Spirit's proceeding in the work of regeneration. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit:" that is, except he be renewed by the Holy Ghost, working as water; leaving the same effect upon the soul in cleansing and purifying it from sinful defilements, as water doth upon the body in washing off contracted dirt and filth. Nor, indeed, is this manner of expression strange to the holy scripture: for John baptist, St. Mat. iii. 11. speaking of Christ, tells them, that he should baptize them "with the Holy Ghost and with fire;" that is, he should baptize them with the Holy Ghost, working as fire: for, as fire eats out and consumes the

rust and dross of metals ; so those, that are baptized with the Spirit, are as it were plunged into that heavenly flame, whose searching energy devours all their dross, tin, and base alloy. So then, here also, to be "born of water and of the Spirit," may be no more than to be born of the Spirit, purifying the soul, even as water purifies the body. So variously is the efficiency of the Holy Ghost, in the work of regeneration, expressed in scripture language : it consumes our dross as fire, and washeth off our filth as water.

These two interpretations may be given of the text, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit : " that is, except he be externally regenerated by baptism, when he hath such an opportunity to receive that ordinance, that nothing but his own wilful contempt of it can hinder it ; and be also internally regenerated by the Spirit of God working a mighty and thorough change upon his heart : he shall never be saved. Or, again, it may be understood thus : " Except a man be renewed by the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, cleansing the inward man from sin, as water cleanseth the outward man from filth, he shall never enter into heaven." In either of which senses you take it, the words will well bear it.

I. Having given you this explication of the words, for the more full and clear prosecution of this doctrine of regeneration, it will be expedient to show you,

What this new-birth or regeneration is.

And that I shall do both *negatively* and *positively*.

i. *Negatively.*

And, here, to be born again or new-born, *is not to have any essential change pass upon the essential parts of human nature.*

The essential parts of human nature I call the soul and body ; which remain the same, for substance, after regeneration, as they were before. Indeed Flagicus Illyricus, that held original sin to be of the substance of the soul, was driven by force of consequence also to affirm, that regeneration made a change in the substance and essence of the soul : and the Familists, of late, have entertained strange and blasphemous conceits concerning regeneration, as if it were a metamorphosis of the creature into the very

being and nature of God ; making that change, that is wrought thereby, to be not so much a new creature, as a new deity. But these are wild and uncouth fancies : for, if regeneration wrought any such change upon man, as that he is not now the same person regenerated, as he was unregenerated ; how doth the apostle say, 1 Tim. i. 13. " I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ? " then also grace, instead of converting, destroyed the sinner ; and, consequently, no sinner yet was or shall be saved. But enough of this. Grace, therefore, makes no such physical change upon the natural being or essence of man : but the understanding, will, and affections are the same for nature and essence, in the regenerate as in the unregenerate ; but only they are rectified and endowed with infused habits.

2. *Regeneration is not a conversion from an idolatrous and an erroneous way of worship, to the profession and acknowledgment of the true faith.*

Much less, then, is it not a conversion from one sect and party of Christians to another ; as many ignorant persons suppose, that, when they are won over from one truth it may be to an error, presently they think they are converted by it, because they join in with another party of Christians. But there may be proselytes gained over to the church, either from heathenism or from popish idolatry, whose souls notwithstanding may never be gained over unto Christ. As travellers, that come into a foreign land, still remain subjects to their natural lord : so these may come into the church, which is the kingdom of Christ upon earth ; and yet still remain slaves to their natural lord, the devil. Indeed, I find in scripture, that, when Christ and his apostles laboured to convert the Jews or others unto the profession and acknowledgment of Christ, and to bring them to a thorough work of regeneration, the chief thing that they insisted on was, to persuade them to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Now, though this dogmatical faith is not regeneration, yet it was then almost an infallible test of it ; and, to persuade them to believe that Jesus was the Christ, was to prevail upon them to be truly and really converted. It was seldom seen among those primitive Christians,

where there were no carnal respects nor outward advantages that could commend the Gospel to the secular interests of men; when the only reward of professing Christ, was reproaches, persecution, and martyrdom: seldom was it seen, that any were won over from heathenism or Judaism, to make profession of the despised name of Christ, but such, as were inwardly renewed by that almighty grace, that can conquer all the despites and affronts of the world: few were so foolish as to profess Christ in hypocrisy, when that hypocrisy would endanger their own lives; and yet, because it was but in hypocrisy, it could gain them no benefit by his death. Therefore it is, that the scripture speaks of those, that made a profession of the name of Christ, as if they were regenerated, because it was then almost an infallible mark of it: thus you have it in 1 John iv. 15. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God:" so, again, in chap. v. 1. "He, that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." But now, when the very name of a Christian is become a title of honour, and the same punishments do now attend the denying of Christ that then attended the acknowledgment of him, men may indeed be called by his name that never were effectually called by his grace, and may make a profession of the true faith and yet remain Christian infidels.

3. *The reformation of a dissolute and debauched life, falls short of this spiritual new birth.*

This is that, with which many do soothe up themselves, when they reflect back upon the wild extravagances of their former times: how outrageously wicked they were; drunkards, unclean, riotous, blasphemers, swearers, and the very worst of sinners: and, now that they find themselves deadened to these things, and that they are grown men of stayed and sober lives and conversations, straight they conclude, that, certainly, such a great change as this is could never be made on them otherwise than by a renewing work of the Spirit: and, yet, this amendment there may be, where there is no regeneration. Men may gather up their loose and dissolute lives within the compass of civility and moral honesty, and yet they may be utter strangers to a work of true and saving grace: and this

may be ascribed to two grounds; partly, to the convictions of God's Spirit awakening natural conscience to see the horror, and to foresee the danger, that is in such infamous sins; and, partly, to prudence, gained from the frequent experiences that they have had of the manifold inconveniences brought upon themselves by such sins formerly. These two may make a great amendment in men's lives and conversations; and, yet, both these convictions and prudence fall far short of true regenerating grace.

All the seeming amendment of such men's lives may be effected two ways: either by changing their sins, or by tiring out the sinner.

(1.) The life may seem to be reformed, when men only change their rude and boisterous sins, for such as are more demure and sober.

When men, from riotous, grow worldly; when from profane and irreligious, they grow superstitious and hypocritical; from atheists, to be heretics; when men make this change of boisterous and roaring sins, for those that are more demure and sober, they are apt to think that this change must be a change of their natures: whereas, indeed, it is but only a changing and bartering of their sins; and usually it is such a change too, that, though it render the life more inoffensive, yet it makes the soul more incurable. St. Austin, long since, hath told us, that vices may give place, when yet no virtue takes it; but one vice gives place to another.

(2.) The life may seem to be reformed, when men are only tired out with their sins, or have outgrown their sins.

There are sins, that are proper and peculiar to such a state and season of a man's life, upon the altering of which they vanish and disappear. The sins of youth drop off in declining age, being then incongruous. This is that, which deceives many: when they look back upon those numberless vanities that they have forsaken and shaken off, and find how deadened their hearts are to those sinful ways which before they delighted in, they conclude, that, certainly, this great change must needs proceed from true grace; whereas, indeed, they do not leave their sins but their sins leave them, and drop off from them as rotten fruit from a tree: the faculties of their souls and the mem-

bers of their bodies, that before were instruments of sin unto unrighteousness, are it may be blunted and become unserviceable. This maim of nature is far from regenerating grace : that doth not disable a man from the service of sin ; but only sets him free from it.

4. *To be endowed with eminent gifts and with the common graces of the Spirit, is not to be regenerated.*

These may be bestowed upon the worst of men. There is grace, that renders a man lovely in God's eyes ; and there is grace, that renders a man lovely only in men's eyes. Of both these, one and the same Spirit is the author. In some, the Spirit sanctifies the heart ; and, in others, it only illuminates the head. Balaam was irradiated with the supernatural light of prophecy. Judas was dignified with the extraordinary office of the apostleship ; and sent out to work miracles, together with the rest of the apostles.

Yea, so much are the gifts of the Spirit, the operations of the Spirit, that they are, in a peculiar manner, called the Holy Ghost himself. See this in Acts i. 4. Christ commands his disciples there, to wait at Jerusalem " for the promise of the Father : " that is, for the gifts of the Spirit ; for that was the promise of the Father ; and he tells them, in the eighth verse, that they should " receive power after that the Holy Ghost was come upon them : " certain it is, that they had already received the Holy Ghost, in the sanctifying graces of it : we cannot think that they were in an unregenerate, unconverted estate, after Christ's death ; but they had not as yet received the plentiful effusion of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, of speaking with tongues, of a bold and ready utterance, of working of miracles, and the like, which were then necessary to qualify them for the successful spreading of a new doctrine. And this is more clear in Acts viii. when Philip had preached at Samaria, it is said he converted many, in verse 12. so that, doubtless, many of them had received the Spirit already, in its saving graces : and yet it is said, in ver. 16. that the Holy Ghost was not yet fallen upon any of them ; that is, though they were converted, yet they were not endowed with those wonderful gifts of the Spirit before mentioned, which

afterwards they received. Had we been among them, and heard them speak of Christ and gospel mysteries with affections and convictions beyond natural capacities; had we heard them speak unstudied languages, and seen them working miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead; could we have thought, that it was possible for any of those, who were so favoured and filled by the Holy Ghost, to be yet in an unregenerate state, in a state of wrath and damnation? Yet, that there might be some of them so is clear: for the apostle speaks of the like; such, who had "tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and yet might fall away, Heb. vi. 4, 6: that is, there were those, in those primitive times, that had an effusion of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured out upon them; of speaking with tongues, of a bold and ready utterance, of working of miracles, and the like: and yet such as these, that had tasted of these heavenly gifts, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, fell away, that is, they were never truly regenerate.

And, certainly, if these extraordinary gifts might be found separate from true grace, much more may those inferior gifts, that the Spirit now dispenseth among Christians be without true regenerating grace. A man may discourse of spiritual mysteries copiously and clearly: he may have gifts of knowledge and utterance: he may preach with evidence and demonstration, and pray with enlargement and affection; and yet, notwithstanding all this, be an utter stranger to a saving work of grace. Gifts prove nothing: these gifts may be but the gilding of a rotten post, the varnish of a corrupt heart. As it was a custom of old to crown those beasts' heads with garlands of flowers, that were ordained to be a sacrifice; so God may sometimes crown the heads of wicked men with flowery parts and gifts, whom yet he intends to make a sacrifice of to his wrath and justice.

5. A civil and harmless demeanor is not this state of regeneration.

There are many, that are of a good nature, that live blamelessly as to the world, and that nearly resemble grace: such as St. Paul was; who speaking of himself

saith, touching the law, he was blameless; and such was the young man in the gospel, that came to Christ and demanded what further lesson he should take out; having obeyed all the commands, as he thought: and, yet, this also is short of the regenerating grace of the Spirit, and argues only a sweet disposition, not a gracious heart.

And thus you see how easily men may mistake themselves in the great work of regeneration, upon which depends their eternal happiness; for, "Except a man be born again, he shall never see the kingdom of God:" and yet it is too much to be feared, that many, yea very many, rest upon these things; and think the great determining change is certainly wrought upon them, only because they are morally honest, or eminently gifted, or much reformed, or gained over to the profession of the truth with such a sect or party of professors; whereas, indeed, the new birth consists in none of all these things.

ii. Briefly, therefore, to inform you *what it is*, you may take it thus;—*Regeneration is a change of the whole man, in every part and faculty thereof, from a state of sinful nature, to a state of supernatural grace; whereby the image of God, that we defaced and lost by our first transgression, is again, in some good measure, restored.*

1. Now, as every science hath its proper terms, that are as so many keys to unlock the mysteries contained in it: so, especially, divinity abounds with terms, that are peculiar to its own doctrine; and, in no one point more, than in this of the great change that a sinner undergoes, when he is translated from a state of nature to a state of grace.

That grace, that concurs unto this great change, is of two sorts: either such as alters the relations, wherein we stand unto God; or such as alters the dispositions and habits of our souls.

Of the former sort, are election, which is antecedent to our faith; and reconciliation, justification, adoption, and mystical union, which are consequents unto it. Of these graces it is not my business now to treat, because they lodge only in the breast of God; and their formal effect is not a supernatural infusing of any new habits or principles, but only of new relations. When we speak of a person

justified and adopted, the true adequate notion of these terms doth not declare how his heart is changed towards God, but, if I may so speak, how God's heart is changed towards him; not that he stands otherwise affected unto God, but otherwise related to God, than formerly: of a guilty malefactor, he becomes acquitted and accepted, by the grace of justification; and, of an alien, he becomes a son and heir, by the grace of adoption.

But then there are other graces, that are inherent in us, and work a mighty change in our moral habits and principles; and whereby we also, though not so properly, are denominated gracious. God is denominated gracious, by the grace of justification, adoption, mystical union, and election: and we are denominated gracious, by the habitual graces, that his Spirit infuseth into us and worketh in us. And these are every where besparkled up and down in the scripture, where it speaks of faith, love, patience, self-denial, meekness, knowledge, temperance, and the rest of them: these, as so many stars, ought continually to shine forth in a Christian's life; and, though they may appear very differently; some obscure and cloudy and others bright and glittering, some at one season setting and others at another season rising, yet they all make up but one constellation, whereby we are "translated," as the scripture speaks, "out of darkness into marvellous light."

Now the framing of this complexion or body of grace in the heart, is that, which we call regeneration; it being a fixed constellation of all the several graces of the Spirit in the heart.

The scripture gives it divers other appellations. It is called the "new man," in Eph. iv. 24: the "new creature:" Gal. vi. 15: a transformation into the image of God: 2 Cor. iii. 18: a participation "of the divine nature:" 2 Pet. i. 4: and, in other places, too long to be insisted on now, it is called conversion, effectual calling, sanctification, and renovation: and sometimes, too, it is termed by the name of two principal graces, the two greatest limbs of the new man, faith and repentance, which are often put for the whole work of regeneration.

All these expressions set forth the same work of grace

upon the heart, though they may be understood under different notions. The new man denotes the greatness and entireness of the change. The new creature denotes that almighty power, whereby that entire change is wrought. The image of God and the divine nature denote that conformity, that is thereby made in us to the holy will and nature of God. Effectual calling and conversion denote our returning to God, after our wandering and straying from him. Sanctification denotes that influence, which this great change hath to set us apart for God from common uses; for sanctification, in propriety of speech, signifies a separation of a person or thing from profane and ordinary uses to the service and glory of God: indeed sanctification doth, in strictness of speech, differ from regeneration, though commonly we use them promiscuously; for regeneration is the implanting of the habits and principles of grace, but sanctification is properly the strengthening and increasing of them: it is the progress, that a holy soul makes, when it passes on from one degree of grace to another.

Regeneration is, in nature, before justification; but sanctification follows it.

And, hence, we may observe the order, in which the apostle rangeth them in that famous place, that climax, in Rom. viii. 29, 30. where every grace is a round of the 'scala cœli,' that Jacob's ladder, whereby we ascend up to heaven. It is a place, if any in the book of God, that deserves our most serious thoughts. Says the apostle, "Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate." If you ask wherein God's prescience and foreknowledge differ from predestination, a question that hath caused much strife, I answer,—prescience here respects the end: predestination respects the means, how to obtain it. So that the sense is this;—whom God foreknew that he would save, them he did predestinate to the means of salvation. "He hath predestinated us," says the apostle, "that we might be conformed to the image of his Son:" that is, he predestinated them to grace, which is the way and means to glory. So, then, where it is said whom God foreknew, that signifies God's purpose and intention of saving some: where it is said, those he did predestinate,

that signifies God's purpose of calling those, whom he did intend to save, unto the knowledge of his Son, and to the means whereby he might save them. It follows, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called:" that is, with an effectual call, which is the same with regeneration: whom he predestinated, them he regenerated; and "whom he thus called," or regenerated, "them he also justified." Here you see justification is put after regeneration, though, indeed, in order of nature, it follows regeneration: for we are justified by faith; now faith is part of that new nature, that is bestowed upon us in regeneration: we are justified by faith; wherefore faith is before our justification, and is part of our regeneration. The apostle now proceeds to the last link of this golden chain: "Whom he justifies, them he also glorifies: where we may observe, that it is at least probable, that the glorification, that the apostle here speaks of, may not be the glory of heaven, because he speaks of it as a thing already past and done; whom he hath justified he hath glorified: we may, without offering violence to the words, interpret it of sanctification; whom he hath justified, them he hath glorified, that is sanctified: so that glorification here is no more than sanctification; for sanctification is also called glory, in 2 Cor. iii. 18. We also "beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" from glory to glory, that is, from one degree of sanctification to another; for, indeed, holiness, that is our sanctification, and the glory of heaven, are but one and the same thing for substance, differing in degrees and circumstances.

So much now for the names, whereby this great change is called.

2. Let us now proceed to consider *the nature* of it.

Which, because it is a mutation of the whole man, we cannot better do, than by considering the terms, both from which and to which, this mutation or change passeth.

Let us, therefore, first take a view what man is, in his unregenerate state; and, then, behold him, as he is new, and as he bears the glorious lineaments of God's image upon his soul.

(1.) In his unregenerate state.

I shall not consider him, as he is obnoxious to divine wrath and vengeance; for, so, he is a child of wrath, an heir of hell and perdition. But I shall consider him, as he stands alienated from the divine holiness and purity; and as he is despoiled of all those choice perfections, wherewith his nature was at first endowed.

And, here, give me leave to represent to your eyes a wretched and sad spectacle. Whose bowels cannot but yearn, to read that description, which the prophet makes, Ezek. xvi. 4, 5. of a poor, forsaken infant, swathed in its own blood, cast out into the open field, helpless for its weakness, and loathsome for its deformity? This is the very emblem of what we ourselves are, in our unregeneracy; cast out to the loathing of our persons, rolling ourselves in our own filth, and impotent that we cannot help ourselves.

But I shall not stand to represent it to you in generals. To come therefore to particulars, I shall give you these following positions; which may clear up, both wherein consists the state of unregeneracy, and also the misery of such a state.

[1.] The corruption of an unregenerate state consists, in blotting out the divine image; that resemblance of God, which was stamped upon our souls in our first creation.

What the image of God is, I shall more clearly show you afterwards; and how it is again restored to us in regeneration. In the mean time, it may suffice, that, by the image of God, I mean those spiritual habits of knowledge and holiness, that were conferred on Adam in his first creation, and on us in him. These habits were natural to him, and concreated with him; whereby his understanding was raised to a clear and satisfying knowledge of divine truths, and his will inclined to a free and unforced performance of divine and spiritual actions: in this consisted a great part of the image of God. It consisted also, in the harmonious subordination of the inferior faculties to the superior; the will being subject to the dictates of the understanding, and the affections subject to the commands and sovereignty of the will. But, now, all this is lost; in our unregenerate state we are deprived of it; and there is nothing but ruin and an undigested chaos left in an unregenerate soul. Darkness covers the face of

the understanding, that great deep; and disorders and tumults sway the affections contrary to the guidance of the will, and these sway the will contrary to the dictates of reason: so that it is a state of mere confusion, disorder, and rebellion; as of man against God, so also of man against himself. It is a state of utter blindness and impotency: When we were weak, then God sent his Son in the likeness of flesh. Yea, it is not only a state of weakness, but it is also a state of spiritual death: "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:" Eph. ii. 1.

