
THE NINTH
C O M M A N D M E N T.

**Thou shalt not bear false Witness against
thy Neighbour.**

THE former Commandment provided for the Security of every Man's Property, that they may suffer no Wrong nor Detriment in their Goods: This which I have now read unto you, provides for the Preservation of their good Name, which is a much dearer Possession: For, *A good Name, saith the Wise Man, Prov. 22. 1. is rather to be chosen than great Riches.* And therefore it ought to be kept by us, although not delicately and nicely; yet tenderly, and with respect. Who so contemns Fame, will soon prostitute Vertue; and those who care not what others say, will shortly arrive to that Impudence of sinning, as not to care what they themselves do. Indeed a good Name is so excellent a Blessing, that there is but one thing to be preferred before it; and that is a good Conscience; when these two stand in competition, Credit must give place to Duty; and in this Case, it is far better to lose our Repute with Men, than our Acceptance and Reward with God. It oftentimes so happens, through the Ignorance and general Corruption of Mankind, that what is honest, and pure, and just, are not yet of good Report amongst them. Piety is but Affectation; Strictness of Life a peevish Hypocrite; the Cross a Scandal;

H h h 2

An Exposition upon

Scandal ; Christ himself a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners ; his Doctrine Heresie ; and his Miracles Impostures : And if thou lightest upon any such froward and perverse Censurers, as too many such there are in all Ages, who *think it strange*, as the Apostle speaks, *that ye run not with them into the same excess of Riot ; speaking evil of you ; seek not by any base and sinful compliance to redeem their good opinion ; but rather glory in the Testimony of their Railing, and account all their reviling Speeches to be but so many Votes for your Blessedness. Mat. 5. 11. Blessed are ye when Men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.* Never covet a good Name by bad Actions : For what will all the concurring Applause of the whole World signifie unto thee, if yet thy Conscience condemn thee louder than they can extol thee ? This is but to have Musick at the Door, when all the while there is Chiding & Brawling within. It is far better that others should wound thy Credit, than thou thy Conscience. That is a Wound which their Tongues can never lick whole again. All the Reputation thy Popular Sinning can bring thee, will be but like hanging Bells at an Horse's Ears, when all the while his Back is gall'd with his Burthen. Whosoever will be a Christian, must resolve to go through bad Report, as well as good ; he should desire the one, but not anxiously refuse the other. And if any will bespatter him, let him be careful that it be only with their own Dirt, and not with his ; with their own Malice, and not his Miscarriages. And whilst he thus keeps his Conscience clear, he may be assured that his Credit shall be cleared up at that day, when all their unjust Reproaches shall but add a Crown and Diadem of Glory to his Head.

But where a good Name is consistent with a good Conscience, we ought to prize and value it as one of the choicest of God's Blessings in this World, and to use all lawful Means to preserve it : For,

First,

the Ninth Commandment.

61

First, This will render a Man more serviceable to God ; and the fitter Instrument to promote his Honour and Glory in the World. And therefore the Wise Man, *Eccles. 7. 1.* compares a good Name to precious Ointment ; and in the Comparison gives it the preference ; for as precious Ointment diffuseth its fragrancy through the Room where it is poured forth, and affects all that are in it with its delightful Scent ; so do Men's Gifts, when they are perfum'd with a good Name, delight and attract others, and by a sweet and powerful Charm allure them to imitate and practise those Vertues which they see so recommendable. And therefore we find it the Apostle's Care, *2 Cor. 6. 3.* to give no offence in any thing, that the Ministry might not be blamed. Though it be our great Folly to estimate Men's Counsels by their own Practice ; since a diseas'd Physician may prescribe a wholesome Medicine ; yet so it comes to pass, whether through the Curse of God, or the Prejudice of Men, that those who have lost their Credit, have, together with it, lost all opportunities and advantages of doing good in the World : Let their Parts be never so flourishing, and their Gifts never so eminent, yet if once this dead Fly be gotten into this Box of Ointment, it will corrupt it, and render it unfavoury to all. And the Devil hath no such Policy to make the Gifts of those whom he fears might shake his Kingdom unuseful, as either to tempt them to the commission of some infamous and scandalous Sin ; or to tempt others falsely to calumniate, and report such profligate Crimes concerning them : For then he knows such an one is disarm'd, and made unserviceable ; and if he can but once blast the Leaves, the Fruit will seldom come to any maturity and perfection. And therefore as you desire to be serviceable to God in promoting his Glory ; and to the World, in promoting their Good and Benefit ; which is the great End of our Being, and the only thing worth living for ; so endeavour by all wise and honest Means, to keep up your good Name. Be good, and appear

to

An Exposition upon

to be so. *Let your Light so shine before Men, that they seeing your good Works, may glorifie your Father which is in Heaven, Matth. 5. 16.*

Secondly, A good Name, as it gives us Advantage of doing Good to others, so it lays an Obligation upon us of being good our selves: For if the World be so kindly mistaken, as to report well of us without any Desert, yet this cannot but work upon us, if we have any Ingenuity, and ingage us to deserve it; so happily turn that which was Praise into Motive. Or if they give us but our due Commendation, and our Vertue justly challengeth this Fame; yet still it will engage us to do Things worthy our selves, and worthy that common Estimate that Men put upon us, that we may not fall short of what we have been, or what they still repute us to be. This is a laudable Ambition, which seeks by Vertue to maintain that Credit, which by Vertue we have acquired. And doubtless when other Arguments have been baffled by a Temptation, this hath been a Sheet Anchor to the Soul; and hath often held it in the greatest Storms, when the Wind and Waves have beat most furiously against it. Should I consent to this Sin, what a Blot and Dishonour should I get to my self! How should I be able to look good Men in the Face again! Would not this Sin brand me for an Hypocrite in their Esteem? Would they ever look upon me, or receive me with Affection after this Fall? Should I not carry the Disgrace, and Scar of this Wound visibly upon me to my Grave? No, one Sin shall never ruine all the Comfort, and all the Repute of so many Years Piety: And I who have been so long noted and exemplary for Holiness, will not by this one Fact make my self a scorn to the Wicked, and a shame to the Godly; and by those Considerations, he rejects a Temptation, that perhaps ran down all other Considerations before it. But now, a Man of a lost and desperate Credit, sins impudently, without any such Restraint

strait upon him: He thinks it is but in vain for him to abstain from any Wickedness; for whether he doth, or not, People will still believe him guilty: His credit is so disfigured, and his Name so infamous, that he thinks he cannot be worse than he is already reported; and so rubs his Forehead, and outfaceth Censure, and with a brazen Impudence cares not how wicked he is, nor how many knew him to be so.

Thus you have seen how cautious we ought to be in maintaining our own good Name.

But this Command requires us also to preserve the Reputations and good Name of others, as well as our own. And it forbids,

First, The Sin of Lying.

Secondly, Detraction and Slander.

Thirdly, Base Soothing, and unworthy Flattery.

First, This Command prohibits Lying. A Sin, that comprehends under it all other Violations of this Precept: For Slander and Flattery are both of them Lies, different only in Manner and Circumstance.

And as it is a Sin large and comprehensive in its Nature; so it is general and universal in its Practice: We may well complain with the Holy Prophet, *Thine Truth is perished from the Earth.*

Here I shall first shew you what a Lie is: And then the Heinousness and Aggravation of this common Sin.

First, A Lie, according to St. Austin's Definition of it, is a voluntary speaking of an Untruth, with an intent to deceive.

*Voluntaria Falsi Enunciatio, fallendi Causa, Aug. de mendac. ad Conferentium, c. 44.

An Exposition upon

ctive. And therefore in a Lie there must be these Three Ingredients.

- First*, There must be the speaking of an Untruth.
- Secondly*, It must be known to us to be an Untruth, and a Falshood. And,
- Thirdly*, It must be with a Will and Intent to deceive him to whom we speak it, and to lead him into Error. And, therefore,

First, Parables, and Figurative Speeches are no Lies: For neither as to the drift and scope of them, are they Falshoods; nor yet are they spoken with an intent to deceive, but rather to instruct the Hearers; and so have neither the Matter, nor the Form of a Lie. The Scripture abounds with these Tropical Expressions, which, although in the proper signification of the Words, they cannot be verified of the Things to which they are applied; yet do very fully agree to them in their figurative and transferred Sense. Thus *Jotham's* Parable of *Trees choosing them a King*, was aptly accommodated to that Sense which he meant, and which those that heard him, well enough understood. And thus our Saviour Christ calls himself a *Door*; signifying by that Metaphor, that by him alone we must enter into Heaven and Eternal Life: A *Vine*; signifying, that without our Incision into him, and spiritual Union unto him, whereby we derive Grace from his Plenitude and Fulness of Grace; as the Branches do Sap and Juice from the Stock, we shall be cast out as withered and fruitless Branches, fit for nothing but to be burned. Innumerable other *Metaphors* are every where dispersed up and down in the Scriptures. And besides *Metaphors*, the Scripture useth *Hyperbolies*. I shall only instance in that famous one, *John 21. ult. Many other things Jesus did; which if they should be written everyone, I suppose that even the World it self could not contain the Books that should be written.* This high Expression the Evangelist useth only to exaggerate

The Fifth Commandment.

65

aggrate the Number of the Miracles and remarkable Passages of our Saviour's Life; and to signifie to us, that he did very many other things, which are not upon Record.

And sometimes the Scripture useth Ironical Taunts. Thus in that bitter Sarcasm of *Elijah* to the Priests of *Baal*, 1 *King.* 18. 27. *He mock'd them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a God.* Which kinds of Ironical Speeches are so far from being intended to create Errour in the Minds of Men, or to confirm them in it, that they are spoken on purpose to convince them of their Errours, and to make them appear to be shameful and ridiculous; and therefore are no Lies.

But here we must take this Caution; That in using such Figurative Speeches, we ought so to circumstantiate them, that the Hearers may easily perceive the Drift and Scope of our Discourses; or at least may be assured that we intend some other meaning by them, than what the Words do properly, and in themselves bear. Otherwise, though it may not be a Lie in us, yet it may be an occasion of Errour and Mistake in them.

Secondly, Every Falshood is not a Lie; for though it hath the Matter, yet it may want the Form and Complement to make it such: For many times Men do speak and report that which is not true, which yet they themselves do believe to be true; and so are rather deceived, than Deceivers; and perhaps are far from any intention of imposing upon the Credulity of others*. Such an one is not so much to be accused of Lying, as of Folly and Rashness, in reporting that for Truth, the Certainty of which is not clear and evident unto him.

* *Vir bonus præstare debet nementitur, prudens nomenmendacium dicat.*
P. Nigid.
apud A. Gell. noct. At. 3. l. 11. c. 11.