[2.] The corruption of an unregenerate state consists, in our aversion from God, and in our inordinate conversion to the creature.

And this necessarily follows, upon the loss of God's image. The soul of man is still an active, busy creature; and must still be putting itself forth in actions suitable to its own nature. Now while it did enjoy God's image, it had power to point every motion of the soul to God, and to fix upon God both as the object and end of all its actions, and that made them all to be holy and divine: but, being now deprived of the image of God, the soul grovels here below; and, instead of aspiring unto God, pitches its affections and thoughts only upon the creature: and this becomes sin and misery to it; not because it affects the creature simply, but because it affects the creature in an inordinate manner, that is, without affecting God the Creator. Briefly and plainly, the soul must have an inclination and propension, one way or other: to incline to the obeying and loving of God, it cannot now, without the image of God, that should raise up the affections of the soul to a spiritual pitch. Now this image of God we are deprived of, and that justly too, by our fall; and, therefore, now the whole bent and inclination of the soul, that ought to be carried out to God, but cannot, pitcheth upon what it can, and that is upon the creature; those things, that please the carnal sensual appetite, and that in an inordinate manner, to the neglect and slighting, yea to the contempt and hating, of God. And this is the state of the soul in its unregeneracy.

[3.] This corruption of an unregenerate state is spread

over every power and faculty of the soul ; not one escaping the contagion of it.

But, yet, as the sea is called by divers names, according to the divers countries and shores that it flows along by ; so also this corruption of our nature is termed diversely, according to the divers faculties and powers of the soul that it hath depraved. In the understanding, it is called blindness and darkness ; in the will, stubbornness and perverseness : in the affections, it is called disorder, sensuality, and irregularity : and yet, still, it is the same corruption of unregeneracy in every one of them, the same body of sin and death ; though stiled thus diversely, according to the divers faculties that it doth infect.

[4.] This corruption of an unregenerate state is unweariedly working out itself, in every act and motion of our souls.

Not so much as one good thought could ever yet escape to heaven free from it. It is as a corrupt fountain, continually sending forth corrupt and bitter streams ; and, though these streams take several courses, and wander severally into several ways and channels, yet they all taste of the same brackishness : so, though the soul is various in its actions, yet all its actions have a taint and relish from the same corruption, that corruption that hath tainted the fountain.

[5.] Hence it follows, that, whatsoever an unregenerate man doth, it becomes sin to him.

And that, whether you consider his religious, or his civil and ordinary actions. If you take the most splendid and gorgeous duty of an unregenerate man, when it is performed with the most pomp, when his affections are most upon the wing, when he is in the highest elevation of soul ; yet this glittering duty is nothing else but the steam and reeking of corruption, and so becomes offensive unto God, there being nothing of grace in it to perfume it. Hence the psalmist speaks, in Psalm cix. 7. " Let his prayer become sin : " and, says the wise man, " The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord ; " Prov. xv. 8. The best duties of unregenerate men are no better, in God's account and acceptance, than abomination, the " cutting off a dog's neck," or as " the offering

up of swine's blood," or whatever else the soul of God doth most abhor; and how then might such unregenerate men wish themselves rather stocks or stones, senseless and unacted things, than such as they are, men of vigorous and active principles; since every imagination of their hearts, and every motion of their souls, is only evil before God! There is nothing, that such men do, in the whole course of their lives, but, at the last day, it will be found in God's register-book among the catalogue of their sins. Yea, even their commendable and necessary actions: "The plowing of the wicked," says the wise man, "is an abomination to the Lord:" this man eats and drinks, plows and sleeps, and hath done so many thousands of such and such natural actions; but he hath done them in a state of unregeneracy, and therefore they stand all upon the account for so many thousand sins. Nay, he hath prayed so often, and heard so often, made so many prayers, and heard so many sermons, and done many good works; but yet, all this while, he was in an unconverted estate: these, therefore, are set down in God's day-book, in black; and they are registered among those sins, that he must give an account for; not for the substance of the actions themselves, but because they come from rotten principles, that defile the best actions which he can perform. His eating, as well as his gluttony; his drinking, as well as his drunkenness; his converse, negociation, and trafficking, as well as his covetousness, and inordinate love of the world; are all set down, and reckoned by God for sins, and such sins as he must reckon for with God.

I speak not these things to discourage any, that may suspect themselves to be in an unconverted estate, from the performance either of the duties of religion, or the necessary and civil affairs of this life: you cannot possibly sit still and do nothing: your thoughts will be working: or, if you do sit still and do nothing, yet your idleness will be a sin. But I speak this only to show the absolute necessity of regeneration; for, without this inward principle of grace, no action, how moral, how specious, how religious or necessary soever, but will be catalogued down in God's day-book among the number of men's sins.

(2.) Having now considered the 'terminum a quo,'

from which we pass to this great change, let us now consider what it is, that we acquire by the term to which we pass. And that I told you, when I gave you the description of regeneration, is the image of God. Of this I spake somewhat before, but shall now do it more fully.

The image of God is taken, in scripture, in two senses. First, for the essential and co-eternal image of God the Father. And, so, Christ is called the image of God, in Col. i. 15. He "is the image of the invisible God," says the apostle. So also, Heb. i. 3. He is "the brightness of his glory," that is, of God's glory; and he is "the express image of his person." Indeed, it is infinitely past our reach, to conceive what a wonderful impression that was, that stamped the image of the Father upon the Son, in such a sort, as to be the same in substance and duration with the original itself.—Secondly, therefore, to come nearer to our purpose, the image of God is taken sometimes, in scripture, for that resemblance of God, that is upon the soul of man. And so it is said, in Gen. i. 27. that "God created man in his own image." Now, to be this image, implies two things;—first, a likeness and similitude, that man bears unto God:—secondly, it implies, that God made himself the pattern and exemplar, when he drew this likeness of himself upon man. Two things, or two persons may be like each to other, which yet properly are not said to be the one the image of the other, unless the one be made purposely to resemble and represent the other: as milk is said to be like milk, but yet one part is not said to be the image of the other. So, then, when it is said, "God made man after his own image," it implies a likeness in him unto God; and it implies also, that this likeness is wrought in him by God, purposely to resemble him.

Now, here, to clear our passage, I shall consider three things;—wherein the image of God consisted, in which man was, in his primitive state, created:—what parts of that image are lost and defaced by the fall; and what of it still remains upon the soul;—and what of that image is again renewed and restored, in our regeneration.

[1.] What that primitive image of God was, in which he created man.

I answer negatively and positively.

1st. Negatively. The image of God doth not consist in any corporeal resemblance of him, or bodily similitude to him.

For our bodies, though they are of an admirable composure, yet they carry in them no resemblance of God, who is a spirit, and who is "the God of the spirits of all flesh." The learned do well distinguish, betwixt '*imago*,' and '*vestigium Dei*.' There are '*quædam vestigia Dei*,' 'certain footsteps of God,' printed upon every creature; by the tracing of which footsteps, we may find out his infinite "power and godhead," as the apostle speaks. Thus, there is not the least pile of grass but points upwards to God, as its wise and powerful Maker: there is not the least leaf, but hath written upon it the wisdom and power of God. Every creature, brute and inanimate, bears the print of God's footsteps upon it. And, of this rank, are our bodies; bearing upon them '*quædam vestigia*,' some footsteps and tracks of God: and, by how much the more wonderfully they are framed and organized, in which respect the psalmist saith, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made;" by so much the more discernible are the footsteps of God seen in our bodies, than in the bodies of other creatures: but yet this is not sufficient to make them images of God; for they have not in themselves any resemblance of the divine nature, neither are they spirits nor intellectual substances as God is; and, therefore, though they are said to bear the print of God's footsteps, yet they are not said to bear God's image: indeed there were some, that were called Anthropomorphites, that fancied God to be corporeal; and that ascribed to him all members in propriety, that the scripture ascribed to him in condescension, as hands, head, eyes, and feet, and the like; and, consequently, thought that God framed man's body, according to the image of his own: but this is a stupid error; and a heathen orator had more true information in this point, when he tells us, that the virtues of man make him to be more like to God, than his shape doth: so, then, it is not the body of man, that is the image of God.

2dly. Positively. And so we may take notice, that the image of God consists,

(1st.) In such perfections, as are spiritual : I say, in such spiritual perfections, as are essential and necessary to man as man : such as the rational soul itself, together with those powers and faculties that are necessarily subjected and seated in it : as the understanding, will, and affections.

For, by these, man may be said to bear the image of God, because these have in them some faint glimpses and shadows of the divine essence. The soul is a spirit ; and so is God. The soul is an intellectual and free agent ; and so is God. Indeed the resemblance betwixt God and us, even in this very thing in which we bear some resemblance of God, is infinitely unsearchable and great. Mark that place, for the confirmation of this, in Gen. ix. 6. " He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed : for in the image of God made he man." Wherein lies the force of this reason ? Do not all affirm, that man lost the image of God, by his sin and fall ? Or, did God hereby intend to secure the lives of the regenerate, that have this image again restored to them ? No, but the weight of the reason lies in this, that every man, whether regenerate or wicked, still bears the image of God, even in this, that he hath a spiritual soul, and that he hath an intellectual mind, that he hath a free and self-determining will : and therefore, whosoever murders man deserves death, because he murders God in ' effigies : ' he murders the image of God. This now is one part of the image of God ; the spiritual soul, and the rational powers and faculties of it.

(2dly.) Another part of God's image consists in those habitual perfections of man's human nature, that were not essential to him : but rather ornamentive ; and necessary, not simply to his being, but rather to his well-being.

To make man a rational creature, it was simply necessary to breathe into him a rational soul ; and it was also necessary, that that rational soul should be endowed with faculties, with understanding, will, and affections.

But, over and above these necessary things, God gave

him righteous habits, that might rectify those faculties : and these are three.

[1st,] God darted into his understanding a clear and exact knowledge ; not only of those things that are natural, but of those things that are divine also.

Of his knowledge in things that are natural, we have a clear instance : when as all creatures passed before Adam as servants to do homage to their lord, he was able, by a transient view and intuition of them, to give them all names according to their several natures. And his knowledge of the divine nature appeared hence, because his love of him was perfect : and how could he love God, if he had not known him ? Now, in this particular of knowledge, man nearly resembled God, in his first estate : for God's infinite delight is in the knowledge and contemplation of himself, and of his works : and so also was man's. But yet this knowledge was not omniscency ; for there were many things, doubtless, that man was then ignorant of : but he knew whatever was necessary and expedient for him to know ; and that was sufficient for the happiness of his estate, and for the end for which he was created.

[2dly.] Man's will was endowed with a habitual prudence and inclination to all good.

There were then no such bandyings in his will, as now the holiest saints complain of : but the will clasped about every good and holy object, that was presented to its choice ; and that it did, freely and fully, with entireness and delight.

[3dly.] His affections also were all holy, and all of them subject to his holy will.

Now, the best complain, it is seldom that they will what is good : and when they have a will to it, yet they cannot do what they would : the good, which they would do, they cannot do. But in our first blessed estate, there was a harmonious obedience, in all the passions and in all the faculties of the soul, unto the command of the will, without the least tumult or disorder. There were, indeed, motions of the affections and passions in Adam, as of love, hope, joy, and the like ; but it was, as some divines express it, as the bubbling of clean water in a clear chrysal vial, that raised no defilement : whereas, now, it is in us

like the working of the sea, that casteth out mire and filth. These affections were under the command of the will then; and that, both as to the continuance and as to the degrees of them.—As to the continuance of them. The will might command them on and off, at its pleasure. They fixed upon nothing, but what holiness directed them to: and they made their stay no longer, than the same holiness commanded. Like the Centurion's servants, they went and came at the word of their superior.—As to the degrees of them. Now we find it a hard task, to set bounds to our love, fear, joy, and the like: we cannot give way to them, without running into strange excesses and intemperance: our love is become fondness: our joy is become wantonness: our fear is turned into a chilling ague; and our anger into a burning fever. But, in our first blessed estate, all these passions were guided by holy reason: both for their objects, upon which they ought to fix; and also for their measures, how far they ought to let forth themselves.

And thus I have opened the first proposal; delineating to you obscurely the divine image: for the best and most comprehensive notions and words of men can but obscurely trace out the tracks, lines, and figures of the glorious image of God, which the creating finger of the Almighty at first drew upon the soul of man; which, when we compare it with the ruins and rubbish of our present state of misery, may administer just cause of shame, grief, and sorrow.

[2.] Let us now consider, what parts of this image are lost and defaced by our fall; and what of it still remains in every man, as well unregenerate as regenerate.

1st. That part of the image of God, that consisted in those things that are essential to man, is not lost; as the soul, and its faculties of understanding, will, and affections. These still remain the same, for substance, as they did before.

2ndly. Some unregenerate men retain many rare natural perfections of these faculties. Some of them grow up in all ornamentative, excellent parts; searching judgments, deep knowledge: when others are born fools and idiots, and are deprived of the use of common reason. Now, though reason and knowledge, even in natural things, be

some part of God's image, that all men have equally forfeited; yet God is pleased to restore this, in a great measure, sometimes, to some unregenerate men, when he denies it to others: yea, it may be, his own children do not enjoy it in the same degree. This part of God's image is dispensed, in common, both to good and bad; and, many times, the wicked have a greater share in it than the holy. These gifts, though they bear some weak and obscure resemblance of God, he keeps in the hands of his common providence; and scatters upon the generality of men, in some measure: unto these we have all lost a right and title, but we have not all lost the actual possession of them; but God restores them to unregenerate men, as he pleaseth.

3dly. As for that part of the image of God, that consists in holy habits, in spiritual knowledge and righteousness, these we have utterly lost and defaced. The mind is become palpably dark; muffled up in error and ignorance: the will and affections are violently and unweariedly bent upon the pursuit only of what is evil. And this is the misery of our fall: thus, is our glory stained, and our silver become dross.

[3.] Let us now consider, what of the image of God is again restored to us, in our regeneration.

1st. To this I answer, briefly;—regeneration restores to us that part of God's image, that consists in holy and spiritual habits, that rectify the operations of our natural faculties and powers.

The mind is illuminated with true knowledge: the will is made compliant to God's will; and the affections are called off from the pursuit of vanity, and set upon spiritual and heavenly objects. And this is that image of God, that is drawn upon our souls in our regeneration, whereby we are made like to God; yea, so like to him, that the apostle, in 2 Pet. i. 4. calls it, a participation "of the divine nature." There are, indeed, some strictures and beams of the holiness of God himself shining in a regenerate soul; though infinitely more weak and waterish, than those in God's infinitely holy essence.

And, here, observe two things.

(1st.) That, in the very instant of our regeneration, all

the graces of the Holy Spirit are implanted in us, at once : for they are all linked together ; and whoever receives any one grace, receives them all. There are faith and love, and the fear of God, and patience, and humility, and self-denial, and the rest of the train of glorious graces : for each of these is a lineament and feature of the divine image, without which it were not complete. And, therefore, that Christian, that can but find any one grace wrought and acted in him by the Spirit of God, may comfortably conclude that he hath all other graces, at least in the habits and principles of them : they may all be weak, indeed ; but, yet, not any one of them is wanting. And it may also serve to stir us up, since we have graces of all sorts that lie latent within us, not to yield to any corruption or temptation ; as that with which we cannot grapple, so as to come off with victory and conquest : for our regeneration furnishes us with all grace ; and there is no particular sin, but we may within ourselves find a particular grace opposite to it, if we would but stir up and rouse it.

(2dly.) Observe also, that the Holy Ghost is, in a peculiar way, the author of this our conformity and similitude unto God. For he it is, that, according to the economy and dispensation of the blessed Trinity, begets us after the image and likeness of God, And, therefore, the text speaks of being “born of the Spirit.” And, so, in scripture, we have frequent mention made of the seal of the Spirit : 2 Cor. i. 22. and Eph. i. 13. Now a seal doth two things : it not only confirms the deed, to which it is annexed ; but it also conforms the wax, upon which the seal is imprinted, to receive its own stamp and image. So, when the Spirit of God doth ‘incubare animæ,’ when it ‘rests upon the soul,’ it casts and moulds it into its own image and shape ; and, of a fleshly carnal soul, it makes it become spiritual, life to itself : and therefore says our Saviour, in John iii. 6. “That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit ;” because the Spirit of God begets in its own likeness. It is like the seal on the wax, that leaves its stamp upon it : so, the soul being sealed by the Spirit, it leaves its own stamp and impression upon it.

2dly. But, betwixt that image of God, which the Spirit

stamps upon us, in our regeneration; and that image of God, in which we were created; there is a two-fold difference observable.

(1st.) That image of God, which is restored to us in our regeneration, though it hath a perfection of parts, yet hath not a perfection of degrees.

The image of God, in which man was at first created, had them both: it included all graces; and it included them all, in their height and in their glory. Now, though the regenerate are as extensively holy as Adam was; and have as many graces, yea more too, as some think, than ever Adam had: yet they are not intensively so holy, as he was; but their graces are allayed with a mixture of sin and corruption. Their knowledge is not so comprehensive; but it is subject to ignorance and errors: their will is not so perfectly guided by the will of God; but, sometimes, it hath eccentrical motions of their own: and their affections are not so refined; but that, sometimes, they are inordinate and earthly. Yea, and every faculty and every action are interwoven and intercheckered with grace and sin: so that, at once, the soul, though it be regenerate, yet bears a double image, God's and Satan's: it bears God's image, in its regenerate part; and the devil's, in its unregenerate part. The best men are like your plaited pictures: wherein, if you look on one side, you may see an angel; and, if you look on the other side of the light, you may see a devil: so, truly, if you look upon the renewed and regenerate part of a child of God, that is angelical, and bears some glimmerings and resemblances of the image of God upon it; but, if you turn your eyes on the corrupt and unregenerate part, what appears there, but blackness and deformity, that shadow out the very image of Satan?

(2dly.) The image of God, restored to us in our regeneration, differs from that, wherein we were first created, in this, that it shall never be totally lost and effaced, as the other was; and herein, it excels the other.

You see how soon Adam lost his. One sin brought such a great blot upon it, that it was no longer discernible for the image of God. But, now, though this image shine not in such bright and orient colours as that did;

yet are they more lasting and durable colours, than the former image had. Yea, though the regenerate commit many sins, that stain and sully it: yet the Spirit of God still refresheth it, by the continual influences of his grace; and will preserve it entire, that, in that great day when God shall come to examine every soul, "Whose image and superscription do you bear?" it may indeed be seen, that we bear the image of God, and may be owned by him as his children, and as those that belong to him.

The forming of this image of God, on the soul, is the product of the new birth.

iii. Now, in that the scripture calls the restoring of this image of God, a new birth; it will be expedient to consider *what this metaphor, to be born again, doth import.*

And, here, I shall touch upon some remarkable resemblances, that are betwixt a natural and a spiritual birth, between our first and our second birth.