Thirdly, A Man may speak that which is true, and yet be a Liar in so doing: As in these two Cases:

1. i

1. When

An Exposition upon

1. When we report that to be a Truth, which, although it be so, yet we believe it to be a Fallshood, and report it with an intent to deceive those that hear us: Or,

2. When we report the Figurative Words of another, leaving out those Circumstances which might make them appear to be Figurative. And therefore, *Matth. 26. 60.* They are called *falsse Witnesses*, which came in against Christ, and testified, that he said, he was *able to destroy the Temple of God, and to build it in three days.* In which, though there were many Falsifications of the Words of our Saviour; yet had they reported the very Words that he spake, they had nevertheless been false Witnesses; because by their Testimony they wrested them to another Sense than what Christ intended by them; for certainly he is a Liar, who reports my Words with a purpose to beget a wrong Construction of them, as much as he who reports me to have spoken what I never said.

Fourthly, It is no Lie to conceal part of the Truth, when it not expedient or necessary to be known. Thus, *1 Sam. 16. 2.* God himself instructs *Samuel*, when he sent him to *anoint David King over Israel*, that he should answer, *he came to sacrifice unto the Lord*; which was Truth, and one End of his going into *Bethlehem*, though he had also another; which he prudently concealed.

Fifthly, A Man may act contrary to what he before said, if the Circumstances of the Thing be altered, without being guilty of Lying. We have frequent Example of this in the Scripture. Thus, *Gen. 19. 2.* The *Angels* tell *Lot*, that *they would not come into his House; but would abide in the Street all night*; yet upon his Importunity and earnest Intreaties, *they went in with him.* And thus *St. Peter*, with some heat and vehemency of his Humility, refused that *Christ* should wash his Feet. *John 13. 3.* *Thou shalt never wash*

wasb my Feet: But when he was instructed in the significance of this Condescension of our Saviour, not only permits, but intreats him to do it. So likewise in all things of such a nature, we may lawfully change our Words, upon the change of our Minds; and upon the inducement of some Circumstances that were not known or considered by us, we may without the imputation of Lying, do otherwise than we before resolved and declared: But this must be heedfully cautioned:

First, That the Actions be not such as we are bound to perform by Divine Precept, Nor,

Secondly, Such as we have bound our selves unto by the voluntary Obligation of a Vow made unto God. Nor,

Thirdly, Such as our not doing them, or doing otherwise than we have promised, should be hurtful or prejudicial unto others: For if I have promised another that which is beneficial unto him, however I may change my Opinion; yet I must not change my Purpose, but unless he will release me, or hath forfeited the Benefit of my Promise, by failing in the Conditions of it, I stand engaged to perform what I have plighted unto him.

And thus you see what a Lie is, and what is not a Lie: The Summ of all I shall contract into this Description of it. A Lie is a Falshood, either real, or supposed so by us, spoken purposely, and with an intention to deceive another. And therefore neither Falshoods, nor thought to be so, nor Figurative Speeches, nor Truth partly concealed, nor the change of our Mind and Purposes, upon the changing and alteration of Circumstances, can be chargeable with that foul and scandalous Sin of Lying.

Now Lies are usually distinguished into Three Kinds:

The Jocular,
 Officious, and,
 Pernicious Lie.

An Exposition upon

First, There is a Jocular Lie; a Lie framed to excite Mirth and Laughter, and deceive the Hearer, only to please and divert him. This, though it may seem very harmless, to deceive Men into Mirth and Recreation; yet Truth is such an awful and severe thing, that it ought not to be contradicted; no, not in Jest: And God reckons it up as a Sin, against the *Israelites*, *Hosea 7. 3.* That they *made the King and Princes glad, or merry, with their Lies.*

Secondly, There is an officious Lie; which is told for another's Benefit and Advantage; and seems to make an abundant Compensation for its Falshood, by its Use and Profit: But yet neither can this excuse it from being a Sin; for since a Lie is intrinsically evil in it self, let the Advantage that accrues by it, be never so great, we ought not to shelter either our selves, or others under that rotten Refuge. That stated Maxim holds universally true in all Cases, *We ought not to do evil, that good may come thereof.* And therefore, although thine own Life, or thy Neighbour's depends upon it; yea, put case it were not only to save his Life, but to save his Soul, couldst thou by this means most eminently advance the Glory of God, or the general Good and Welfare of the Church; yet thou oughtest not to tell the least Lie to promote these great and blessed Ends. This the Apostle takes for granted, *Rom. 3. 7.* Which Place, because it may seem at first glance, somewhat obscure, I shall briefly expound unto you. *If the Truth of God hath more abounded through my Lie unto his Glory, why yet am I also judged as a Sinner?* The Words, as they lye, seem to be favourable to such a beneficial Lie: But if we consider the Scope and Drift of them, we shall see that they clearly condemn it. For the Apostle had in the foregoing Verses taught, that the Unrighteousness and Sins of Men did occasionally conduce to the Manifestation of the Justice and Veracity of God, in fulfilling his Threatnings upon them; against this Position, he raiseth an
Objection;

Objection: *Verse 5.* If the Unrighteousness of Men commend, and illustrate the Righteousness of God; How then can God be just, in taking Vengeance on those Sins by which he is glorified? To this the Apostle answers two Ways.

First, He abhors the Consequence, *Verse 6. God forbid,* that we should think him unjust, because he punisheth those Sins, which accidentally serve for the Manifestation of his Glory. For if God were unjust, how then should he judge the World.

Secondly, He answers by putting a like Case, and giving a like Instance, *Verse 7. If the Truth of God hath more abounded through my Lie, why yet am I judged as a Sinner?* As if he should say; by the like Reason, as you infer, that it would be unrighteous in God to punish those, who are the occasion of so much Glory to him through their Sins; by the like I might infer, that if by *my Lie* I might glorifie God, I were not to be accounted a Sinner for Lying. But this, saith he, *Verse 8.* is a most wicked Consequence, and such as would justify the Slanders of those, who report that we affirm it lawful, *To do Evil that Good may come, whose Damnation is just:* That is, it is just with God to damn those, who slander us with such a gross Untruth; and it is just with God to damn those, who hold so wicked and destructive a Doctrine. So that you see nothing could be more expressly spoken against these officious Lies, than what the Apostle here produceth in this Place. He asserts in the general, That we must not do Evil that Good may come thereof; and he instanceth in particular, that we must not lie, although the Glory of God may be promoted by it.

Thirdly, There is a malicious and pernicious Lie, a Lie devised on purpose for the Hurt and Dammage of my Neighbour; which is the worst, and the most heinous sort of all,
and

An Exposition upon

and hath nothing that might excuse or extenuate it. It shews an Heart brim-full of the Bitterness of Malice, when this Passion works out at the Mouth in slanderous Reports, and false Accusations. All Lies are in themselves sinful; but this the vilest, and most abominable of all.

Now for the Aggravations of this Sin, Consider,

First, It is a Sin that makes you most like unto the Devil. The Devil is a Spirit, and therefore gross carnal Sins cannot correspond unto his Nature: His Sins are more refin'd, and intellectual; such as are Pride, and Malice, Deceit, and Falshood. *John 8. 44. He is a Liar, and the Father of it.* And the more of Malice goes into the Composition of any Lie, the more nearly it resembles him. This is the First-born of the Devil; the beginning of his Strength; for by Lies he prevailed over wretched Man; and therefore is his Darling and Beloved Sin, and the greatest Instrument of promoting his Kingdom. 'Tis that which, in his own Mouth, ruined all Mankind in the Gross; when he falsely suggested to our first Parents, that they should be as Gods, and that which he still puts into the Hearts and Mouths of others, to ruine and destroy their Souls, and the Souls of others, *Acts 5. 3. Why hath Satan filled thine Heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? When he speaketh a Lie, he speaketh of his own,* saith our Saviour: And certainly when we speak a Lie, we repeat only what he prompts and dictates to us. Thou never liest, but thou speakest aloud what the Devil whispered softly to thee. The Old Serpent lies folded round in thy Heart, and we may hear him hissing in thy Voice: And therefore when God summoned all his Heavenly Attendance about him; and demanded who would persuade *Abab* to go up, and fall at *Ramoth-Gilead*, an Evil Spirit, that had crowded in amongst them, steps forth, and undertakes the Office, as his most natural Employment, and that wherein he most

the Fifth Commandment.

most of all delighted, *1 Kings 22. 22. I will go forth, and be a lying Spirit in the Mouth of all his Prophets.* Every Lie thou tellest, consider that the Devil sits upon thy Tongue, breaths Falshood into thine Heart, and forms the Words and Accents into Deceit.

Secondly, Consider, That it is a Sin most contrary to the Nature of God, who is Truth it self; a Sin that he hates and abominates. *Prov. 6. 17. These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him; a proud Look, a lying Tongue, &c.* And, *Prov. 12. 32. Lying Lips are an abomination unto the Lord.* And therefore we have so many expresse Commands given us against this Sin. *Lev. 19. 11. Ye shall not deal falsely, nor lie one to another.* *Col. 3. 9. Lie not one to another.* *Eph. 4. 25. Wherefore putting away Lying, speak every Man Truth to his Neighbour.*

Thirdly, Consider, That it is a Sin that gives in a fearful Evidence against us, that we belong to the Devil, and are his Children: For he is the Father of Lies, and of Liars: God's Children will imitate their heavenly Father in his Truth and Veracity. And it is a very observable Place, *Isa. 63. 8. Surely, saith God, they are my People, Children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour.*

Fourthly, Consider, how dreadfully God hath threatned it with eternal Death; scarce any one Sin more expressly and particularly. *Rev. 21. ult. Without, even in outer darkness, are Dogs, and Murtherers, and Idolaters, and whatsoever loveth, or maketh a Lie.*

Fifthly, A Lie sheweth a most degenerate and cowardly Fear of Men, and a most daring Contempt of the great God. **Whoever lies, doth it out of a base and sordid Fear, lest some Evil and Inconveniency should come unto him by declaring;**

Lib. 2. c.
18.

clarating the Truth. And this *Montaigne*, in his *Essays*, gives as the Reason why the Imputation of Lying is the most reproachful Ignominy that one Man can lay upon another; and that which most passionately moves them to Revenge; because, saith he, *to say a Man lieth, is to say, that he is audacious towards God, and a Coward towards Men.*

Sixthly, Mankind generally accounts it the most infamous and reproachful Sin of all others: A Liar loseth all Credit and Reputation amongst Men; and he who hath made himself scandalous by Lying, is not believed when he speaks Truth. Yea, it is so odious and foul a Sin, that we find it generally esteemed worse than any other Sin; and the avoiding of this, thought a good Excuse for the commission of others: For when Men are moved with some violent Passion, they oftentimes resolve to do such things, which, when their Passion is allayed, they must look upon as grievous Sins; yet rather than be false to their Word, and so censured for Lying, they will venture to perpetrate. Thus *Herod*, for his Oath's sake, beheaded *John the Baptist*. And the common Excuse for rash and unwarantable Actions, is, *I said I would do thus, or thus; and therefore I thought my self bound in Honour to do it.*

Seventhly, It is a Sin that God will detect, and exposeth those who are guilty of it, to Shame and Contempt. *Prov. 12. 19. Lying Lips are but for a moment.* And when they are found out, as usually they are, by their own Forgetfulness, and the interfering of their own Speeches, how shameful will their Sin be to them? And the only Reward they shall have for it, is, that those who have accustomed themselves to Lying, shall not be believed when they speak Truth.