1. To be born again implies, *that, as no man can bestow upon himself a natural being; so, much less, can any man bestow upon himself a supernatural being.*

What! where were all of us a hundred years since? All in that vast wild wilderness of nothing; all sleeping in our own causes; we ourselves not having then so much existence, as our very dreams have now: and could we awake ourselves out of that sleep? could we procure our own being? could we fetch from heaven those sparks of divine fire, those souls of ours which are now kindled in our breasts? Could we ourselves tie that vital knot betwixt our souls and bodies? No more, certainly, can any carnal, natural man, that is as much nothing in grace as we before we were born were mere nothings in nature, call down into his soul from heaven that living and active principle of grace, that should make him a new man and a new creature.

And therefore the scripture chuseth to express this new birth, by such terms, as do import in us an utter impossibility and impotency to effect it by our own power. It is called the quickening of the dead, in Eph. ii. 1. "You hath he quickened," says the apostle, "who were dead

in trespasses and sins." Look, how impossible it is, for a dead man, that is shut down under the bars of the grave, that is crumbled away into dust and ashes, to pick up again every scattered dust, and form them again into the same members; and how impossible it is for him to breathe without a soul, or to breathe that soul into himself: alike impossible is it, for a natural man, who hath lain many years in the death of sin, to shake off from himself that spiritual death; or to breathe into himself that spiritual and heavenly life, that may make him a living soul before God. Moreover, the grace of regeneration is said to be created in us, in Eph. iv. 24. "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." In creation, the creature is formed out of nothing; and what can nothing contribute to being? Such is every natural man; he is mere nothing in respect of grace; and, therefore, can work nothing of grace in himself. Thus you see the scripture carries it, that, no more than a child can beget itself, or a dead man quicken himself, or a non-entity create itself; no more can any carnal man regenerate himself, or work true saving grace in his own soul.

Indeed, there are a growing number of men, who think that regeneration is the effect of free-will, and that it is in our own power to convert and renew ourselves. Though it be abundant confutation of this spreading error, that it is against the common sense and experience of true Christians; who, as they sadly complain of the averseness of their wills to what is good, even after regeneration, so they have found that, before their regeneration, the greatest obstacle to it was the stubbornness and refractoriness of their own wills, that would never be brought to any terms of compliance with divine grace, had not the Spirit of God, by a sweet and irresistible efficacy, at once both persuaded and subdued them: though this now were sufficient, yet let me add one argument, which I think is unanswerable. If an unregenerate man can, by his own power, regenerate himself, then one of these two absurdities must necessarily follow: either that there are still left some holy habits and principles in the will, that were never lost by the fall; or, else, that

man may make himself truly holy, by a will that is totally corrupt and sinful : but it is very gross to admit either of these.

(1.) There are no holy habits or principles left in a carnal man, whereby he should be able to convert and regenerate himself.

For what holy habits can there be in the will of a corrupt man, unless they are true graces ? And, to affirm, that man, in a state of nature, hath true grace inherent in him, whereby he is able to convert and regenerate himself, is dull nonsense, and a flat contradiction ; for it is to affirm, that he hath grace before he hath grace.

(2.) A corrupt will cannot make a holy man.

If there be no such habits and principles left in the will since the fall, then the will must be totally corrupt ; and a corrupt will cannot make a holy man : grace is above and beyond its sphere. Yea, an unregenerate will, in all its inclinations, is utterly contrary unto grace : there is not any one act of the will, but it is evil and sinful ; and it is strange divinity, to affirm that gracious habits may be wrought in us by sinful acts : as soon may a man become just by cozenage, and merciful by oppression, sober by drunkenness, and liberal by griping ; as any man can become holy by acts of his own will, since every act of his will is before conversion sinful and unholy. Besides, the will of man, by the fall, is become a fleshly will ; but, in regeneration, it is made a spiritual will : now it is a most strange kind of production, that a fleshly will should beget a spiritual will ; nor would that, which our Saviour affirms, any longer hold true, in John iii. 6. " That, which is born of the flesh, is flesh," if a fleshly will could beget a spiritual will. You see, then, by this, that no man, by the power and freedom of his own will, can regenerate himself. As for previous dispositions and preparatory works, I deny not but that an unregenerate man may, by the common assistance of the Spirit, and by the industrious and careful improvement of his own power, proceed very far in them, so as not to be far off from the kingdom of God ; but, still, the great change of regeneration itself is not wrought by our own power,

or by our own will: so saith St. John, speaking of believers; and he affirms it, in as express terms as may be, in John i. 13. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God:" a plain and undeniable proof, that our will is not the efficient cause of our new birth.

2. In that it is called a being born again, it is implied, *that there must be a father of this divine and heavenly, as well as of the natural birth.*

Now God himself is this Father; and hence is it, that the saints are said to be born of God, and to be the children of God. This is their parentage, their high original and extraction; in which, though they are poor, despised, and distressed, they may more truly glory, than the great ones of the earth in the paint and empty glittering of a noble or honourable title.

But, concerning the duty and dignity of a child under this consideration of being born again, I may have occasion to speak when I come to the application, and so I shall reserve it till then. I am yet on the doctrinal part.

God is now, under a different notion, a Father to his children, by regeneration, and adoption. By adoption, we receive the privileges of children, and are numbered among the family of heaven; made heirs of glory, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ our elder brother. By regeneration, we receive the divine nature, are made partakers of it: and, as natural children often bear such lively representations and resemblances of their parents, that we may know by their very countenances whose they are; so, in the new birth, there is such a resemblance of God stamped upon the soul, that, by the conformity of our wills and affections to his, it may well be discerned that he is our Father. In regeneration, we receive his nature: in adoption, we receive the privileges of his children: we are made sons, by both.

It is true, God is the author of all other things, as well as of the grace of regeneration. By him doth the whole frame of nature subsist, and all men owe their beings to his power and goodness: but, yet, the endearing, and sweet name of Father he appropriates to himself, not because he gives natural beings to his creatures, although

in that respect too he is "parens rerum," "the parent of all things;" but because also he gives supernatural grace to his own children, which indeed is a giving them of his own nature. To give them natural beings, is but to communicate to them the effects of his power and providence: but, to give them supernatural grace, is to communicate to them of his own nature, and therefore more especially he is called their Father; the Father of those, that he doth regenerate. The rest of his works are but the effects of his common goodness and bounty; but this is the effect of his special grace: wherein God doth more show forth the effects of a Father, than in the production of all the world.

3. *The seminal virtue or means, by which this new birth is effected, is the word of God.*

So you have it expressly, in James i. 18. "Of his own good will begat he us with the word of truth." In Ezek. xxxvii. 4. you read that the prophet is commanded to prophesy over a heap of dry bones: such an almighty power was in his words, that it is said, in verses 7, 8. "as he prophesied, there was a great noise, and shaking among the bones; and sinews and flesh came up upon them." An almighty power indeed, that could speak dry bones into living men! the same, that the prophet did only in a vision, the word of God preached doth in a reality. We are all of us dry bones, till this almighty word breathe life and quickening into us. The preaching of the word is the great means, which God hath appointed for regeneration: Rom. x. 17. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." When God first created man, it is said, that he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;" but when God new creates man, he breathes into his ears. This is that word, that raiseth the dead; calling them out of the grave: this is that word, that opens the eyes of the blind, that turns the hearts of the disobedient and rebellious. And, though wicked and profane men scoff at preaching, and count all ministers' words and God's word too but so much wind; yet they are such wind, believe it, as is able to tear rocks, and to rend mountains; such wind, as, if ever they are saved, must shake and overturn the foundations of all their

carnal confidences and presumptions. Be exhorted, therefore, more to prize, and more to frequent the preaching of the word. How knowest thou, O sinner, but, whilst thou art slothfully absenting thyself from the public ordinances, that word is then spoken, that might have been thy conversion? How knowest thou, but that, whilst thou art sleeping in the congregation, that word is then spoken, that possibly, if thou hadst attended to it, might have awakened thee from the dead sleep of sin and security? Such an energy is there in the word of God, when the Spirit of God clothes it with power, that it breaks in upon the conscience; ruins and demolishes the frame of sinful nature; and, in an instant, conveys spiritual light, warmth, and quickening into the soul.

4. *There are pangs and throes, that do accompany this new birth, as well as the natural birth.*

And these are convictions and humiliations: when the soul is bowed down under the insupportable burden of its own guilt, and the sense of God's wrath: when it lies grovelling in prayer; rending itself, and heaven too, with its cries. In the midst of all these agonies, Christ Jesus becomes formed in the soul; and the work of grace is accomplished, which is the true ground of joy and comfort for ever after. Indeed these travailling pangs are not alike strong in all men. In some, they are distracting terrors; terrors, that break their bones, and drink up their spirits: and such, usually, they are in old and customary sinners, that will not be won by more gentle and mild courses: with such knotty pieces as these are, the Spirit of God deals terribly; and, in their new birth, cuts them out of the womb, and saves them after such a manner, that to their present apprehensions he could not deal more dreadfully with them if he had destroyed them. But those, that are converted in their youth, before customariness in sin and hardness of heart had made them impenetrable to the ordinary works of the Spirit of God, with these God deals more mildly; and melts them down, by soft and sweet relentings of soul; and delivers them into the glorious liberty of the children of God, without those violent pangs and convulsions, that others do undergo: yet in all that are sanctified and regenerated, after they arrive at the use

of reason, it holds true in the new birth, as well as in the natural birth, that they do all of them bring forth in sorrow.

II. Thus you see what this work of regeneration is, without which, our Saviour tells us, that "no man shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

And, to show both the certainty and weight of this truth, he doth twice assert it : once in the third verse ; and, then again, in the text.

This is that very first doctrine, in which our Saviour instructs his novice-disciple. Nicodemus, being convinced of Christ's extraordinary mission by the miracles that he wrought, courts him with terms full of humble respect. " Rabbi," says he, " thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." To this our Saviour answers, more pertinently to his salvation than to his charesis, " Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God : " as if he should say, ' The miracles, that I do, prove my mission, that I am sent of God ; but I do greater miracles than any, which thou hast seen or heard of. Thou hast heard, perhaps, that I restore sight to those that are blind ; and life to those that are dead : but I am come to give eyes to those that do already see ; and to give life to those that do already live. I am come to cause those, that are already born, to be born again : and this is a miracle, that must be wrought upon thee, and upon all that shall be saved ; to turn flesh into spirit, to fashion lumps of clay into the glorious similitude of the image of God. This is the greatest of all miracles, and this great miracle must be wrought upon all ; for, except this be done,' says our Saviour, ' no man can enter into heaven.'

The words contain in them a general proposition—a man cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven ; an exceptive limitation, added to this general proposition—except a man be born again.

And both these do deliver to us this proposition or doctrinal observation, *that regeneration, or the new birth, is of absolute necessity unto eternal life.*

There is no other change simply necessary, but only this. If thou art poor, thou mayest so continue, and yet be saved : if thou art despised, thou mayest so continue,

and yet be saved : if thou art unlearned, thou mayest continue so, and yet be saved. Only one change is necessary : if thou art wicked and ungodly, and continuest so, Christ, who hath the keys of heaven, who shutteth and no man openeth, hath himself doomed thee, that thou shalt in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. This is also definitively pronounced by the apostle, Heb. xii. 14. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

In the prosecuting of this doctrine, I shall first give you some demonstrations of it, and then apply it.

Very difficult it is to persuade men against the prejudices of their corrupt hearts. 'This great change,' say they, 'is more than needs.' Regeneration begins now to be decried, by as great masters in Israel, as ever Nicodemus was. Many understand not to what end the fabric of corrupt nature should be demolished ; and men, as it were, turned out of themselves. They think, if they are but baptized, whereby, as they suppose, the guilt of original sin is washed away ; and lead a sober religious life, keeping from gross actual sins ; that this is sufficient for the obtaining of heaven, without those hard and inexplicable notions of regeneration and the new birth.

I shall, therefore, endeavour to convince you of the indispensable necessity that there is, of being born again ; that so, when you are persuaded of it, you may give no rest to yourselves nor unto God, till he cause his Spirit, which is that "wind that bloweth where it listeth," to breathe spiritual life into you, without which it is impossible that you should inherit eternal life.

i. There is *an identity or sameness betwixt grace and glory* ; and therefore it is, that regeneration is so necessary unto salvation.

What is that illustrious thing, that we call the glory of heaven ? Is it, that we shall outshine the brightness of the sun ? or that we shall tread on a pavement of stars ? Is it a freedom from diseases, pains, and death ? Is it, that we shall hear the melody and songs of saints and angels ? These things indeed, and whatever the heart of man can desire or imagine to be excellent, do fill up this blessed estate : but, yet, that, which chiefly constitutes heaven, is

holiness ; that very holiness, that wicked men, who yet presumptuously hope to inherit heaven, do yet despise and hate on earth. We shall there be united to God by love, depend on him by faith, obey him with delight : and that, with the very same love, faith, and delight, as we do here on earth ; only these graces shall then be exalted above all imperfections and frailties. This is the glory of heaven. The glory of God himself consists, especially, in his infinite holiness ; and, therefore, in that most triumphant song of Moses, in *Exod. xv. 11*. God is styled “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises.” Now the glory of the saints in heaven is but a reflection cast upon them from the glory of God ; and, therefore, as he is especially glorious in his holiness, so are they also glorious in their holiness. If, then, grace and glory be the very same thing, canst thou, O sinner, ever hope for glory without grace ? Or, is not this the heaven, that thou dost desire and hope for ? Is it a place of ease and pleasure only, that thou wishest ; where thou mayest be free from cares and fears, from sorrows and sad hours ? why this is impossible : such a heaven God never made, nor canst thou in reason expect ; for God hath so linked sin and the curse together, that heaven itself would be no sanctuary to thee from the regrets and stings of conscience, nor from the horror and ghastly fear of wrath, if sin and guilt should enter there with thee.

ii. *Unregenerate men are utterly unsuitable to this state of glory* ; and, therefore, there must necessarily intervene this great change of regeneration.

All true pleasure and delight springs from the suitability of the object to the power or faculty that receives it. Thus Solomon tells us, “It is a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun,” or the light ; it is pleasant also for the ear to hear melody ; because these objects are attuned and proportioned to the senses. Now as light brings no pleasure to a blind man, nor music to a deaf man : so there would be nothing pleasing in heaven to us ; but that God doth, beforehand, by his grace temper and proportion our souls to that glory, that he will then reveal unto us. Hence it is, that the apostle, in *Col. i. 12*. gives thanks unto

God, that "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

But wicked unregenerate men are altogether unsuitable, both to the work, and also to the reward of heaven.

1. *They are unsuitable to the work of heaven.*

And what is the work of heaven, but the adoring, admiring, blessing, praising, loving, and serving of God for ever and ever? This is that work, wherein saints and angels spend an eternity. And dost thou, O prophane wretch, think to crowd in among that blessed company, and join with them in this blessed work? What! must that heart of thine, which here on earth was used only as the devil's pot to seeth and stew wicked thoughts in, be now on a sudden filled with the spiritual praises of the great God? Is this, thinkest thou, fit or likely? Is it fit, that that tongue of thine, which hath even been blistered with horrid oaths, cursed revilings, and reproaches of God and godliness, should first in heaven begin to set forth the high praises of God? There are none admitted to be free citizens of the new Jerusalem, but only such as have first served out their time of holiness, some more, some fewer years, here on earth. The work of heaven must be learned in the time of our apprenticeship on earth. And tell me now, what delight do you take in holiness? Is it not a task and burden to you, I will not say always to keep alive in your thoughts constant meditations of holy things, and vigorous affections towards them; but is it not a task and burden to you, to be sometimes drawn to the external performance of holy duties? Why else do you engage so seldom, and so slightly in them? What makes it thus your task, but an unholy and an unchanged heart? And what think you would it be, a heaven or a hell, a happiness or a torment to you, to spend an eternity in the most fixed contemplations, and in a most ardent love of God? You, who cannot bear the imperfect holiness of God's children, but rail at it as unnecessary and a puny preciseness, how will you be able to bear the most consummate holiness of heaven? Now wicked men, though they vex at the purity of the saints and laugh at it at once, yet is it toilsome; though it is a devilish contentment to them, that they can reproach their defects: should these men enter into heaven

with unchanged hearts, heaven would be a place of exact torture to them; to find nothing there but that purity which they hate, and that perfect purity which hath no defects for them to abuse.

Behold, then, the certain and unavoidable misery of unregenerate men; that even heaven itself cannot make them happy, nor is it scarce in the power of the Almighty to bless them! Tell me, thou, that, in holy duties, grudge at every word that is spoken, and at every sand that runs; that thinkest every summons to the public worship, as unpleasant as the sound of thy passing-bell; that sayest, "When will the sabbath be gone, and the ordinances be over?" what wilt thou do in heaven? what shall such an unholy heart do there, where a sabbath shall be as long as eternity itself; where there shall be nothing but holy duties; and where there shall not be a spare minute, so much as for a vain thought or an idle word? What wilt thou do in heaven, where, whatsoever thou shalt hear, see, or converse with is all holy? And, by how much more perfect the holiness of heaven is, than that of the saints on earth; by so much the more irksome and intolerable would it be to wicked men: for, if they cannot endure the weak light of a star, how will they be able to bear the dazzling light of the sun itself?

I speak all this to convince wicked men, how weak, vain, and foolish a thing it is, for them to hope for happiness without endeavouring after this great change. Misery pursues them, even to heaven itself; and they would not be happy, even there. Certain it is, that God never bestows heaven upon any, but beforehand he makes them agreeable to its holiness by their own. As for swines and dogs, filthy and impure sinners, God will never punish them with the purity of heaven: no; he hath provided another place for their torment; where they shall eternally and incessantly hate and blaspheme God, as the saints in glory love and praise God. It is therefore necessary, that, as musicians tune their instruments before they enter into the presence of any; so our hearts should be tuned to the songs and praises of heaven, before we enter into the glorious presence of God, to be made his music for ever.

2. Unregenerate men are unsuitable to the reward of heaven.

As the work there is spiritual work, so the reward is a spiritual reward. And it consists, especially, in two things; both of them unsuitable to a carnal heart: in a clear vision of God; and an unimaginable entireness of communion with him in heaven. And these two things, of all others, unholy persons cannot bear.

(1.) The sight of God, to a sinner, is infinitely full of dread and terror.

You read in scripture what dreadful apprehensions, even God's own children have had, after some, though but restrained and reserved, discoveries of himself to them; and that, because they had still some remainders of corruption in them, that grace in this life could not destroy. Thus, the prophet Isaiah cries out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Hosts:" and, so, when Christ put forth his divine power in working of a miracle, the glory of it was so terrible and so unsupportable, even to holy Peter, that he cries out, Luke v. 8. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And if these faint discoveries of God, even to holy men themselves, were so astonishing and unsupportable, what a confounding sight then will it be, to have all the glorious attributes of God break forth in a full flash upon the faces of wicked men; when, among the rest of those attributes, they shall behold the dread wrath and severe justice of God, to be sworn and armed against sin and sinners! Is this a sight, that will make heaven desirable to a wicked man? How dost thou think to endure the rays of that excellent glory and majesty, which make even the eyes of the angels themselves to twinkle with the dazzling brightness of it?

(2.) As for that near bosom-communion with God, wherein stands another part of the reward of heaven; this is that, which wicked men hate: yea, they hate that any should pretend to it.

Those sweet, endearing intercourses, that pass betwixt God and the soul, in ways of worship, of love for love, and of obedience for mercies received, they never knew on

earth, and how then shall they be fit for them in heaven? Certainly to be for ever tied up to such spiritualities as these, will make heaven but an uncomfortable place to an ungodly, unchanged heart.

Now tell me, after this representation made unto you, both of the work and of the reward of heaven, whether you are indeed willing to be in this eternal state or no. A strange question, you may think! 'What! to ask men whether they are willing to go to heaven, and to be possessed of glory!' But, let me tell you, it is an impossible thing, for an unsanctified heart really to wish to be in heaven; considering it under that notion of perfect purity and true holiness, which hath now been laid before you. Do you wish to be for ever employed in the loving, praising, serving, and enjoying of God, without interruption or cessation? why then do you not endeavour to fit yourselves for it, against the time of your appearing in glory? why do you not labour after true grace, that alone can fit you for that holy and blessed work? That idea and notion, that wicked men frame to themselves of heaven, only as a place of ease, rest, and all blessedness, makes them to believe that they do really wish themselves possessed of it; but, yet, if it could be supposed that such a person were taken up into heaven, he would find it a place so contrary to his fancy and corrupt inclinations, that he would soon wish rather to be on earth again in the pursuit of his more sensible and suitable pleasures.

I have the longer insisted on this particular demonstration, because I look upon this as a most convincing argument, to make every wicked man see how unfit he is, in a state of unregeneracy for the state of glory. As ever, therefore, you hope for heaven, and I dare assure myself that this is the hope of all of you, make sure to yourselves this great change. It is no notion, that I have now preached unto you: your natures and your lives must be changed; or, believe it, you will be found at the last day under the wrath of God. For God will not change or alter the word that is gone out of his mouth: he hath said it, Christ who is the truth and word of God hath pronounced it, that, without this new birth or regeneration, no man shall inherit the kingdom of God.

iii. *Whatsoever a man doth in a state of unregeneracy is sin* ; and, therefore, the change of regeneration is absolutely necessary, unto eternal life.

Whatever such a man's whole life is, it is nothing else but a continued course of sin, without either interruption or cessation : and, in this one particular lies a main difference betwixt a regenerate and unregenerate man. The regenerate man, through that corruption that is remaining in him, sins in every thing that he doth ; but, whatever an unregenerate man doth is sin : there is the difference : the one doth, as it were, tread awry, in a right path ; and the other runs out into a crooked and perverse one. And how then is it possible for such men ever to arrive at heaven, since every step they take leads down to the chambers of death and destruction ?

I spake somewhat to this before, in opening to you the misery of an unregenerate state and condition ; and showed you then, that the scripture every where speaks of the civil actions and the religious duties of wicked men as sins : their ploughing is sin ; and so also is their praying : yea, whatever they do is sin ; they sin in doing evil, and they sin in doing good.

But I shall pass by that, and briefly inquire what it is, that makes all the actions and all the duties, that wicked men perform, to be thus sinful. And this may be reduced to two particulars : and these are the principle from which, and the end to which, their actions are done.

1. *The principle from whence all the actions of an unregenerate man flow is corrupt* ; and when the fountain is corrupt, the streams also, that issue from thence, must needs be tainted.

That principle, that is necessarily required to make our actions to be truly good and holy, is the sincere and superlative love of God. What we do becomes then a good action, when we do it from the commanding motive of divine love : and, therefore, our Saviour saith, in John xiv. 24. " He, that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings." Our whole duty consisteth, either in that which immediately respects God, or in that which immediately respects man ; and, accordingly, God hath comprised the

whole law in two tables : in the one, he prescribes the services due to himself ; and, in the other, he requires from us what is due to men : and both these are fulfilled by love. So, saith the apostle, Rom. xiii. 10. " Love is the fulfilling of the law : and, therefore, our Saviour reduceth all the ten commandments unto two, in Mat. xxii. 37—39. " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it ; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Our Saviour reduceth all unto two, and these two speak but one and the same thing, love, which is the fulfilling of the commandment. Now this teacheth us, that, whatever external conformity our actions may carry in them to the letter of the law, yet are they not true obedience to God's commandments, if they flow not from a principle of love. Though you may perform each particular duty required in each particular command, yet this is not fulfilling but transgressing the law, if what you do is not done out of a principle of divine love. This is that universal qualification, that can alone make our duties truly good and acceptable unto God. So that, either to do contrary to the law, or to do actions that the law requires without love to God, are both of them sins ; the one against the express letter, and the other against the true sense, of the law. Now no unregenerate man can act any thing from this divine principle of the love of God ; for this is implanted in us, only by regeneration : and, therefore it is said, 1 John iv. 7. " Every one, that loveth, is born of God." The great moving principle in a carnal man, that sets him on to work every thing that he doth, is love indeed, but it is only self-love ; not love to God, but love to self ; a love, that is enmity and hatred against God ; and, therefore, whatever he doth is sin.

2. As all unregenerate men fail in the principle, so they also fail *in the end of all their actions*. For, such as a man's principle is, such also will be the end that he propounds. Water will naturally rise no higher than the spring-head from whence it flows : so neither can any man's principles carry him out to act above themselves. Now as the love of God is the moving principle to a re-

generate man, so the glory of God is his determining end: and so, on the contrary, self-love being the only principle of an unregenerate man's actions, self-preservation must be his utmost end into which he resolves all. And, because God hath in his word of truth threatened destruction to those who persevere in sin, and promised an unconceivable reward of glory to obedience, self-love here interposes; and excites to the external duties of religion, that thereby it may escape the one and obtain the other. Now, herein, self-love is very blind: for, by propounding himself as his end, he loseth the reward sought for, and all his services become only sins.

I would not be thought to condemn this kind of self-seeking in religion, for I know that it is one of the greatest incentives to obedience. Moses "had respect unto the recompence of the reward," and encouraged himself by it: yea, of Christ, a greater than Moses, the apostle saith, he had an eye upon the glory set before him, to encourage him to undergo those humiliations and abasements that he was sent into the world for. Only when a man's self-concernments stand so full in his eye, that he cannot look either beside them or above them, then do such self-ends become sinful in themselves, and turn also every action that is directed by them into sin.

Here, then, let every carnal, unchanged sinner see the sad and deplorable condition he is in: what little ground he hath to hope for heaven and salvation. Alas! sinners, how do you hope to be saved? The only way, that leads to heaven and happiness, is faith and good works: not such equivocal good works, as most men rely upon; but such genuine ones, as have the love of God for their principle, and the glory of God for their end: and such no unregenerate man can produce. All the rest are but trash and lumber; and such, as will rather burden, than crown your souls, at the last day. Think of it seriously: unless the foundation be laid in a real change of grace wrought upon your souls, all that afterwards you build is but hay and stubble; such, as will only add fuel to your unquenchable fire. Think not, therefore, as many ignorant, sottish people do, of balancing your evil deeds by your good: for, if you are in an

unregenerate, in a natural state and condition, if in the same that you brought into the world, there is nothing but what is evil and sinful. And it is very sad to consider, that, when God and your own consciences shall come, at the last day, to take a review of your lives; those lives, that have been full of actions, perhaps for forty, fifty, or three-score years together; that then they shall be found to be but one continued series of wickedness, one sin succeeding another without the least gap made in it by one good and holy work. This is the condition of every unregenerate sinner. And, therefore, if ever you hope for heaven, endeavour for regeneration: for this change is absolutely necessary, for the raising of any of your actions from being sinful to be holy.

iv. Heaven, in scripture, is promised to be given by way of inheritance, and no otherwise.

So you have it, in Acts xx. 32. and, in Acts xxvi. 18, and in many other places. Now an inheritance denotes sonship: God will not give that inheritance unto any, but to those, that are his own children. We are all of us naturally strangers to God: and, before we can become his children, we must be new born; and, by this new birth it is, that we are made heirs of glory, and, co-heirs with Jesus Christ our elder brother: and therefore regeneration is absolutely necessary unto eternal salvation.

v. It is not for the honour of God, to bestow heaven and happiness upon sinful men, unless they are changed. The glory of God is chiefly manifested in our regeneration. Should he admit sinners into heaven, many of his attributes would suffer thereby. His truth would suffer, in saving those, whom in his word he had doomed to damnation. His justice would suffer; for, if he should save all wicked men, and leave none as vessels of wrath, what would become of the glory of his justice and severity? if he should save some, and not all, this would be partiality; seeing all, according to the terms of the gospel, are equally liable to damnation. His holiness would suffer also, in the admitting of unholy and impure men to inhabit for ever before him, who is of purer eyes than to

behold sin on earth with approbation, and therefore certainly will not behold sin in heaven with countenance.

vi. *Both the persons and the performances of unregenerate men, while they are such, are displeasing unto God; and, therefore, this change is necessary in order unto salvation.*

Certainly, if God neither loves what they are nor what they do, it will be impossible for them to enter into heaven, while God keeps it garrisoned against them; unless they can break down the eternal fence, and take it by another force than ever John Baptist's hearers did.

Now that God neither loves unregenerate men's persons nor performances, neither what they are nor what they do, is clear.

1. *He loves not what they are: their persons are displeasing to him.*

Neither is this displeasure founded upon a small dislike, but upon that most bitter and implacable passion of hatred: Psalm v. 5. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." And this hatred is reciprocal: for, as wicked men are hated by God, so they are haters of God: Rom. i. 30. "Haters of God." Hence the apostle tells us expressly, "they, that are in the flesh," that is, in their unregenerate state, "cannot please God," Rom. viii. 8. and he gives the reason of it, in verse 7. "Because," says he, "the carnal mind is enmity against God." Thus you see the opposition is mutual: and amounts to no less than a hatred on both parts, both on God's and on the sinner's. Now, though anger be for the present a sharp and eager passion, yet is it soon pacified by a retribution of wrong for wrong; but hatred is irreconcilable, and rests satisfied in nothing less than in the utter destruction of its object: and thus wicked men hate God, and wish at least there were none, and do what they can to dethrone him; and God again so hates them, that he resolves he will have no peace with them; "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:" but will pursue them to destruction. Let sinners then seriously consider, that they are mortally hated by that God, who is of infinite power; and can, when he pleaseth, bring upon them the dreadful effects of his hatred. And

is it like that such men shall ever enter into heaven, where there is such a hatred armed with power to their just and eternal perdition? Are you stronger than God? or are you more mighty than the Almighty? Can you reverse his decree, whereby he hath doomed all the wicked unto hell? or can you compel him to make other terms with you, than he hath already propounded in his unalterable word? Can you distress him to surrender heaven to you? or can you break down the walls and ramparts of heaven; and burst open those everlasting gates, that he hath shut and sealed against you? Alas! then, what are all your hopes? Where-to is it, that you trust? Do you think, at last, to enter heaven as friends, who now daily assault the God of heaven as enemies? Assure yourselves, so long as God is able to hold it out against you, not one wicked wretch shall ever enter there. When the angels rebelled, God chased whole millions of them out of heaven; and do you think that ever he will admit rebellious men into heaven? No: doubtless the same hatred, that cast them out headlong, and pursues them down to the pit of hell, will also pursue all the wicked of the world thither, who are as well enemies to God as the devils themselves. Let all unrenewed sinners, therefore, sadly and seriously consider with themselves what hopes they have of heaven, since God counts them for enemies; and professes that he hates them, nay, not only hates them, but hates the very places where they are for their sakes: so you have it, in Amos. vi. 8. "The Lord God hath sworn by himself; I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and I hate his palaces." And should wicked men come into heaven, heaven would become a hateful seat unto God.

2. As their persons are hateful, so also *all their performances are displeasing unto God.*

This follows upon the former: for where the person is not accepted, the services cannot. And therefore it is said, Gen. iv. 4. "The Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering:" first, to his person; and, then, to his service. If your persons be hateful to God, never expect that your performances should be acceptable. And the reason is clear, because there is but one way of acceptance for ourselves and for our duties, and that is through Christ.

As the best are not, in this life, free from the remainders of sin ; so neither are their best duties free from the mixtures of sin : now these sinful mixtures are so manifest unto God, that he must needs reject and abominate them, were it not that Christ, into whose hands they are first delivered, separates those mixtures, and fills up all their defects by the redundancy of his own merits : but the duties of wicked men are not accepted in Christ ; so audacious and bold are they, as to come before God without a mediator to present them ; and that God, who is pleased with nothing but 'what is absolutely perfect, if not so in itself yet at least in the mediation of his Son, seeing so many faults and flaws in the services of wicked men, cannot but cast them back as dung and filth in their faces ; for God, accepting of nothing but what is perfect, and the services of wicked men wanting the merits of Jesus Christ, they come up before God as unsavory stench instead of sweet smells. This is the fruitless issue of wicked men's duties : and, therefore, the apostle tells us, in Heb. xi. 6. that "without faith it is impossible to please God ;" because faith is that grace, that unites and makes us one with Christ, and gives us an interest in those merits that alone can procure acceptance for ourselves and for our services : but wicked and unregenerate men have not this faith ; and, therefore, nothing that they do is well-pleasing unto God. They may, for the good works that they do, be rewarded possibly with temporal blessings, and certainly with the mitigation of future punishments ; but the reward of eternal life belongs to none, but to those, whose services are accepted through Him to whom their persons are united.

See here, then, the miserable shipwreck of all the hopes of carnal men : who regard not what they are, but look only, and that too with a too favourable eye, upon what they do ; and, with the boasting pharisee, make large inventories of their good works. They fast twice a week, and give alms often : they are frequent in prayer, and constant at the ordinances : and therefore they think, certainly, that they shall enter into heaven with the forwardest. But, alas ! what is all this ? God respects what thou art, as well as what thou dost ; and if all your duties proceed

from an unchanged, unrenewed heart, he neither accepts them, nor regards them. Thou, perhaps, thinkest that thou hast laid up a great mass of treasure for thy soul, against the time to come; whereas, at the last day, it will be found to be but great heaps of dung and filth. Nay, let me tell you, should you pray till your knees took root in the earth, could you nail your eyes to heaven, could you melt your hearts into tears, and vanish away into sight, yea and spend every moment of your lives far better than ever you spent the best, and yet should you remain unsanctified and unchanged, all this would be of no account with God; but, instead of a 'Euge,' "Well done, good and faithful servant," you would meet with that unexpected demand, "Who hath required these things at your hands?" Consider seriously and sadly of this, you, who think that you have many duties upon the file in heaven, as so many evidences of your right and title unto heaven. As you would not have all these to be lost, and utterly in vain; so look to it, that they proceed from hearts, that are truly sanctified and renewed: without which, they will be of no avail at all in God's esteem.

And so much for the demonstrations of this point.

III. I come now to make some *use* and *application* of what hath been spoken concerning this great and necessary doctrine of regeneration.

It is not a particular doctrine, that concerns some persons, and not others: upon this lies the eternal salvation of the whole world.

i. And, therefore, in the first place, seeing it is impossible ever to obtain life eternal without regeneration or the new birth, let us then by this *try our title to heaven*.

Put it seriously to the question;—are we indeed born again? Are we become the children of God: such as have a right and title to the purchased inheritance? The question is of vast concernment: and a mistake in this, either hazards our souls, by presumptuous conceits that we are the children of God, when yet we are strangers and enemies to him; or destroys our comfort, by sinister apprehensions that we are aliens and outcasts, when yet we are begotten again by his Spirit, at least to the grounds of a lively hope.

I shall endeavour to manage this use of trial, by laying down some particular attainments of carnal men, that possibly they may mistake for evidences of their regeneration; by laying down some particulars, that the scripture hath made infallible marks and tests of a regenerate person.

1. As to the first of these, the usual mistakes of those, whose convictions ever awaken them to a self-examination, are in that they rely upon works preparatory to regeneration, for the work of regeneration itself: for as, in natural generation, there is some previous disposition of matter, before there is the existence of a form; so, in regeneration, commonly, though not always, there are some preparations of the soul by the common works of the Spirit, before the new creature is formed in it.

Now, by regeneration, there is a five-fold change wrought;—upon the understanding or judgment, by enlightening it;—upon the conscience, by awakening and pacifying it;—upon the affections, by spiritualizing them;—upon the will, by converting it;—upon the life and conversation, by reforming it.

From each of these particulars, carnal men may collect mistaken evidences for their regeneration: and these I shall endeavour to discover to you.

(1.) Touching the mind or understanding: that may be greatly irradiated with a clear and sparkling knowledge of spiritual objects, when yet the soul is not truly regenerated.

It is true, as, in the creation of the world, light was numbered amongst the first of God's works; so, in this new creation, the first work of the Spirit of God is to shed abroad a heavenly light into the understanding: and, therefore, we have this first in order, in the commission, that Christ gives unto St. Paul, Acts xxvi: 17, 18. "I send thee to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light;" and, then it follows, "from the power of Satan unto God." But, yet, notwithstanding there is an illumination about spiritual things that may gild and beautify the understandings of unregenerate men; who, like the toad, may be full of poison, though she hath a precious stone in her head. The apostle lays down this as one of the first attainments that un-

regenerate men may have, and yet be apostates : Heb. vi. 4, 6. "For it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened; if they shall fall away, to renew them again by repentance." They may not only have a deep knowledge of gospel mysteries, so as to see the whole compages and concatenation of the doctrine of Christ, and be able to unfold them also unto others; but also have particular discoveries of the glory and beauty that is in those things. See it in Balaam's ecstasy, Numb. xxiv. 5. "How amiable are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" where, besides, that prophetic illumination which was darted into him immediately by the Spirit of God, he had also a glorious discovery made to him of the beauty and excellency of the spiritual state of the church : it was not only a view of the order and discipline of the Israelitish camp, that made him break forth into high admirations; but also a seeing of them ranged under Jesus Christ the Captain of their salvation, which was an extraordinary illumination to such an unregenerate wretched man as Balaam was. Such discoveries of the most spiritual objects, carnal hearts may have made unto them : they may see their lost estate by nature, the way of recovery by grace, the suitableness of Christ to their souls, the riches of his grace, the freeness of his love, the readiness of his heart to save them, the desirableness of happiness, and the beauties of holiness; and yet, for all this, remain still in a carnal and unregenerate state.

Now such illumination of carnal men falls short of being a good evidence of regeneration in two particulars.

[1.] Because it is a barren light.

That illumination, that is saving, is not only light, but influence also. As the light of the sun doth not only serve to paint the world, and varnish over the variety and beauty of the several creatures that are in it; but, by the grateful heat that its influence insinuates and soaks into them, doth also refresh them; and, as its light discovers their beauties, so its influence increaseth them : so, saving illumination not only illustrates the soul by its light; but, by its congealing influences, nourisheth it, draws sap into it and fruit from it. But the illumination of wicked men

is but a barren light ; and hath no influēdes in it, to make the soul to grow and bring forth the fruits of holiness.

[2.] It is an ineffectual, idle light.