Thus much concerning that heinous and odious Sin of Lying.

There

The Ninth Commandment.

73

There remains two other Violations of this Commandment: The one is, by Slander and Detraction; the other, by base Flattery and Soothing: And both these may respect either our selves, or others. I shall first speak of that common Sin of Slander and detraction; a Sin that is reigning and triumphant in this our Age: And if I should likewise say in this Place, I think I should not my self be guilty, of it by that censure. Indeed Slander and Detraction seem somewhat to differ; For Slander properly is a false Imputation of Vice; but Detraction is a causeless, diminishing Report of Vertue. The one traduceth us to be what indeed we are not; the other lessens what we really are, and both are highly injurious to our good Name and Reputation, the best and dearest of all our earthly Possessions.

When a Man's Life and Actions are so blameless and exemplary, that even Malice it self is ashamed to vent its Venom by base Standers, lest it should appear to be Malice, and the Reproach should light rather upon the Reporters, than him whom they seek to defame; then it betakes it self to those little sly Arts of nibbling at the Edges of a Man's Credit, and clipping away the Borders of his good Name, that it may not pass so current in the World as before. Thus, when any are so just as to give others their due commendation either for Learning, or Wisdom, or Piety, or any other Perfection, either of Grace, or of Nature, you shall have those who lie in wait to cut off other Men's Esteem, if they see it so strongly fortified by the Conspicuousness of it, and the general Vote of the World, that they dare not attack the whole, then they lurkingly assault part of it; and what they cannot altogether deny, they will endeavour to diminish: *'Tis true, such a Man is, as you say, Learned and Knowing; but without, so knowing, as so know, that too. He is wise, but his Wisdom is rather politick, than generous; and all his Designs are byass'd with Self-Ends. He is charitable; but his Charity seems too indiscreet; or if such if you did not pro-*

K k k

claim

claim his good Works, he himself would. He is pious and devout indeed, poor Man, after his Way, and according to his Knowledge. Thus by these blind Hints, they endeavour either to find, or to make a Flaw in another Man's Repute; well knowing that a crack'd Name, like a crack'd Bell, will not sound half so clear and loud in the Ears of the World, as else it might.

Thus you see what Slanders and Detractions are. Now,

First, A Man may be a Self-Slanderer, and a Self-Detracter; and such are those who traduce and defame themselves, and either assume to themselves those Wickednesses they have not committed, or blameably conceal those Gifts and Excellencies they are endowed with, when they are called to discover them for the Glory of God, and the publick Good. Some slander themselves out of hope of Reward; when they suppose the Crimes they boast of, may be accepted as Services, by others. Thus, when *Saul* had slain himself, an *Amalekite* falsely reports to *David* that he had slain him, hoping to obtain a Reward from him for dispatching his Enemy. Sometimes Men impiously boast of those Sins which they never did, they never durst commit, merely out of a braving Humour of Vain-glory, and that among their debauch'd Companions they might gain the reputation of vallant and daring Sinners. Others falsely accuse themselves of those Sins of which they were never guilty, out of a despairing and dejected Spirit. Thus many a poor Soul that hath laboured under severe Convictions, begins first to doubt, and then to conclude that he hath certainly committed the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost; & in extreme anguish & horror cries *Guilty*, & confesseth the Indictment that is falsely drawn up against him by the Calamny of the Devil, and his own black Fears and Melancholy. Sometimes Men detract from themselves out of a lying and dissembled Humility;

Η ὕμνος
βλαση ἡ
λαση ἕλλη-
στις ἀλλο-
κοινῶν
Arist. Eth.
l. 4. c. 7.

mility ; making this kind of Detraction only a Bait for Commendation ; as knowing the Ball will rebound back the farther to them, the harder they strike it from them. This is usually an Artifice of proud and arrogant Persons ; and those who cannot endure to be contradicted in any thing else, would be very loth you should yield to them in this. And lastly, Others detract from themselves out of a too bashful Modesty, or to avoid some troublesome and unpleasing Employments which they are called unto. Thus we find *Moses*, *Exod. 4. 10.* making many Excuses, that he was not eloquent, but of slow Tongue, and a slow Speech ; and all because he was loth to undertake that difficult and dangerous Charge of bringing out the Children of *Israel* from the Bondage of *Egypt*. All these Kinds of Self-Slander and Detraction are evil, and some of them most vile and abominable.

Secondly, There is a slandering of, and detracting from another, wronging him unjustly in his Fame and Reputation ; which we ought tenderly to preserve and cherish. God and Nature have intrusted us mutually with each other's good Name. Thy Brother's Credit is put as a precious *Depositum* into thy hands ; and if thou wickedly layest it out, by spreading false Rumours of him, or carelessly keepest it, by suffering other to do so, when it is in thy power to justify him, know assuredly that it will be strictly required of thee: For in this respect every Man is his Brother's Keeper.

Now this Slandering of others, may be either in Judicial Process, or else in common and ordinary Converse.

First, In Judicial Process ; and then it is truly and properly *False witnessing* : When thou risest up against thy Brother in Judgment, and attestest that which thou knowest to be false and forged, or which thou art not most infallibly assured to be true : And this Sin is the more heinous

An Exposition upon

and dreadful, upon the account of two aggravating Circumstances that attend it.

First, Since usually all Actions in Law and Judgment, concern either the Person, or the Estate of thy Brother, by a False Witness thou not only wrongest him in his Name and Reputation, but in one of these, and so art not only a Slanderer, but a Thief or Murderer. *Prov. 11. 9. An Hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his Neighbour.* And by so much the more odious is thy Crime, in that thou pervertest the Law, which was intended to be a Fence and Safeguard to every Man's Property, and turnest it against it self, making it the Instrument of thy Injustice and Cruelty. The Psalmist, *Psal. 52. 2.* compares *Doeg's* malicious Tongue to a *sharp Razor*; and certainly when thou givest a false Testimony against thy Brother, thy Tongue is a sharp Razor, and it not only wounds his Credit, but cuts his Throat.

Secondly, Since usually all Judicial Proceedings exact from the Witnesses a tremendous Oath solemnly taken by the Name of the great God of Heaven; to give in a false Testimony, is not only to be guilty of Slander, but of Perjury too. Yea and let me add one thing more to make it a most accumulate Wickedness; such a false Testimony is not only Slander and Perjury; but it is Blasphemy too: For what else is it but to bring the most holy God, who is eternal Truth, to confirm a Falshood, and a Lie? What can be an higher Affront to his most Sacred Majesty than this? For a sworn Witness is therefore accepted, because he brings God in to be Witness too. And wilt not thou tremble, O Wretch, to cite God to appear a Witness to that, which a Thousand Witnesses within thee; (I mean thy own Conscience,) do all depose to be false and forged; and so to transfer thy Injustice, and Rapine, and bloody Murder upon him, and shelter them all under the shadow of his Veracity and Faithfulness?

You

You see then how horrid an Impiety this is. And yet how common, not only those who by this wicked Means suffer wrong, but others, who are conversant in such judiciary Trials, do too truly report. May it please God to put it into the hearts of our Rulers to enact more severe and rigorous Laws against those who are found guilty of it. It is sad to think, that whereas a Thief shall be adjudged to Death for stealing some petty inconsiderable Matter, and perhaps too for the relief of his pressing Necessities; yet two Villains that have conspired together, by false Accusations, and perjured Testimonies, to take away a Man's whole Estate, or possibly his Life, should for these far greater Crimes, be sentenced to so easie a Punishment, that only Shame and Reproach make up the severest part of it. Certainly, methinks, it were but just that the least they should suffer, should be a retaliation of their intended Mischiefs; and that the same they design'd against their Brother, should be inflicted upon themselves, whether it be loss of Life, or loss of Goods and Estate. It is but all Equity that the Complotters and Artificers of Mischief, should perish by their own Craft. And if this Rigour and wholesome Severity were but once used, we should not have so many Oaths set out to hire, nor would any make it a Trade to be a Witness; but Innocency would be secured under the Protection of the Laws, and the Laws themselves be innocent of the Ruine of many Hundreds, who by this Means fall into the Snares of ungodly Men. Of this one thing I am sure, That God himself thought it a most equitable Law, when he thus provided for the Safety of his People Israel. *Deut. 19. 18, 19, 20. If the Witness be a false Witness, and testifie falsely against his Brother, then shall you do unto him as he had thought to da unto his Bröther: So shalt thou put away the Evil from among you; and those who remain shall bear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.*

Secondly,

An Exposition upon

Secondly, There is a slandering of others in our common and ordinary Converse. And this is done two Ways; Either,

First, Openly and avowedly, in their Presence, and to their Faces. And that is also two-fold.

Either by reviling and railing Speeches. And thus *Shimei* bark'd at *David*, *2 Sam. 16, 7. Come out, thou bloody Man, and thou Man of Belial.* And I wish that our Streets and Houses did not, to their great Disgrace and Reproach, eccho with such Clamours; and that too many did not rake together all the dirty Expressions their Wit and Malice will serve them to invent, only to throw into one anothers Faces. A Sin, which as it is sordid and base in it self, so it chiefly reigns among those who are of a mean Condition. But wheresoever it be found, it is a Disparagement to Humane Nature, a Sin against Civil Society, and argues Men guilty of much Folly and Brutishness; and I am sure, is a Transgression of that express Command of the Apostle, *Eph. 4. 31, 32. Let all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all Malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

But then there is another way of open, avowed Slander, and that is by bitter Taunts, and sarcastical Scoffs. And this is usually an applauded Sin among the more refined sort of Men, who take a Pride and Glory in exposing others, and making them ridiculous; thinking their own Wit never looks so beautiful, as when it is died in others Blushes. But this is a most scurrilous, and offensive way, wherein certainly he hath the most Advantage, not who hath most Wit, but that hath least Modesty. These kind of Tauatings, are sometimes such as the Apostle calls cruel Mockings; and reckons them up as one part of those Persecutions the

Primitive

Primitive Christians indured, *Act. 13. 36.* Others had *Trial of cruel Mockings.*

As Nero, for his barbarous Sport, wrapp'd up the Christians in Beasts Skins; and then set Dogs to worry them: So these disguise their Brethren into false and antick Shapes; and then fall upon them, and bait them.