The illumination, that is saving, is also transforming : 2 Cor. iii. 18. “ We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” If a beam of the sun fall upon a looking glass, it not only makes the glass to have a greater and a more glorious light, but it represents the image of the sun in it ; but let it beat never so clearly against a mud-wall, though it doth enlighten it, yet it leaves no image upon it : so, truly, the illumination, that is saving, not only irradiates, but transforms. If you look upon the sun when it is in its full strength, the light thereof will imprint the shape and image on the eye ; so that, look where you will, still the appearance of the sun is visibly before you : so, every sight, that a true Christian hath of the Sun of righteousness, makes a parallel, another sun in his soul. But the illumination of wicked men only enlightens, but doth not change them : their understandings may be irradiated with glorious discoveries of God, and Christ, and the things of another world ; but this doth not transform them into the image and likeness of these things. The illumination of a regenerate person is like light, that breaks through the air in an instant, and turns all the vast body throughout into light : but, in a carnal heart, it is but like light falling upon jet or ebony, that makes it shining, but changeth not its hue and blackness. Yea, it is with them, as it is with men that lie long tanning in the sun ; who, though they are enlightened by the sun, yet they are also made black and swarthy by it : so, though men may have the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ shining strongly upon them, yet that very light tans their souls, makes them more black and deformed, and aggravates their sins. So, then, thou mayest have as much notional knowledge of God and of the mysteries of the Gospel, as any regenerate person whatever ; yea, and much more : and yet, for all this, have no good evidence of thy regeneration ; for this knowledge is not therefore saving because it is clear, but because it is influential and transforming.

And that is the first thing, which many mistake for regeneration; because they are enlightened.

(2.) As to the conscience, neither the peace nor yet the trouble of conscience, are good evidences of a man's regeneration.

[1.] Not the peace of conscience.

For though, where this peace is true, it is always an effect of grace; and therefore we have them so often coupled together, as Rom. i. 7. and 1 Cor. i. 3. "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God the Father:" yet there is that which looks very like peace of conscience, though it is not so in reality; and this is a supine presumption, a carnal stupidity and ossitancy of conscience, in men, that never have been troubled with the sight of sin or the sense of wrath, nor ever had any serious thoughts of their vileness by it: but it is with them, as it was with those presumptuous sinners in Deut. xxix. 19. who bless themselves in their hearts, saying, "they shall have peace, though they walk on in the imagination of their hearts, adding drunkenness to thirst." Now this peace is founded only upon a bold and confident persuasion, without any examination of their interest in God, and of his love and favour to them: "God is infinitely merciful and gracious, and he will exalt his mercy above all his name; and, therefore, as he hath exalted his power in creating and sustaining us, will he not also much more exalt his mercy in saving us?" Thus, as madmen often fancy themselves to be kings or some great persons, when indeed they are wretched and miserable spectacles; so do these spiritually mad men: they not only, with the devil, look upon the glory of this world, and say, "All is mine:" but they look upon the glory of heaven itself, and say presumptuously all this is theirs. This is a spiritual frenzy, that makes them speak of great matters, in which they have no interest at all. Yea, this presumption is often accompanied with a fiducial, or rather a confidential application to themselves, in particular, of the love of God, and of the merit of Jesus Christ, so as to appropriate them unto themselves as their own: now this is the highest act of faith, when it flowers up into assurance, to say with St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God;" yet,

through a mere wretchless security; sinners take it for granted that God is theirs, though they never examined their evidences, and scarce know upon what terms God hath promised to become ours. To such I may say, as our Saviour doth, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living:" he is not the Father of such, as live in and love their wickedness: it were a dishonour to him, to be a Father to such children. As we must not discourage the broken and contrite spirit, but embolden him to appropriate Christ to himself in particular: so we must let wicked men know withal, that they call God their God and Father in presumption, and in the security of their hearts only; and their disappointment will be sad, when, instead of finding him their God and Father, they shall only find him their Judge. Now it appears that this peace of a carnal man's conscience is only from a deep spiritual security: because, if you come to examine the grounds of it, what is it that such plead, except the goodness of their hearts? they bless God that their hearts are good; and in this they trust, and of this they boast and glory: though they live in the constant neglect of holy duties, and though they wallow in the filth of customary sins, yet still they boast of this, that they have good hearts: but this is a mere self-delusion; for it is as utterly impossible, that the heart should be good where the life is wicked and profane, as that a good root should bring forth evil fruit. Such a secure peace is no good evidence, that this great change is wrought upon the heart by regeneration; but is only founded upon mere obstinacy and carelessness of the great concerns of men's everlasting salvation.

[2.] As peace of conscience is not, so neither is trouble of conscience a good evidence of a man's regeneration.

A dull lethargic conscience, that hath lain long insensible under the commission of gross sins, may at length by strong convictions be startled, awakened, and troubled with the sense of sin, and frightened with the sight of wrath; and yet, all this while, remain an impure and polluted conscience. God may set an unregenerate man upon the rack, break all his bones, and give him some foretastes of

that cup of trembling that he must for ever drink of; and as he made himself a devil incarnate by his sins, so God may make his conscience a hell incarnate with his torments: you hear Cain, that primitive reprobate, crying out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear:" nor could Judas find any other way to choke his conscience, than with a halter. Though in a course of sinning, conscience may be dead and seared; yet God will awaken this sleepy conscience: and, when it shall then see that it hath slept only on the top of a mast and on the brink of hell, and that it is falling into it irrecoverably, what fears and terrors will this cramp it with! and yet this may leave it short of true grace; under the horrors of sin, and yet short of grace; torment it here, and yet possibly leave it to be for ever tormented hereafter. Take heed, therefore, of collecting evidences of regeneration, only from the trouble of your consciences, which deceives many who take up with preparatory convictions, which do often vanish away without leaving any saving effects of true grace. Many, if their consciences are awakened to admonish, reprove, and threaten them, think this a good argument of the goodness of their condition: St. Paul saith of himself, in his unregenerate state, touching the righteousness, which is of the law, he was blameless; so strict and rigid an observer was he of the law, that his conscience had little to accuse him of. And will you build your hopes upon a worse foundation, than he did in his unregeneracy? not that conscience hath nothing to accuse you of, but that it doth accuse you? not that you are not guilty, but that you are sensible of your guilt? What is this more than sinners shall find in hell? It is a great and insufferable part of those torments, to be pursued with the stinging regret of an enraged conscience, which is that worm that never dies: and will you take that for an evidence of grace, that must be for ever the punishment of sin? And, yet, do not many of us rest only on this, that conscience is awakened, frightening us in sin and deterring us from sin? 'Those sins, that, before, we could swallow down without straining at and digest without nauseating, now conscience riseth at, and we dare not commit them for a world: and those duties,

that, formerly, we lived in the neglect of, conscience now straightly enjoins, and we dare not for a world neglect them: those sins, that, heretofore, we committed quietly, conscience now returns upon us with torment. And is not this a work of grace? Is not this regeneration?' No: it is not, if there be no more: all this only proves conscience to be awakened, but not to be sanctified. Conscience may be defiled, though it be not seared: a filthy puddle may be stirred and troubled, as well as a clear stream; and conscience may work horrors and terrors in that soul, where the Spirit of God never yet wrought grace.

So that you see we cannot argue from the peace of conscience, nor yet from the trouble of conscience, that we are in a state of regeneration; which is of absolute necessity to obtain heaven.

(3.) As to the affections, those sweet motions of the heart, though they are usually much relied on, yet even these affections unto holy and heavenly objects are not always infallible evidences of a man's regeneration.

In Matt. xiii. 20. some are said to receive the word with joy; and yet that they were unregenerate is clear, for it is said they had no root: and so, John v. 35. Christ tells the Jews, that they did rejoice for a season in the light of John Baptist, that is, in his doctrine and preaching: and Herod also is said to hear him gladly. So that you see these affections, of delight in holy duties and ordinances, may be in those, that are yet without a saving work of grace. And, as there may be these affections of joy and delight, so also of sorrow for sin: thus, Matt. xxvii. 3. it is said expressly of Judas, that he repented himself; and Ahab's humiliation was so great, that God took special notice of it, 1 Kings xxi. 29.

Now all these affections are but temporary and vanishing, and they may be excited from several advantages, that holy things have in them to commend them to the hearts of carnal and unregenerate men.

[1.] Sometimes, the very novelty and strangeness of them may affect us.

Novelty usually breeds delight, which longer custom and acquaintance somewhat abate. And this may be given

as a true reason, why, soon after conversion, a new convert's affections are more strongly drawn out in the ways of God, than, afterwards, when he is a grown and settled Christian: his affections then, may not have such full spring-tide, as when he was but a novice in Christianity: the reason is, because novelty, in that way and course that he is entered upon, doth naturally affect him, besides the real desirableness of the things themselves. And this also may satisfy us, though many have turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus and from the ways of his worship that he hath appointed, and do yet boast that they have in those new ways found more new comfort and sweet affections than they did before, that yet this is not because those ways have any thing in them that really yields more comfort and delight, but only because they are new ways, and new things will for the present affect: after some continuance in those ways, they find that joy and delight, that they spake of, to flag; and then they seek out other new ways and commend them as much, having as great delight in them: and it is no wonder; for new ways will stir up new affections. And thus may the affections of carnal unregenerate men be stirred up, by their entering upon the profession and external practice of religion, because of the novelty of it to them.

[2.] Good affections may be stirred in us, from the affecting nature of spiritual objects; for spiritual objects may affect us in a natural way.

Who can read the history of Christ's passion, without being affected with sorrow for all that sorrow that he underwent for us? He hath a heart certainly harder than a rock, that can think of the agonies, reproaches, cruel scourgings, and cursed death, that so innocent and so excellent a person as Christ was underwent, and that for sinners also, and not be moved and affected with grief and compassion to him. And yet it is possible, that these affections may be deceivable; and move no other ways, than they would do in the reading of some tragical story in a romance. To read some sad and dismal story, will naturally affect the heart with grief and sorrow. And so it may be with the truths revealed in the Gospel: upon thy reading of them, they may affect thee, according as those

truths are : if they promise blessings, they may affect thee with joy : if they threaten, and thou readest sad and dismal events, they may affect thee with sorrow : and, yet, all this may be only from the nature of the objects, and not from any divine affections that are in thy soul.

[3.] The affections may be stirred from or by the artificial rhetoric of others ; by the abilities of the ministers, whom you hear.

And thus God tells the prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song, as one that hath a pleasant voice, and canst play well on an instrument." They may have their judgments pleased with the learning showed in a sermon, and with the well methodizing of it ; and their affections may be pleased with the oratory, and powerful utterance of it. Now, though these are good helps to spiritual affections, yet are they not good trials of them.

[4.] Pride and self-seeking may, in the performance of duties, excite good affections.

And men may be much deceived in this particular. As, in prayer, they may think they are affected with the things that they pray for : when as, possibly, their affections are moved only with the manner of their prayer ; with their words ; with that copious, free, and admirable gift, which they have, of expression : whereas a contrite heart, that is moved with true spiritual affections, may not be so adorned with such an admirable gift of expression. As the ground, that is fullest of precious mines, hath least grass growing upon it ; so is it, many times, with the children of God in holy duties : where the heart is most full of grace, and where there are many precious affections stirring in it towards God, yet there are the least flourishings of expressions in their words. So that you see you cannot gather the truth of regenerating grace from the strong workings of your affections, which are very deceitful, even about spiritual things.

(4.) Every change wrought upon the will is not an infallible evidence of regeneration.

It is, indeed, the thorough change of the will, in which this great work principally doth consist. This is the first principle of spiritual life ; without which whatsoever other

change is wrought upon us, is no more than to set the hand of the watch right to the hour when the spring is broken. The will is, by the philosopher, called the commanding and swaying faculty of the soul; which controls the affections and inferior faculties, and makes them obey its inclination: so that, such as the will is, such is the man. And, therefore, the scripture, in setting forth the twofold estate of men, of nature and of grace, doth it by showing the temper of their wills; what their wills are. Unregenerate men are described by their wilfulness: John v. 40. "Ye will not come to me," says our Saviour, "that ye might have life." And the regenerate men are described by their willingness: Psalm cx. 3. "Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power."

Here I shall endeavour two things;—to show you after what manner the Spirit of God works this renewing change upon the will;—to show you what other changes may be wrought upon it, that are not good evidences of a man's renovation.

[1.] For the first, after what manner the Spirit of God works this renewing change on the will, you must know that there are two ways, whereby God doth effectually change the heart of a sinner: and they are moral persuasions; and physical determinations, or real efficiency, which is nothing else but God's all-powerful grace, whereby he doth immediately turn the bent and inclination of the will towards himself.

And both these always concur, in this great change of the will. God doth convincingly persuade us of our own vileness, and of the emptiness of all those vain things that our desires are so eagerly pursuing: and, on the other hand, he clearly represents to us the great excellency of himself and of his ways; that he is the greatest good we can enjoy; and that there is no other way of enjoying, but by loving and serving him. To do this, he makes use of moral persuasions; working upon our reason by cogent and prevailing arguments: and then diffuseth such a heavenly sweetness through the heart, as makes it disrelish all those fulsome delights of sin, that would separate us from that Infinite Good, with which they can hold no comparison: so that, finding more true delight in God and

his ways, more charming and alluring joy than ever before we did in sensual pleasures, we are thereby carried forth to them by an infallible, yet altogether a free, voluntary, and amorous motion. And this is done by the real and immediate efficiency of the Spirit of God upon the will itself: and this operation of the Spirit of God upon the will is so sweetly attuned to the native liberty of the will, that it would be a pain and torment to the soul to be separated from that God, whom now its understanding apprehends, and its will clasps about as its chief and only good.

Here, you see, are both a moral suasion and a real determination of the will, in the work of regeneration. God really determines it, by the efficacious touch of his own grace; whereby he powerfully turns the bent and inclination of it to himself, which before stood to sin and vanity. And, that this might be no infringement upon the will's prerogative in acting freely, at the same time he morally persuades it; representing himself as the best and most satisfying object for all its inclinations to centre in.

And, thus, the efficacy of divine grace and the liberty of man's will do fully accord, in this work of regeneration, which some have thought to stand at an irreconcilable distance one from another. For the freedom of the will doth not consist in its indifferency to act or not to act; either to love and fear God, or not to love and fear him: for, otherwise, the saints and angels in heaven, who are under that blessed necessity that they cannot but love God, should not then love him freely. But the liberty of the will consists in the will's acting upon rational grounds; which, by how much the more strong the grounds and reasons are that the will acts by, so much the more do they in a sort necessitate the will to act, and yet by so much the more free is the will in its actings: so that here, that the liberty of the will may not violate the certainty of God's purpose and decree, he changeth it by the power of his irresistible grace; and, yet, that this irresistible grace may not violate the liberty of the will, he persuades it by such powerful and rational arguments that it should not act freely if it should dissent from it.

Though God useth an infinite power in regenerating and

converting a soul, yet he useth no violence : he subdues the will, but he doth not compel it. This is that victorious grace, that doth not more overcome a sinner's resistances, than it doth his prejudices : it overcomes all oppositions, by its own irresistible power ; and it overcomes all prejudices, by its attracting sweetness : and when it brings a sinner to submit to God, it makes him apprehend also that it is his chiefest happiness and joy so to do. This is the sweet nature of regenerating grace.

And it is the same winning sweetness, that afterwards preserves the regenerate from a total apostasy from grace : for, though there is a constant supply of grace, to keep them that they shall never certainly draw back to perdition ; yet, withal, their own freedom is such, that they may if they will : but how can they will it, since the will never inclines but to that, which most pleaseth it ; and nothing pleaseth a regenerate and sanctified will, so much as that sovereign good, that comprehends in it all other good, and that is God himself ?

And thus you see how God disposeth of the will of man, in changing it to himself, without constraining it ; turning it, as unforcibly, so infallibly to himself : when he draws it by the sweetness of his own efficacious inspirations.

And thus I have dispatched the first particular, in showing you after what manner the Spirit of God works this change on the will, by persuading it with rational arguments, that it cannot gainsay ; and by overcoming it by his irresistible grace, that it cannot oppose.

[2.] The second particular is to show you what other changes may be wrought upon the will, that are no good evidences of a man's renovation and regeneration. And,

1st. An unregenerate man may have many faint velleities and wishes after grace.

When he hears so much spoken of the beauty and excellency of holiness, he is convinced, in his judgment, that these things are true : that without holiness no man shall see the Lord : that though now, whilst he is carnal, spiritual duties are tedious and burdensome to him ; yet, were he himself but spiritual, they would be pleasing and delightful to him : that those very pleasures of sin, which now keep him off from closing with grace, were he but

renewed would all be but an unsavoury thing to him : and, that what he is afraid to lose should he turn to Christ, he would not value the loss of were he but in Christ. When an unregenerate man is fully convinced of this, it makes him break out into pangs of affectionate wishes for grace : ' Oh, that I were holy and gracious ! Oh, that my heart were changed and renewed ! Oh, that I were better, and could do better ! ' Let every man appeal to his own conscience, whether, when he hath been convinced of the excellency and desirableness of holiness, he hath not breathed forth such wishes as these. When you have seen a Christian, eminent and exemplary for piety, have you not wished yourself in his condition ; not only in respect of his future reward and glory, but also in respect of his present grace and holiness ? and wished not only with Balaam to die the death of the righteous, and that your latter end may be like his ; but also to live the life of the righteous ? and yet still you continue, notwithstanding these wishes, in the same sinful course and state as formerly you did. Now these are but empty velleities, and idle wishings and wouldings. An unregenerate man may possibly wish he were a saint ; as a man may wish he were an angel : but such a man's wishes put him not upon any serious and constant attempting of the means whereby he may become so. No man, that wishes he were an angel, is thereby put upon the means of making himself an angel : so, many wish they were saints, but never put themselves upon the use of those means, that might make them such. Generally, their wishes and sighs vanish away together ; and the one leave no more impressions on their hearts, than the other do in the air : they run to the commission of sin, even with a wish in their mouths that they might not commit it ; and they neglect duty, and yet at the same time wish they were performing it. Such contradictory wishes have they ! They wish themselves holy ; and yet they are willingly sinful : they wish themselves better ; but yet they never endeavour and strive after their own amendment. These are idle and empty wishes and velleities ; and are no good evidences of a man's regeneration.

2dly. An unregenerate man may not rest in these slight wishes, but he may rise up to resolutions.

He may be resolved, that lust shall no longer enslave him, that the pleasures of the world shall no longer bewitch him, that the difficulties of religion shall no longer fright him; but that he will break through all, and that he will act like a man and like a Christian. With such generous resolutions as these, men, that are in a sinful estate, may fortify themselves. Grace they know they must have, or they must eternally perish: and they know, withal, that God doth not use to be wanting to men's endeavours; and they are peremptorily resolved, therefore, that they will not be wanting to themselves. See the same strong resolutions, in those, that came to inquire of the prophet Jeremiah, in ch. xlii. 5, 6. "The Lord," say they, "be a true and faithful witness between us, that we will do even according to all things, for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good or evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God. And yet, in the next chapter, you find none so rebellious against God, as these men, that had formerly made this remonstrance.

3dly. But, yet, notwithstanding these wishes and resolutions, the will of an unregenerate man falls short of a saving change; usually in some of these particulars.

(1st.) In that it is fickle and inconstant.

Their desires may sometimes be violent and eager, as if they would take heaven by force, and wrest mercy out of the hands of God: their prayers may be so importunate and earnest, as if they would take no denial from God: but yet this volatile spirit is soon spent, and this full bent of their souls soon flags; and they return to the road of as dull and formal a profession as ever, and it may be to the commission of the same foul gross sins as before. Such a will as this, though at first it seems to hurry men on apace, yet soon tires and leaves them far short of grace. A Christian's race is not run at so many heats, but by a constant course and progress; still getting ground upon lust, and approaching daily nearer to the kingdom of God. It is with such men, as I have sometimes told you it is with the sea: which, when it is spring tide, covers all its shores; but, when it ebbs, it discovers that there is nothing but sand, where it seemed to be a deep sea before.

So, these ebbing and flowing Christians discover plainly, that there is nothing but a barren sand at the bottom: they are unstable as water, and cannot excel; as Jacob speaks of Reuben, Gen. xlix. 4. A Christian is not made in a fit: nor is regeneration wrought in a passion; but it is a settled, solid, and constant frame of heart, that brings a man unto Christ, and makes him persevere to be a new creature.

(2dly.) The will of an unregenerate man is never universally changed; but he reserves still to himself some lust or other, that he will not part with.

His resolutions are such as were the resolutions of Naaman the Syrian: 2 Kings v. 17, 18. "Thy servant," says he, "will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto any other god, but unto the Lord. But in this thing, the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth to worship in the house of Rimmon, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." So, many peremptorily resolve to forsake their sins; but yet still there is some one dear lust or other, concerning which, they cry out, with Naaman, "the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing:" all their other sins they will willingly sacrifice to Christ, may they but be allowed to retain this one sin. Now that thin partition, that any one sin makes betwixt the soul and Christ, will keep it from ever closing with Christ: as, if there be but a thin film betwixt the scion and the stock, they can never be engrafted and grow together.

(3dly.) The will of an unregenerate man is usually very irrational.

He would obtain the end; but yet he will not use the means. Grace, he would willingly have; but you cannot bring his averse will to close with the performance of those unpleasing and irksome duties, wherein God usually bestows grace. Could they be holy with a wish, and suddenly metamorphosed to other men, none should be better Christians than themselves: could they enter into heaven by being willing to have it, none should shine higher in glory than they: but, when so much hard and unpleasing work must be done, first that they may be regenerate, and then after that they are regenerate to

perfect them for glory, they look upon these things at a great distance and afar off; and so they sit down with idle wishes, far short of grace and glory.

(4thly.) The will of an unregenerate man is usually a general not a particular will.

If God should ask them, 'Sinners, what would you do to be saved?'—'Oh, any thing, every thing,' say they. 'Leave off such and such a sin: perform such and such duties.'—'Yes, Lord: we will do any thing, but this duty; or leave any thing, but that sin.' Just so is it with many men: they will do any thing, every thing in general: but, bring it down to particulars, to the doing of this or that duty, or to the leaving of this or that sin, and then they are willing to do just nothing.

And thus you see how far the will itself may be wrought upon in unregenerate men, and what it is that usually hinders this change from being a thorough work of regeneration.

(5.) There may be also a great and wonderful change wrought in their lives, and yet they may continue in their former unregenerate state.

They may have *escaped*, as the apostle speaks, "the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ," and yet be "again entangled;" which shows them to be unregenerate: as it is in 2 Pet. ii. 20. To escape the pollutions of the world is no argument of the truth of grace, unless yourselves also are cleansed from the pollutions of your own hearts: for sins may be left merely from external, forced principles; such as are the terrors of conscience, or the heavy judgments of God; when God sets a flaming sword, betwixt a sinner and those sins, that he counted his delight and paradise. To leave sin upon such constraints as these, is to leave sin with a great deal of reluctancy and unwillingness: as a mariner, in a storm, casts his goods overboard: he doth it, indeed, with a kind of will; but it is with an unwilling willingness: he is frightened and terrified to it, for fear he and they should sink together. So, when a soul is tossed in a tempest of divine wrath, ready to split against the rock of ages, and to sink and be swallowed up in a sea of fire and brimstone, it is forced to lighten itself, and to

cast this and that dear lust overboard ; and this it doth from a will : but, yet, it is with such a forced will, as that with which the mariner throws his goods into the sea in a storm ; and, as soon as the tempest is allayed, the one gathers up his wreck, and the other gathers up his sins again. These men leave their sins, as Lot's wife left Sodom ; they dare not longer continue in them, for fear fire and brimstone should rain down upon them ; and yet, in leaving them, they give many a look back towards them, and at last they return again to them. I have spoken to this formerly on this subject : I shall not therefore insist on it longer now : only, be sure you rely not upon these broken reeds, as evidences of eternal life and glory ; for these things are deceitful, and have deceived many, at least for a time.

And, so much, for the first branch of this use of trial ; which was to show you what changes may be wrought upon carnal men, which they may mistake for evidences of their regeneration.

2. The second branch of this use of trial, is, *to lay down some particulars, that the scripture hath made infallible marks and tests of a regenerate person.*

(1.) But, before I come to mention these in their particular order, it will be expedient, briefly to premise something concerning the manner of obtaining assurance of grace, by the signs and characters of grace.

[1.] It is possible for a Christian to attain an assured knowledge of his regeneration.

I say, an assured knowledge, to carry it higher than the papists do, who allow no more than a conjectural probability ; which may well enough preserve from despair, but yet doth not exclude all fears and doubtings. But it is no wonder, that they, who will not trust their natural senses in the doctrine of transubstantiation, should not much less trust their spiritual senses in the doctrine of assurance. A Christian's assurance is many degrees above these weak guesses ; and arrives at a far greater certainty, than any demonstration can be : for the evidence of sense and reason is not so clear as that of assurance is : the testimony, that sense and reason give, is but human ; but the testimony given in a Christian's assurance is

divine, and therefore is far more certain and more infallible.

The apostle groundeth the evidence of assurance upon the divinity of the witness, in Rom. viii. 16. "The Spirit itself" (mark that) "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." What greater ground for assurance can there be than this? "The Spirit itself beareth witness:" and what God speaks is infinitely more certain, than that, which our very eye sees: and therefore it is very injurious to his truth and veracity, when he, by the secret and sweet whisperings of his Spirit informs the soul, that it is in a state of grace, to think that this testimony only gives probable guesses and conjectures. The witness, that the Spirit gives, is such a full assurance, as removes all doubts and fears; for it is the witness of God himself.

Now such a witness as this is, a Christian may have; and therefore it is possible, and it necessarily follows also, that he may have a full assurance beyond all doubts and fears. Nor is this possible by way of revelation, as special privilege indulged only to some few, and them the choicest of God's servants: for, in 2 Pet. i. 10. the apostle exhorts all Christians, to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure, which he would never do, were it an impossibility, and could not be obtained with our diligence. So, in 2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Examine yourselves," says the apostle, "whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates:" reprobation, in this place, by the way, doth not stand opposed to the decree of election, as if none were elected but those that were already actually in Christ; but it stands opposed to approbation, for God doth not approve of any in whom Christ is not formed: now, says the apostle, since you know this, try and prove yourselves whether Christ be in you: but it were a vain thing to put a Christian upon self-examination and trial, if there were no ordinary means to attain to the knowledge of it, but he must expect and depend upon some extraordinary revelation from heaven, a thing that is never but rarely given unto some few.

It is true, among Christians some may not have this assurance at all, and none have it at all times. As in a walk, that is shaded with trees and checkered with light and shadow, some tracks and paths in it are dark, and others are sunshine : such is usually the life of the most assured Christian. Sometimes, he walks in the light of God's countenance, and rejoices in the smiles of his favour : and, at other times, he walks in darkness, and can see no light : he steps out of the bright manifestations of God's love, into the umbrages of sad and cloudy apprehensions concerning his present state of grace and his future state of glory. So that some Christians never have any full assurance at all, and no Christian hath this full assurance at all times.

Now this inequality of assurance proceeds from a double cause.—Sometimes, from the free and various dispensations of the Spirit, who is arbitrary in his workings ; who is that wind, that bloweth when and where he pleaseth. For the treasures, as well of comfort as of grace, are in his hand. As the sun, he disposeth to the soul its summer and winter days, according to his approaches to or recesses from it.—Sometimes, it ariseth from new contracted guilt, that blots our evidences ; and makes them illegible, till it be taken off again. It is frequent with Christians, when they have done sinfully or hypocritically in one particular instance, then to begin to question all their sincerity ; and, upon the prevalency of one corruption, to doubt of the truth of all their graces. We do not therefore affirm, that there is in all, or may be in any at all times, this full assurance : but, in some there is ; and, in all, there is ground for it, and a possibility by diligence to attain it. “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”

That is the first thing.

[2.] The marks and signs of our regeneration, in which the scripture abounds, are, of themselves, insufficient to raise us to a full assurance, without the testimony of the Holy Spirit of God.

I doubt not but this appears very clear to those, who have taken pains to search out their spiritual estate by

marks and signs. If the Spirit comes not in, to satisfy them by his own witness, they may soon run themselves to a loss ; and, at the end, sit down as doubtful and perplexed as when they first began. As, for instance, if a gracious soul should call into question the truth and sincerity of his love to God ; and should begin to examine himself ; ‘How shall I know whether I do indeed love God ? Why, the scripture tells me, by keeping his commandments, by obeying him sincerely. Yea, but the sincerity of our obedience is as difficult to be known, as the sincerity of our love : and how shall I know whether my obedience be sincere ?’ Now here, though many signs might be given as evidences of this, yet still the doubting soul will be driving itself from one sign to another, and never find satisfaction in any of them, unless the Spirit of God comes in by its undeniable witness to silence all its objections, and to resolve all its doubts by a kind of peremptory and discussive voice that it is so : otherwise, there is no end of looking after signs, for they will still leave the soul full of perplexities. Unless the Spirit of God comes in as a satisfactory witness, we may run from one sign to another sign to inquire after grace, whether it be there and there ; and, when all is done, we may be as much at a loss concerning that sign, as we were at first concerning the grace which we inquired after.

And there are two reasons, why signs of grace, without the testimony of the Spirit, cannot work in us a full and absolute assurance. Because, usually, one grace is the sign of another. Signs of grace are graces themselves ; and, therefore, stand in need to be evidenced by other signs ; and those signs, being graces too, do stand in need to be evidenced by others : and so we shall run to an “infinitum,” unless the Spirit of God, by his witness, puts a stop to this search.—Because most of the signs and evidences of true grace may be so exactly counterfeited by hypocrites, that the judgment, that we pass upon ourselves by these alone, will still leave place for perplexing doubts and fears, lest all our graces, and all our signs of them too, should be but hypocritical delusions.

So, then, unto a full assurance, there is necessarily re-

quired an inward peremptory witness of the Holy Ghost. Signs and marks, without his infallible testimony, are insignificant and unsatisfactory things.

[3.] That assurance, that Christians have of their regeneration, is not wrought in them merely by the testimony of the Spirit, without the help of signs and marks.

As marks and signs cannot raise up to a full assurance, without the Spirit of God ; so neither do we obtain a full assurance merely by the testimony of the Spirit, without the help of signs and marks. For, to what end doth the scripture so much abound in giving characters of men's estates, which is the main scope and drift of the whole first epistle of St. John ? These were all superfluous, if the usual way of the Spirit's evidencing were without them. I am regenerated : but how come I to be assured of this ? not barely because the Spirit testifies to me that I am so : that looks too much like enthusiasm, and a wild and groundless delusion. But the Spirit proceeds in a more rational way : I am a Christian and regenerated, because I find those marks upon me, that can belong to none but to such who are so. Indeed, all our assurance must be ultimately resolved into the alone verdict of the Spirit of God, and that, without the help of farther signs and marks : for when a Christian gains assurance, he doth not with the sun run through all the signs of the zodiac to know if he be a Christian by this and this sign, and then to try the truth of that sign by another, and that other by a third, and so onward : that were endless and unsatisfactory : but when he is brought to signs that lie a remove or two off from the grace that he inquires after, he doth not usually make a farther search whether they be truly in him or not ; but the Spirit darts in a clear and heavenly light, that discovers them to him, not discursively but only intuitively, so that he is able to say they are in me beyond all deceit.

[4.] The usual way, whereby Christians come to be assured of their regeneration, is by the joint testimony, both of marks and signs of grace, and also by the Spirit's witnessing to us that these marks and signs are in us.

The word and the Spirit are the twin lights, that discover to us our condition. And, as mariners presage to

themselves a prosperous voyage, when two lights, Castor and Pollux, appear; but a dangerous voyage, if only one appears: so, here, it is unsafe, in the trial of our regeneration, to take up with one single, solitary light; but, when both the light of scripture marks and signs and also of the Spirit's witnessing appear together, we may then prosperously and happily proceed to a discovery of ourselves. So, in Rom. viii. 16. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." To evidence that we are born again, there comes in a twofold witness; the witness of our spirits, and the witness of God's Spirit: our spirit deposeth that we are so, that we are born again, and become the children of God; and this it doth, by observing the proper marks and characters, that the scripture gives of a child of God; and the Spirit of God comes in as another witness, that, in the mouth of two witnesses, this may be established; and, by his immediate light, clears up the truth of that attestation, that conscience did make; which takes away all doubtings and hesitations, and fills us with a full assurance, yea, gives us a plerothy. So that, still, marks and signs are of great use, for the discovery of the truth of grace; 1 John ii. 3. By this we "know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." But, still, we may be puzzled to know, whether our keeping of God's commandments be such a ground for our comfort; therefore, the witness of the Spirit is here required, to seal and confirm this unto us; without which, still, we shall be to seek assurance, for all the marks that the scripture lays down for evidences of our graces.

These things I thought fit to premise, before I give you any signs and marks of regeneration: that so you may be exhorted and moved, when you hear those signs that the scripture gives, to examine your hearts, whether they are transcribed within you; and also to lift up your hearts unto God, that his Spirit may dart into you such a spiritual light and clear illumination, as may infallibly demonstrate to you that these marks are indeed in you; it being the proper work of one and the same Spirit, to work grace in us, and to manifest it to us: it is he alone, that can draw that curtain that hangs before it, and gives us a view

of it. As it is the light of the sun only, by which we can see the sun; so is it the light of the Spirit only, by which we can know the Spirit to be in us. Let us, therefore, in the trial of ourselves, look to marks and signs for a testimony in our own consciences; without which, all our assurance may be well suspected for enthusiasm: and let us also beg the testimony of the Spirit; without which, all marks and signs will be but vain and unsatisfactory.

(2.) Now, to give you some signs of the truth of grace, I shall not insist upon all that might be mentioned: for they are very numerous; since there is no one grace, but is the sign of another grace, yea the sign of all other, for all graces are concomitant. I shall only, therefore, select out a few.

[1.] It is a good sign of grace, when a man is willing to search and examine himself, whether he be gracious or not.

There is a certain kind of instinct in a child of God, whereby he naturally desires to have the title of his legitimation tried: whereas a hypocrite dreads nothing more, than to have his rottenness searched into. David therefore prays, Psalm xxvi. 2. "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me: try my reins and my heart." God, indeed, hath many ways of trying us; but especially by the word and ministry: the scripture is the great treasury of all spiritual light: God hath amassed and stored it all up there; and whatever comes with spiritual illumination upon the conscience must borrow it from thence: the preaching of the word is the darting abroad of those beams, that pierce into the very entrails of sinners, and discover the secret thoughts and intents of their hearts.

Now try yourselves by this. Do you love the word of God, because it is a searching word? because it brings home convictions to you, and shakes your carnal confidences and presumptions? Do you love a soul-searching ministry, that speaks as closely and particularly to you, as if it were another conscience without you; a ministry, that ransacks your very souls, and tells you all that ever you did? Do you delight in a ministry, that forceth you to turn inward upon yourselves: that makes you tremble and look pale at every word, for fear it should be the

sentence of your damnation? This is a sign, that your condition is good, because you are so willing to be searched. "He, that doeth evil," saith our Saviour, John iii. 20. "hateth the light; neither cometh he to it, lest his deeds should be reproved." But, if you are pleased only with a formal, general ministry; and such prophets, as sing only pleasant songs to you; such, as never touch the conscience to the quick, that keep aloof off, and, instead of brandishing the word that is "sharper than a two-edged sword," reaving the heart with it, only make a flourish of it: if you can brook no other, but such a quiet, unconcerning ministry as this is, this is a bad sign, that yet you are unsound. A thief hateth the light, says our Saviour, lest he should be detected and discovered: so a hypocritical professor hateth that a beam of spiritual light, by the ministry of the word, should break in upon his conscience, to show how rotten and unsound he is.

And that is the first trial. It is the sign of a good estate, when a man is willing to put himself on the trial.

[2.] Love to those, who are truly godly, is a certain and infallible sign of regeneration.

1 John iii. 14. "We know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." This is a certain sign, that a mighty change is wrought on the heart: for, naturally, we are inclined to hate the children of God, upon that very account because they are godly. It is a true rule of the schoolmen, borrowed out of Aristotle, that the affections of the soul are the same towards the image of a thing, as they are towards the thing itself: if we love or hate any person, we shall accordingly love or hate his picture and resemblance: now all wicked men naturally hate God, because he is a holy God, and thereby is contrary to their very natures, that are corrupt and sinful; and so they also hate the children of God, because they are living pictures of God, and bear his image upon them, being made comformable to him by a work of regeneration. "He, that is born of the flesh," says the apostle, "will persecute and hate him that is born after the Spirit;" because he is the copy of that original, betwixt whom and them there is an antipathy founded in

their very natures. Now when a man, who before did thus hate, scorn, and despise the people of God, as a company of affected and turbulent hypocrites, shall find in himself a love and esteem for them, and shall see the beauty and glory of that holiness that before rendered them odious to him : this is a sign, that, certainly, a mighty change is wrought upon that man ; and that he himself is transformed into the image of God, because he loves that image, in others.

Now this trial will proceed upon these three particulars. —That this love be to them, because they are godly. We may possibly love godly men, for other respects ; because they are wise or learned, or because possibly they love us, or are related to us : but these are but by-respects, and grace hath no interest at all in them. That love to the godly, that can assure us of being godly and regenerate, must be a love to the children of God, merely because they are godly.—As we must love them because they are godly, so the more godly they are the more we should love them. “ My delight,” says David, “ is in the saints, and in the excellent ones of the earth.” The more holy a child of God is, if we love him aright, the more we shall love him.—If we love all, that are godly. Not only those of our temper, constitution, and opinion in all things ; but all of them : with a valuation and esteem for them, with a prizing love, which the image of God upon their souls and their similitude to him challenge. Indeed, our familiarity and intimacy may be with some of them, more than with others ; but our high and cordial esteem must be of all of them.

Now try yourselves by this. Do you love the brethren ? And so little, truly, is this love to be found, that the name of brethren is become a mock and a jest by many ! But is your delight in the saints ? Do you account them the excellent ones of the earth ? How few are there, that love them that love God ! or, if they do love them, possibly it is for other respects and reasons : could you not love them better, if they were not so rigid, strict, and precise as they are ? Let such know, as St. John speaks, in 1 John v. 1. “ He, that loveth him that begetteth, loveth him also that is begotten.” It is in vain

to think that we are born of God, if we have not a sincere and cordial affection for all those, that are the children of God, and our brethren.