Secondly, There is a more secret and sly conveyance of Slander; and that is, by back-biting, whispering, and carrying up and down of Tales, like those Lusive Tongues, *Jer. 20. 10.* that would fain find, or make themselves some Employment; saying, *Report, and we will report:* And so a false and slanderous Rumour shall, like the River Nilus, spread over the whole Land, and yet the Head of it be never known; it shall pass on to the indelible Blot and Infamy of thy Neighbour, and the first Author of it lie hid, and concealed in the Croud, as some Fishes will in the Mud, which they themselves have stirred. Against this sort of Men, *Solomon*, in his Book of *Proverbs*, is very severe; and there is no one Wickedness, which that excellent Compendiunt of Wisdom and Morality, doth more inveigh against, than this of whispering about another Man's Disgrace, *Prov. 16. 8.* *The Words of a Tale-bearer are as Wounds, they go down into the inmost Parts of the Belly,* And this he repeats again, *Chap. 26. 22.* intimating to us, that the Wound such a Tongue makes, is deep, but yet hid and secret, and therefore the more incurable. And *Prov. 16. 28.* *A Whisperer separates chief Friends.* He is as it were the Devil's Truchman; and Interpreter between them both; and goes to one, and buzzeth in his Ear what such an one said of him, although perhaps it be altogether false; and when he hath by this means got some angry and choleric Speeches from him, goes and reports them back to the other; and so by his wicked Breath blows up the Coals of Strife and Dissention between them. And therefore the Wise Man tells us, *Prov.*

An Exposition upon

26. 20. *Where no Wood is, the Fire goeth out; so where there is no Tale-bearer, the Strife ceaseth.* The Apostle cautions the Corinthians againsts this Sin, 2 Corinth. 12. 20. *I fear, lest when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, lest there be among you Debates, Envyings, Strifes, Back-bitings, Whisperings, Tumults;* and he reckons it up among the black Catalogue of those Crimes, for the which God gave up the Heathen to a reprobate Mind, to do things which are not convenient; being filled with all Unrighteousness, full of Envy, Murder, Debate, Deceit, Malignity, Whisperers, Back-biters, Despightful, Inventers of Evil Things, Rom. 1. 29. 30. Now one of the chief Artifices of this sort of Men, is to caluminate strenuously, according to that old Maxim of the Devil; *Calumniare fortiter, & aliquid adhaerebit,* Slander stoutly, and somewhat will stick behind: For though the Wound may possibly be healed, yet the Scar will still remain, and be a Blemish to a Man's Reputation as long as he lives.

But then again there is another kind of Slander and Detraction; and that is, when a Man divulgeth those Imperfections and Faults, which are truly in his Neighbour, without being called, or necessitated to do it: For sometimes Truth it self may be a Slander, when it is spoken with an evil Design to the Hurt and Prejudice of another. Indeed if thou be duly called to witness in Judgment; or if it be in thy own Defence and Vindication; when if thou dost not discover him that is guilty, thou thy self mayest be supposed to be the Person; or if the Crime be such, as ought not to escape unpunished; or if he remain contumacious after more private Admonition; in which Case, our Saviour commands us to tell the Church; or, lastly, when it is for the Safety and Security of another, who might else be wronged, should we conceal from him the Mischiefs, which others intend him: In these Cases, it is both lawful and expedient to make known the Faults of thy Brother. But then be sure that thou do

the Ninth Commandment.

81

do it, not with any secret Delight and Exultation, that thou hast his Credit to trample upon, to raise thine own the higher; but with that true Grief and Sorrow of Heart, that may evince to all the World, that nothing but Conscience, and a Sense of thy Duty, enforced thee to publish his Shame, which thou shouldest be willing to hide at the price of any thing, but Sin, and thine own Shame. But alas, it is strange to consider the Depravity of our Nature, how we delight in other Men's Sins, and are secretly glad when their Miscarriages give us an occasion to reproach and disgrace them. How many are big with such Stuff, and go in pain till they have disburdened themselves into the Ears of others! And some are such ill Dissemblers of their Joy, that they do it with open Scorn and Irrision. Others are more artificially malicious, and with a deep Sigh, and a down-cast Look, and a whining Voice, and an affected Slowness, whisper to one; Alas, Did you not hear of such a gross Miscarriage by such an one? And then whisper the same thing to another, and a third; and when they have made it as publick as they can, hypocritically desire every one to keep it secret; for that they would be loath their Neighbour should come to any Disgrace and Trouble about it. Believe it, Sirs, this, though the Matter you report be never so true, is nothing else but Slander; because it is done to no good end, but only to feed your own Malice; and, like Flies, to lie sucking the gall'd Backs and Sores of others. And therefore we find that *Doeg*, though he told nothing but the Truth, 1 *Sam.* 22. 9, 10. Yet he is by *David* challenged as a Liar and Slanderer, *Psal.* 52.

And thus now you have seen what this Sin of Slander is.

I shall finish this Subject, with giving you,

An Exposition upon

First, Some brief Rules and Directions, which through the Grace of God, may be serviceable to keep you from this common Sin. And then,

Secondly, Shew you how you ought to demean yourselves under the Lash of other Men's slanderous Tongues.