[3.] Another sign of regeneration, is a universal respect and obedience unto all God's commandments.

This St. John expressly gives us, in his first epistle, chap. ii. 3. "Hereby," says he, "we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments:" and so, in ver. 5. "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."

It is observable, that the work of regeneration is itself called the writing of the law in our hearts, in Jer. xxxi. 33. "I will put my law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."

God hath written this law three several ways. When he first created man, he wrote it then upon his heart by his creating finger: man was the transcript of God: as he was his handy-work, so he was his hand-writing also: man was then the only copy of the law extant in the world: this copy was perfect; but yet it was such, as might be blotted and torn. Next, God wrote his law in his word: the holy scriptures exhibit to us an entire system, both of commands and duties: and this copy is both perfect and durable; such, as neither hath suffered, nor can suffer, any decays from length of time, or from the rage and malice of men or devils. And, lastly, God hath again wrote his law upon the heart of man, in his new creation: and this copy is eternally durable; but yet it is but as a writing upon sinking and leaky paper, which in this life is very obscure and full of blots.

Now this writing of the law upon our hearts, is a figurative expression: and denotes nothing else, but an inclination, joined with some ability, to fulfil the commands of God contained in his word; a conformity, betwixt the commands of the law and the affections of the heart, that, whatever the law enjoins, the heart also desires and delights in. Thus David explains it, Psalm xl. 8. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." So that the heart of a regenerate person answers to every tittle in the law, with sincere

desires at least to perform it. And, as, betwixt an indenture and the counterpart of it, there is an exact correspondency word for word: such an exact correspondency is there betwixt the law of God and the heart: whatever the law commands, the heart readily embraces and endeavours to fulfil. This harmony is expressed by David in Psalm xxvii. 8. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." This is to have the law of God written on the heart; which is the proper work of regeneration.

Let us now, therefore, try whether our conformity and obedience to the law and will of God written in his word, be such as may give us good ground to hope, that his law is also written in our hearts in our regeneration.

There is, therefore, a two-fold obedience to God's commandments: first, perfect; secondly, imperfect, but yet sincere.

1st. There is a perfect obedience: such as carries in it an absolute perfection, both of parts and degrees.

To make up this, two things are required;—That it be such an obedience, as is stretched forth to the utmost latitude of all God's commands; such, as is fully commensurate to the fullest bounds of duty; so as to leave nothing undone, that the law requires;—that it be such an obedience, as is wound up to the greatest intenseness of spiritual love and delight in the performance of it; in-somuch, as not to permit in the least any carnal ends, any straggling thoughts, or any wavering and unfixed affections at all so much as to breathe upon it. And this the scripture calls a serving of God with all our hearts, and minds, and souls: Deut. x. 12.

This is obedience, that is absolutely perfect and universal; both in respect of the object, and also in respect of the subject.

Now, here, I shall lay down two particulars.

(1st.) That, in the examining of our regeneration, we must not proceed by this absolute and perfect obedience; so as to conclude we have no grace, because we have some remaining sin.

Obedience to God's commandments is a sign of regeneration, where it is not thus consummate and blameless.

Nay, indeed, never any man since the fall did or can keep God's commandments, in this absolute and perfect manner, Christ only excepted: "There is no man that liveth and sinneth not:" 1 Kings viii. 46. It is true we are commanded, in Mat. v. 48. to be "perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect;" but, as soon may a clod of earth shine as bright as the sun, as we who have sinful natures ever attain to a sinless state in this life. And yet such an excess of commands as these are, though they are impossible; yet are they not unjust, nor unuseful. They are not unjust: because God commands nothing that is simply in itself impossible, but is equally proportioned to that strength which he at first gave us; and, if we have wilfully lost our power of obeying, we have no reason to complain of God as rigid and severe, because he will not also lose his prerogative of commanding. Neither are they useless: because to command beyond what we are able to perform, proves a means to excite us to perform so much at least as God will be pleased to accept of; who always accepts of sincerity in the desires and endeavours, where absolute perfection is wanting and unattainable: "If there be a willing mind," says the apostle, 2 Cor. viii. 12. "it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." Let none, therefore, conclude that they have no grace, because they have many imperfections in their obedience. A weak child is not therefore a bastard or illegitimate: so, thy grace may be very weak and imperfect, and yet thou mayest be truly born again to God, and be a genuine son and heir of heaven.

(2dly.) It is a good evidence of the work of grace in our obedience, when, though our obedience be very imperfect, yet we restlessly aspire, both in fervent prayer and in earnest endeavours, after the most absolute degree of perfection.

Both of these must be concerned: for prayers, without endeavours, are but hypocritical; and endeavours will never be without prayers, or at least they will never be successful. If we pray with unfeigned desires, that God's will may be done by us on earth with the same fixedness, delight, constancy, and perseverance, as it is done by the

saints and angels in heaven: if we rest not in our present attainments, nor sit down contented with what we have already; thinking that sufficient to defray our charges, and to bring us safe to heaven at last: if we think we have attained nothing, while there is any thing defective in us: if we strain every sinew, and bend every faculty of our souls, pressing forward to the mark for the prize of our high calling; and, with a holy impatience, breathe after farther measures of grace, still strengthening ourselves against lusts and temptations, and striving after the spiritual performance of duties: while we thus endeavour and strive, it may be a good evidence to us of our sincerity; and, in God's account, sincerity passeth for perfection.

Thus much, concerning the first sort of obedience, which is absolutely perfect. It is not attainable by Christians in this life: and therefore, the want of it should not deject us with a suspiciency of the want of grace: yet we must pray for it, and aim at it; and if we do so, it may be a good evidence of sincerity, which is evangelical perfection.

2dly. As for that obedience, that is attainable in this life, in imperfect measures and degrees, it becomes an evidence to us of our regeneration in these following particulars.

(1st.) When it is universal in respect of the subject: that is, there must be an obedient frame and rectitude of the whole man, both inward and outward.

[1st.] Sincere and evidencing obedience must be internal, of the inward man; such, as may regulate the heart and conscience itself.

“The law is spiritual,” says the apostle, and reacheth the soul and spirit of a man; and hence, says St. Paul, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” There is a spiritual force in the law of God, that, in a truly regenerate soul, checks all sinful thoughts, and quenches and damps the flames of sensual affections and desires. It judgeth those secret and retired motions of the soul, over which human laws have no command or prerogative.

Now examine yourselves by this. Do the commands

of God pierce and insinuate unto your inward man? Do they conform that to obedience? Dare you not cherish those sins in your souls, that possibly you dare not commit in your practices? Do you not dandle them in your thoughts, and hover and flutter over them in your affections? Are you not content with a fair and plausible appearance towards man? But do you labour also to approve your hearts unto God, and to bring every thought unto obedience to Jesus Christ? This internal obedience is a good evidence of the truth of that grace, which always begins with the heart, and from thence influenceth the life.

[2dly.] Sincere obedience must be external.

It is a vain plea, to pretend, as many ignorant people do, that their hearts are good, when their lives abound with ungodly practices. The life is the index of the heart: and, as the hand of a dial never goes amiss, but the fault is in the wheels that move it; so the life is never disorderly, but the fault lies in the heart and in the affections, that are the wheels and springs that move it. "An evil man," saith our Saviour, "out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things." True grace seasoneth the whole man; and makes a thorough change, both in the inward disposition, and also in the outward deportment: as it makes the thoughts holy, so it also makes the discourses savoury, and the affections and conversation heavenly. Both must be conjoined in a regenerate person: for, in the tendering unto God only an external conformity of the life when the heart is required, is but to mock God; and, to think that we please God with good affections when we take no care of our lives and practices, is but to mock ourselves.

Now try yourselves by this. Is your whole man, both soul and body, formed to the will of God? Do you serve him with your inward and with your outward man? Christ calls his law 'a yoke,' and certainly it is a yoke, wherein both must be coupled. Do you desire and endeavour to yield the obedience of the heart, and the obedience of the life also, as he requires: neither contenting yourselves with a slight and overly performance of duties, where the lips outrun the heart, and the heart

gives the lie to the lips ; nor yet slighting that outward reverence, that is necessary to testify the due sense which you have of his glorious presence, and that care which you have to serve him both in soul and in body that are his ? Do you so live, as not to defraud God of any part of his service, or of his servant ; but sacrifice yourselves entirely unto him ; your bodies, upon the altar of your soul and affections ; and both soul and body upon that altar, that alone can make both acceptable, even the Lord Jesus Christ ? This is a good evidence, that you do so keep the commandments of God, as that it may be a ground of assurance to you that you do know him, and are in him.

And, so much, for the first branch.

(2dly) Obedience is a good and infallible sign of our regeneration, when it is universal : as in respect of the subject, the whole man, soul and body ; so, also, in respect of the object, that is, the whole law in every particular command of it.

The whole law is contained in two things : in those duties, that immediately concern God ; and in those duties, that do immediately concern men. Now, if thy obedience be sincere, thou wilt have a general respect unto all God's commands : to those, that concern thy Lord and master ; and, to those also, that concern thy fellow-servants.

Bring this also to the trial. Art thou just and upright in thy dealings with men ? Art thou loving and helpful to thy neighbours ? it is well. But what then is thy religion to God ? is not that a dull and formal thing ? is not this the best character that can be given of thee, that thou art a good neighbour, better to men than thou art to God ? Again, if thou hast taken up a glorious profession of religion, and art frequent in those duties of it that concern God, what art thou then as to men ? Religion hath of late suffered upon this very account, while the professors of it have acted high things in a way of duty, and pretended to high things in a way of enjoyment ; but yet have been as unjust, oppressive, self-seeking, covetous, and over-reaching, as if their only reward were to live upon the spoil of others : thy religion to God, cer-

tainly, is no sign of grace, if thou art not also conscionable in thy dealings towards men : " Herein do I exercise myself," says the apostle, " to keep in all things a conscience void of offence both to God and men." But, more particularly, the duties, that respect others, are either general, as thou art a man to men ; or particular, as to thy relation in which thou standest, relative duties. Now, how is it, that you perform these duties, that belong to thy special relation ? for herein the life of Christianity is seen. How dost thou demean thyself, in the place where thou livest, as a magistrate, in checking sin and in punishing vice ? how, as a minister ? how, as a parent ? how, as a yoke-fellow ? how, as a child ? and how, as a servant ? Whatever a man doth, as to the general duties of Christianity, yet if he be negligent and careless in these particular relative duties, he hath great cause to suspect himself : it argues truth of grace, when we are careful in the fulfilling of these particular relations and stations, that we stand in towards others. I shall close up this note of trial with that of the apostle, in James ii. 10, 11. He, that offendeth in one, is " guilty of all : " if there be a willing and indulging sloth, in the neglecting of any one duty that God hath commanded, how difficult and how opposite soever it be unto flesh and blood, that man hath ground to suspect, that whatever other duties he performs, be they never so many and never so admirable, yet they are not such as manifest sincerity, and, may give him a good evidence of a good estate.

[4.] Another sign of regeneration, which is the last that I shall mention, is that which St. John speaks of in his first epistle, chap. iii. ver. 9, 10. "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.*"

This place may, perhaps, be among the number of those, that had been more clear, if they had been less expounded. I shall only give you the genuine native sense of the words, and then proceed to manage them to my present purpose. " Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Some

from hence have concluded a possibility, at least, of a sinless state in this life : others, the infallible certainty of it ; not only that a child of God might attain to such a perfection as is exclusive of all sin, but that whoever is a child of God cannot upon that very account be guilty of any sin : so like are errors to precipices, that, if a man lose his firm footing, usually he falls headlong ; nor doth he stop, till he dash himself against the bottom and foundation of all religion and piety : had these men but seriously pondered what the same apostle saith in his first chapter, v. 8, 10, " If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us : " and, " If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, " they would not have entertained such an over-weening conceit of a spotless perfection of life here : whereof the greatest part is no better than sin, and the best of it but too, too much defiled with it. Others interpret it thus : ' So long as we are the children of God, so long we cannot sin ; ' and so the Papists go : but these go upon an erroneous supposition, that every mortal sin, as they call them, makes an intercision of justifying grace ; and doth, as it were, annihilate the new creature. Others interpret it thus : ' In quantum sumus Dei filii ; ' we cannot sin under that respect and notion, as we are the children of God ; but even so far as we are, the best of us in the most part, unrenewed ; though this is a certain truth, yet it is but a dilute and waferish exposition of this place ; and it amounts to no more than this, that a regenerate man sins not as he is regenerate, that the principle of grace in him is not that principle from whence sinful actions proceed : and certainly, no man, that considers the weight of this scripture expression, will think that the apostle, by such an instance and ingemination, would press so thin a meaning as this is. The interpretation, therefore, that I judge to be the most natural and unforced is this : " He, that is born of God, doth not commit sin ; " that is, he doth not sin in that malignant manner, in which the children of the devil do ; he doth not make a trade of sin, nor live in the constant and allowed practice of it. Neither can he thus sin, because " his seed remaineth in him ; " that is, either the energy of the word of God whereby he is begotten again

to a spiritual life, or the complexion of the graces of the Spirit that are as it were the seminary and seed-plot of glory. Nor he cannot sin because "his seed remaineth in him: this seed remains, and keeps him that he cannot sin; either as apostates do who totally forsake the ways of God, or as profane persons do who never embraced them. There is a great difference between regenerate and unregenerate persons, in the very sins that they commit: all, indeed, sin; but a child of God cannot sin; that is, though he doth sin, yet he cannot sin after such a manner as wicked and unregenerate men do: there is a vast difference betwixt them, even in that wherein they do most of all agree; see that place in Dent. xxxii. 5. "Their spot is not the spot of his children;" even deformities themselves are characteristical; and a true Christian may come to know by his sins, that he is not a sinner. And, as they differ in the committing of sin, so much more in the opposing of it.

Let us, therefore, examine ourselves what evidences we have in respect of the keeping of ourselves from sin, that we are regenerated and born again.

1st. It is a good evidence of the work of grace, when our opposition against sin is universal. When we do, as David speaks of himself, "*hate every false way.*"

The reservation, indulgence, or allowance granted to any one known lust, is utterly inconsistent with a state of grace. One lust, that hath obtained your pass to go to and fro unmolested, and to traffic with the heart undisturbed, whatever opposition you may make against other sins, is a certain sign of a corrupt heart. One lust will serve as a spy, to hold intelligence with the devil. A scion can never be incorporated into the stock, while there is the least skin or film betwixt them: no more can we ever be incorporated into Jesus Christ, if there be but the separation of any the least allowed sin to interpose betwixt him and us. Our opposition, therefore, must be against all sin. It is true, in our bodies there are such parts, that, if we were wounded in them, there need no other wounds to dispatch us, but the wound is instantly mortal: as, if a man be wounded in the heart, you need not strike him on the head; but, in the body of sin and death, there is

no such wound : it is not sufficient to destroy the old man, that we wound him in any one part ; but he must be made, as our natural state is described to be by the prophet, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, all full of wounds and bruises.

Let us now try ourselves by this. Is there no lust, that your eye spares, nor that your heart pities ? Doth the sword of mortification draw the heart-blood of every sin ? When they fly for shelter into your bosom, can you rend them from thence, and slay them before the Lord ? When they plead profit or pleasure, can you, with a holy disdain, destroy them with such arguments in their mouths ? Can you then cut off a right hand, when it is lifted up to plead for mercy ? Can you then pluck out a right eye, when it sheds tears to move you to compassion to it ? If so, this is a good evidence of regenerating grace : whose proper effect it is, to beget an antipathy and hatred in the heart against all sin. But, if there be any one sin, that you allow and indulge in yourself, whatever other sins you may abstain from, assure yourself that the greatest change that is wrought upon you is only some external change of the life, but no change of the heart or state ; still you are in your sins, if you allow yourself but in one of them. One allowed sin is vent enough for the old man to take breath at ; and, while it hath a breathing-place allowed it, it is in vain to think that you have mortified and destroyed it.

2dly. As this opposition must be universal, against every sin in general ; so it must be, more especially, against the sins of the heart.

He, that will destroy a toad crawling on the ground, will much more destroy it should it crawl in his bosom. Now these sins are the bubbleings up of evil thoughts, and the motions of evil affections and desires ; those lurking and invisible lusts, that hypocrites may foster, and yet have a large testimonial of their saintship, to which all the world almost will be ready to set their hands. But this doth one, that is truly born of God, most of all complain of and strive against. In this, indeed, lies the most unerring test and trial of true grace. What the apostle tells us, in Rom. ii. 28, 29, that is not " circumcision which is

outward in the flesh ;" but that, which is inward, in the heart and spirit, the same may I say : it is not striving and struggling against sins, that are outward in the flesh ; but against sins in the heart. A numbness may seize on the outward members of the body ; when yet the heart beats strong and quick, and the brain works in sprightly and vigorous motions : so, truly, is it in this case ; the old man may sometimes be benumbed in its outward limbs, and denied in its executive part ; when yet the head may work busily in building and shaping sinful objects, and the heart eagerly beat and pant after them. It is, usually, the only care of a wicked man, to keep his lusts from raging and breaking forth into outward act : though his heart seeths and stews in malicious, unclean, worldly thoughts ; yet these he regards and laments not, nor suppresseth, so long as he can but keep them from boiling over, and from raising ashes and smoke about him. But here lies the chief task of a regenerate person : for, though it seem possibly an easy thing to destroy such little naked infant things as thoughts are that flutter up and down in the soul, and that light strokes would lay them dead ; yet, certainly, a true Christian, who by experience knows what it is to deal with his own heart, finds it infinitely more difficult to beat down one sinful thought from rising up in him, than to keep a thousand sinful thoughts from breaking forth into open act. Here lies his chief labour, to fight against phantasms and airy apparitions, such as thoughts are : he sets himself chiefly against these heart-sins ; because he knows these are sins, that are most of all contrary to grace, and do most of all weaken and waste grace : outward sins are but like so many caterpillars, that devour the verdure and flourishing of grace ; but heart-sins are like so many worms, that gnaw the very root of grace : and, therefore, God calls upon Jerusalem, in Jer. iv. 14, " O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness : how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee ?"

Now try yourselves by this. In the opposition, that you make against sin, what is it, that you chiefly resist ? Do you not content yourselves, that you have beaten corruption from the outward works into the very fort ; that, whereas

it sallied forth before at its pleasure and wounded your consciences, now it is pent up in a narrower room and compass? Do you not content yourselves with this? but do you still oppose it, and follow it into the heart; and, when it hides itself in a sinful thought, do you stifle and kill it there? If so, this is such an opposition, that proceeds from true grace, which works in you an antipathy against all sin. But, when a swarm of lusts is up, which perhaps some external principles only may keep from flying abroad: if they cluster in thy heart, and thou hivest them there: and if thou canst, for the satisfying of conscience, abstain from the outward acts of sins; and yet, for the satisfying of thy corruptions, canst also tolerate and allow the inward motions of sin: it is a sign that thou never knewest the power of regenerating grace; which first begins to cleanse the heart, as being the most compendious way and method to reform the life.

3dly. Look how you oppose those sins, that are more spiritual sins: such as reside in the refined and exalted part of a man, his mind; but have little traffic or commerce with the dreggy part, his body.

Such are pride, envy, unbelief, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, slighting of Jesus Christ, and the like. These are spiritual wickednesses: and, if thou art truly regenerate, thy chief endeavours will be bent against these; for these are sins of the deepest and blackest guilt in themselves, though they are not branded so in the account of the world. And, therefore, when our Saviour rakes up the bottom of hell, who do you find lies there? Is it the drunkard, the unclean person; such sottish and swinish sinners? no: but it is the hypocrite, the spiritual and refined sinner: Matt. xxiv. 51. These are those sins, that are so inconsistent with the image of God upon the soul, that, of all other sins, they make men nearest to resemble the devil: to be guilty of these sins, is to be a sinner like him. Those brutish lusts, wherein sensualists wallow, are not the proper sins of the devil: no; they are intellectual sins, clarified from such dregs; such as pride, malice, hatred of God and goodness, and the like.

Now try yourselves by this. You rush not, possibly, "into the same excess of riot" with others: you resist and

refrain from outward, gross, self-condemning sins : but, do you strive against pride, hypocrisy, unbelief, and hardness of heart? If so, this is a good sign, that you are the children of God ; unto whose spiritual nature, and unto yours also, these spiritual sins are most of all contrary. But, if you are only cleansed from the pollutions of the flesh, and not also from the pollutions of the spirit ; if you indulge yourselves in pride, malice, murdering and revengeful thoughts, and the like ; know assuredly, that you do not bear the image of God, but the image of the devil, whose peculiar sins these are.

4thly. A regenerate person bends his opposition, as against heart-sins and spiritual-wickedness ; so also against his own iniquity, in a peculiar manner.

David produceth this as a clear evidence of his integrity, in Psalm xviii. 23. “ I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.” Indeed, a child of God can have no sin his own, by any deliberate choice and approbation of it ; as one culled and chosen out from the rest, and reserved for him to commit. Thus to have any sin a man’s own, is inconsistent with true grace. But sin may be called a man’s own, by a too frequent practice of it, and by a too violent inclination of his heart unto it. Every one of us hath his peculiar sin, that we may call our own, that is more deeply rooted in us than others are : whether they arise from the temper of our nature, or from custom that is a second nature, or from the verge and tendency of our callings and employments, or from what account soever they proceed ; yet there are some sins, that a child of God may call his own, and against these doth he more particularly bend himself, and single them out unto the combat.

5thly. A truly regenerate person will be careful to avoid all temptations unto, and all occasions of sin.

And, therefore, in that prayer, that Christ hath taught us, we first pray, that we may not be led into temptation ; and, next, that we may be delivered from evil. So is it the first care of a child of God, that he be not tempted ; and his next care, how he may escape when he is tempted. It is a sign of a heart woefully entangled with the love of sin, when men choose to walk upon the very borders of sin and

temptation ; and, when they are under strong temptations, secretly please themselves with it, because now they think they have some excuse if they yield.

6thly. Our opposition against sin is a good sign of the truth of grace ; when it is not only universal against all sin, but universal from our whole man ; when it is not only from our reason and conscience, but also from our will and affections.

For, in regeneration, there is a principle diffused through the whole man, that is contrary to sin, and destructive of it in every faculty. As it was with Elisha, when he stretched himself over the Shunamite's child ; his eyes were against the child's eyes, and his mouth against the child's, yea every limb in him corresponding to every limb in the child : so is it in a regenerate man ; the new man, that is spread all over and covers as it were the whole old man, limb for limb, is spread over every faculty of the soul and body also. It is not enough, that our consciences check us for sin ; but the will and the affections must be bent against sin : the opposition must be from the whole soul, or it is not an evidence of the truth of grace.

Be exhorted, therefore, to deal impartially with your own souls. Look into your own state. Examine yourselves. Try whether Jesus Christ be formed in you. If your state be good, searching into it will give you the comfort of it. If your state be bad, searching into it cannot make it worse : nay, it is the only way to make it better ; for conversion begins with conviction.

ii. Now if you have tried yourselves by any of these marks, either you find that you are such as are already passed from death to life, or that you are still in a state of sinful nature : accordingly, I shall direct to you *a word of exhortation*, and so shut up the whole subject.

1. *If you have a comfortable evidence of your regeneration, that the habit of grace is indeed wrought in you, be exhorted to draw it forth into act. If you are born of God, live then as those that are the children of God.*

This exhortation I shall branch out into three particulars.

(1.) Endeavour, that the graces of the Spirit be fruitful in good works,

Your corruptions are always vigorous and operative; and why should not your graces be so, much more? Grace is in you the ruling and prevailing principle: why should it not also be most active in you? Yet so it is, as it was with Sarah and Hagar: Sarah, the free-born mistress, is barren; but Hagar, the bond-woman, is fruitful. So is it even in the children of God themselves: the noble, spiritual, and free-born part is usually barren and unfruitful; when the carnal and servile part is too, too fruitful, still conceiving, and still bringing forth. What is the reason, that corruption that is conquered should have a more numerous offspring, than grace that is triumphant? Grace is no sluggish, unacted principle; no; it is ethereal: it carries a divine and heavenly fire in it; and tends as naturally to what is good, as the corrupt part doth to what is sinful: it hath a natural propension to breathe itself forth into holy thoughts, holy affections, and desires. Do not you, then, be wanting to it; but stir up the grace of God that is in you: think how becoming a thing it is, when God hath framed you according to his image and likeness, that you also should frame holy thoughts and heavenly affections, according to God's likeness, and have a numerous progeny like unto him. But, alas! the children of God are much wanting to themselves, in this particular: if the Spirit, at any time, is impregnant upon their hearts with holy motions, how do they neglect and stifle them! so that there are but very few of them, but prove mere abortives. Our hearts, at last, will be found to have been the graves and sepulchres of thousands of holy thoughts and motions, which we have starved in their very infancy.

(2.) Oppose indwelling grace against the prevalency and power of indwelling sin.

Grace is an immortal seed, that will certainly sprout up and flourish into glory: it is a living fountain, that will certainly spring up unto eternal life; a ray of heavenly light, that will wax brighter and brighter to a heavenly day. It is immortal, in its seed; victorious, in a spark: triumphant, in its dawn: yea, take it when it is weakest, when this dawn is clouded, when this spark twinkles, when this seed is unspirited; yet, even then, is it mighty

through God, and is still an over-match for sin. To set grace against sin, is to set God against Satan, heaven against hell, the Spirit against the flesh : and what odds can any Christian desire more? Have we a principle of grace in us, which will go forth conquering unto conquer, and will assuredly crown us with victory ; and shall we not bring it to the trial? Yea, let me tell you, you must detain grace in unrighteousness, and depress and keep it under by violence, if you do not prevail with it : if you do not strive against your sins, you must strive against your graces ; and, therefore, it is the greatest shame in the world, for you, that have a principle of grace in you, that principle that shall never totally be overcome, basely to yield to any temptation or lust whatsoever.

(3.) Be exhorted also, since you are born of God, to live as becomes the children of God, and to express your heavenly parentage by your heavenly conversation.

I have formerly, in the handling of this subject, told you that we are the children of God, two ways ; by regeneration, and by adoption : adoption gives us the inheritance of children ; and regeneration gives us the nature of our heavenly Father. As we then bear the relation of children, so let us have the affections of children.

[1.] Let us possess our hearts with a filial fear and reverence of God.

God calls for this, in Mal. i. 6. "If I be a Father, where is mine honour?" And so the apostle, 1 Pet. i. 17. "If ye call God Father, pass the time of your sojourning here with fear." This holy awe and fear of God will be a great check upon us, when we are apt to grow wanton and extravagant. Children, whatsoever they do at other times, yet will strive to deport themselves respectfully in the presence of their father. Consider, you are always in the presence of your heavenly Father, who is omnipresent : he is with you wherever you are : his eye is upon you, whatever you are doing. Oh, therefore, behave yourselves with that holy reverence and composedness, which becomes so awful a presence as his. Thou, who wouldst abstain from any lewd and unbecoming action before the reverent face of thy earthly parents, wilt thou not much more reverence the all-controlling looks of thy heavenly

Father? There is not a thought in thy heart, nor a word upon thy tongue, but God knows it altogether; and if this be not a most powerful restraint to keep thee from evil, know this, that the very immodesty of thy sinning is a clear proof that thou art no child. When Joseph's brethren committed that horrid fact of selling him, they contrived how they might hide it from the knowledge of their father: doubtless, if the authority of Jacob's presence had been with them, it would have overawed them from that wickedness. Behold a more awful and dread Father than Jacob was, is always with you: and, therefore, since you can hide none of your sins from your dread Father's sight, be careful that you commit none in his sight.

[2.] Imitate your heavenly Father in his goodness and bounty unto all.

He is kind to the froward, and to the disobedient: He causeth his sun to shine upon the good and upon the bad, and doth good both to the just and to the unjust. Should God have avenged all those petulant wrongs and those arrogant affronts, that sinners have done against him, the whole world ere this time would have been utterly destroyed; but he hath not left himself without witness: it is the witness of his patience and forbearance, that the sun yet shines upon us, that the air supports us, that the heavens give forth their cherishing influences to us. Here is a pattern for you to imitate. Alas! you cannot be so much injured by men, or so beneficial to men, as God is. They depend no more upon you, than you do upon them: but we all depend upon a patient and forbearing God; and yet we are apt, upon every slight provocation, to break forth into fire and fury. This is not the disposition of God, neither should it be the disposition of his children. The divine nature, whereof we are made partakers, prompts us to be long-suffering, and full of bowels of mercy and compassion, and is pleased when it can like God forgive others. Jesus Christ, who had all the host of heaven and earth in pay under him, and could have commanded whole legions to have secured and revenged himself: yet, when he was, under his sufferings, hanging upon the cross, how patiently did he endure the scoffings, shout-

ings, and mockings of men; and open not his mouth otherwise than in prayer for them! "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," "When he was reviled, he reviled not again." Imitate your Lord and Master, your God and Father; and, when the world reproaches you and persecutes you, show that you have learned one thing, that nothing but true godliness can teach you; to wit, that you are able and willing to forgive them.

[3.] If you are the children of God, be patient and submissive under his correcting hand. Is it not thy Father that afflicts thee?

The apostle argues this strongly, Heb. xii. 9. If we suffer our earthly parents to chastise us for their pleasure, how much more should we suffer patiently the chastisements of our heavenly Father, who doth it only for our good, and if need be! Nothing puts a sharper sting into afflictions and makes them more intolerable, than to look upon them as punishments inflicted by an avenging God. The soul is not able to bear up under such afflictions, because then it looks upon the lightest and smallest evil that befalls it, to be but, as it were, the pledge and earnest of a far greater that is to ensue. But when we can look upon afflictions as the chastisements of a gracious Father, this will enable us to bear them, not only patiently, but thankfully also; as being the testimonies and effects of his special love unto us: for, says the apostle, he chastiseth "every son whom he receiveth." The end, for which God casts thee into the furnace of affliction, is to purify thee from thy dross, not to consume thee: he knows what afflictions, and what measures of them, will best conduce to this end, for he is a wise God; and he will bring no other affliction upon thee than what shall accomplish this end, for he is also a gracious Father.

These three exhortations belong to those, who, by the signs before named or any other, have attained to some assurance that they are renewed and born again.

2. In the second place, let me speak to *such, as are yet in a natural and sinful estate; in the same deplorable state of sin and misery, in which they came into the world.*

Unto these now I shall only direct a two-fold exhortation, and so conclude the whole subject.

(1.) Beware that you do not flatter yourselves with any deluding hopes of heaven : you are, as yet, without any right to it.

This is, indeed, a dreadful caution. What! to beat men off from their hopes of heaven! And, commonly, it proves as fruitless, as it is dreadful: men's hopes, of all things, frequently deceive them. They maintain themselves with little, especially the hopes they have of heaven; and they live either upon weak probabilities, or upon strong fancies. And, hence, the scripture compares the hope of a hypocrite to "a spider's web:" Job viii. 14: men spin their hopes out of their own bowels, and settle themselves in the midst of them, and doubt not but they shall catch heaven itself in their foolish cobwebs. Should I come and ask you all, one by one, 'Do you, and you, hope to be saved?' where is the person, that would not, by his disdain at the very question, testify how high and how great his hopes are? Would not the drunkard, the swearer, the profane person, and the whole rabble of wicked and ungodly wretches speak as confidently of their salvation, as if they were born with sure proofs of heaven in their hands? What! are these men regenerate? or is the price of heaven fallen; and God become willing to part with it upon lower terms than the new birth? Art thou regenerated, that hatest God and godliness, and all those that bear the least resemblance to the divine purity? Art thou regenerated, that makest an impudent scoff at the name, and deridest the very title that fallen man hath unto happiness? is it likely, that the new nature should be hid under an old life? Regeneration is the ransacking of the soul; the turning of a man out of himself; the crumbling to pieces of the old man, and the new moulding of it into another shape: it is the turning of stones into children; and a drawing of the lively portraiture of Jesus Christ upon that very table, that before represented only the very image of the devil. This mighty change is wrought by regeneration. Man's partaking of the divine nature is the greatest change, that ever was wrought in

heaven or in earth, unless it were God's partaking of the human nature. Art thou thus changed? are all old things done away, and all things in thee become new? hast thou a new heart and renewed affections; and dost thou serve God in newness of life and conversation? If not, what hast thou to do with hopes of heaven? thou art yet without Christ; and so, consequently, without hope. Sinners, what is it you trust to? Is it your own good works? this, indeed, is the common refuge of those, that have fewest good works to produce: but, alas! what confidence canst thou repose in these, when the very prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord? Is it the merit of Christ, that you rely upon? why Christ becomes a Saviour to none, but to those in whose hearts he is first formed. Is it some slight and general notions of God's mercy, that you trust to? it is true, God is infinitely merciful, though he hath already damned thousands for their sins; and he will remain for ever infinitely merciful, when thou also art damned among them: it is in vain to press the mercy of God to serve your foolish hopes, against that inviolable truth of his, that hath excluded you out of heaven: "Except you be born again, you can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God." This is that irreversible sentence, that is written on heaven-gates: no entering there, but by passing first through the new birth: no dogs nor swine must come into that holy city; and such are all unrenewed persons: yea, the scripture calls them the children of the devil: John viii. 44. "Ye are of your father, the devil:" and, certainly, that God, who hath chased devils out of heaven, will never admit any of his rude offspring into it. And therefore let me, in the first place, exhort you not to flatter yourselves into hell and destruction, with false and deluding hopes of heaven.

(2.) Give no rest, either to God or to yourselves, till this thorough change be wrought upon you in your regeneration.

It is, as you have heard, of absolute necessity unto eternal salvation; and, unless you think that salvation itself is not of absolute necessity, what can be the reason, that you trifle and dally in that, which is of so vast a concernment? What is it that you can plead for yourselves?

Is it, that it is not within the compass of your power to regenerate yourselves? it is true: but, although you cannot form this new nature in you, why do you not yet do your utmost to prepare and dispose yourselves to receive it? Though we are all lamed and crippled by our fall which we took in Adam, yet such cripples as we are may notwithstanding make shift to get into that way by which Christ useth to pass, and may possibly be healed by him. It is a sure rule, Though God is not bound to give grace upon men's endeavours, yet neither is he wont to deny it: do you expect that this change, like that of the surviving saints at the last day, should pass upon you ere you are aware of it, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye?" It is true, man's change of heart is the greatest miracle that God works in the world; but yet, he works it in an ordinary way, by our own endeavours, as well as by his own irresistible and victorious grace: and, therefore, God calls upon us, Ezek. xviii. 31. "Make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die?" Do not therefore cheat your souls into eternal perdition, by such lazy conceits of your own weakness and impotency. Do not content yourselves with a few yawning, drowsy wishes; expecting till divine grace doth of its own self drop down out of heaven, and of its own accord change your hearts: possibly, before that time you yourselves may irrecoverably drop into hell. Will you lose your souls for ever, only out of a wretched sloth? doth one end of them lie burning as a brand in hell-fire, and will you not stretch out your hand to pluck it thence? Believe it, so long as you continue in a sinful state you are wrapped about with ten thousand curses: the wrath of God is continually making its approaches unto you; and there is only a thin mud wall of flesh to fence it out, which is still mouldering and falling away, and whether it will be able to hold out one day longer you know not: you hang over the bottomless pit, only by the weak thread of a frail life, which is ready to be snapped asunder every moment; and, if some consuming sickness should fret this thread or some unforeseen casualty should break it off suddenly, if death work a change upon you before grace works a change in you, of all God's creation you are the most miserable: Better,

that you had been the most loathsome creature that crawls upon God's earth, yea better that you had never been, than that you should forget and neglect this great work of renovation one moment too long. Therefore, use no delay. Every moment, that is not this present, is too long a delay. While you are dreaming of repentance and converting, some months or possibly some years hence, God may snatch you away before the next sand is run in time's glass; and where are you then? "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." Whatever is not now, may be too late; and, ere that time comes that you have prefixed to yourselves, God may set up your souls as flaming monuments of his displeasure, justice, and severity in hell for ever.

If you ask me what you shall do to be renewed, I answer, the directions are not many: take only these two.

[1.] Be instant with God, by prayer, that he would, by his omnipotent grace, new-create you to himself, and stamp again upon you his effaced image.

There is a prevalency in the prayer of a mere natural man, when he prays for grace; else St. Peter would never have exhorted Simon Magus, who was "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," to pray that so the thought of his heart might be forgiven him.

[2.] Improve diligently, all the means of regeneration; whereof the word is the chief.

Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth, says the apostle: Jam. i. 18. Attend it constantly: meditate upon it frequently: endeavour faithfully to practise it. This hath been the way, in all ages, that hath proved successful for the bringing in of sinners unto God. Heaven is full of happy souls, that have been fitted for that glorious estate, by such very ordinances as these are, that now you sit under. It is true, these are not of themselves a sufficient means. Alas! what is the weak breath of a poor man, to make impressions upon hearts that are harder than the nether mill-stones? What can we do, to give sight to the blind, and life to the dead? but only God, who demolished the walls of Jericho by the sound of a few rams' horns, doth likewise make use of the preaching of the Gospel to demolish the strong-holds of Satan; which

would have been as impertinent and insignificant a sound as that was, had not God put his institution upon it, and his Spirit into it. Wait upon the ordinances, therefore; that that happy soul-saving word may at length be spoken, that may cause thee to arise, and to stand up from the dead. Endeavour to do whatever lies in thy power, in order to thy regeneration. It is true, it is not in our power to make ourselves new creatures: but, when God sees thee conscientiously improving that power that thou hast, he will then give thee that power that thou wantest. Never yet was there an instance of any, that did vigorously to their utmost labour after grace, that did not also leave some good evidences behind them that they did obtain it: and, certainly, thou hast no reason to think, that God will make thee the first instance and precedent.

So much, for this time, and for this subject.

THE
ALMOST CHRISTIAN DISCOVERED.

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