First, If thou wouldst keep thy self from being a Slanderer of others, addict not thy self violently to any one Party, or Persuasion of Men. For part-taking will beget Prejudice, and Prejudice is the Jaundies of the Soul, which represents other Men, and their Actions, in the Colour which our own Disease puts upon them. And indeed, we have all generally such a good Conceit of our selves, that it is a very hard and difficult Matter, to have a good esteem for others, who are not of our Judgment, and of our Way. And this makes us first very willing to hear some Evil of them: For because we think that what we do is good, we cannot cordially think them good, who do not judge and act as we our selves do; and so our Minds are prepared to entertain Reports against them from others, and then to spread them abroad our selves. And I cannot but impute to this the great Uncharitableness of our Days, wherein Love and Brotherly Kindness lye murdered under the Violence of different Persuasions, and different Modes, and divers Ways of worshipping one and the same God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence all those lying Rumors, and lying Wonders, that one Party invents to beat down the other. One Party reports the other to be all profane, and superstitious; and the other reports its Opposite to be all hypocritical and seditious, and both suffer from each others invenomed Tongues; and between both, Truth suffers, and Charity perisheth, and is utterly lost. For Shame, O Christians! Is this the way to promote God's Cause, or Christ's Kingdom? Doth He or It stand in need of your Lies? Will you speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him? Shall his Ho-

OUR.

not be maintained by the Devils Inventions; I shall not speak partially; but wheresoever the Fault lies, there let this Censure fall; That it is certainly a very strong Presumption of a very weak and bad Cause, when the Refuge and Support of it are Lies

Secondly, If thou wouldest not be guilty of Slander, be not busie in other Men's Affairs; keep thine Eyes within doors, and thy Thoughts at home; enquire not what others say, nor what others do; but look to thine own Affairs, and guide them with discretion: Thou hast work enough at home, within thine own Heart, and in thine own House; and if thou art careful to manage that well, thou wilt scarce have either Time or Inclination to receive or divulge bad Reports of others: And therefore the Apostle joyns Idleness, Pragmaticalness, and Tatling together. *1 Tim. 5. 13. They learn to be idle, wandering about from House to House; and not only Idle, but Tattlers also, and busie Bodies, speaking Things which they ought not.* They are idle, and yet busie-Bodies; very idly busie; who, because they care not to employ their Hands, set their Tongues on work, and suffer them to walk through the World, abusing and lashing every one they meet. A true Description of a company of giddy Flies in our times, that are always roving from House to House, and skipping about, now to this Man's Ear, and by and by to that, and buzzing Reports of what Ill they have heard, or observed of others.

Thirdly, Take another Rule; If thou wouldest not be guilty of Slander, be frequent in reflecting upon thine own Mis-carriages, or thy Proneness to fall into the same, or greater Faults; when thou hearest or knowest of any foul and scandalous Sin committed by another, look backwards upon thine own Life and Actions. Canst thou find no Blots in thy Copy? Is the whole Course of thy Life fair written

An Exposition upon

upon thy Conscience? If not, how canst thou with any shame and modesty upbraid thy Brother with his Miscarriages, when thou thy self hast been guilty of the like, or greater? Or why, *O Hypocrite, beholdest thou the Motte that is in thy Brother's Eye, and seeest not the Beam that is in thine own?* Methinks our shame for our own Sins, should be a Covering to our Brother's; and when we our selves are guilty, we should not be so malicious, nor foolish, as to reproach our selves, by reproaching him; otherwise, to eclipse and darken his good Name, is but as when the Moon eclipseth the Sun, her own Darknes and Obscurity is made the more remarkable by it.

Or, if God by his restraining Grace hath kept thee from those Wickednesses into which he hath suffered others to fall; yet then look inward, view and search thine own Heart, ransack over thy corrupted Nature; and there thou shalt find those, yea, and far greater Abominations than those, like Beds of twisted Serpents, knotting and crawling within thee; say with thy self, How can I reproach him who hath but copied forth mine own Nature? How can I expose his Infamy who hath but done what I have much ado to keep my self from doing? Possibly the same Temptation might have prevailed over me too, had God let it loose upon me. I owe my Preservation, not to any difference that was between us, but only to the free and arbitrary Grace of God: By this it is that I stand; and shall I reproach him for falling, who should also my self have fallen, were I not strongly upheld by another? Thus, I say, by reflecting on our selves, we shall be withheld from being injurious in our Censures, and in our Reports of others; we shall hardly divulge their real Miscarriages, much less accuse and slander them with false and forged ones. This is the Apostle's Rule. *Gal. 6. 1. Brethren, if a Man be overtaken in a Fault, you which are spiritual, restore such an one in the Spirit of Meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

Fourthly,

Fourthly, If you would not be guilty of Slander, listen not unto those who are Slanderers and Detracters. Lend not your Ears to those who go about with Tales and Whispers whose idle Business it is to tell News of this Man and t'other : For if these kinds of Flies can but blow in your Ears, the Worms will certainly creep out at your Mouths: For all Discourse is kept up by exchange ; and if he bring thee one Story, thou wilt think it Incivility not to repay him with another for it ; And so they chat over the whole Neighbourhood ; accuse this man, and condemn another, and suspect a Third, and speak evil of all. I wish that the most of our Converse were not taken up this way, in recounting Stories of what pass'd between such and such, when all is to no other end, but to bring an evil report upon them. Now if any such Back-biters haunt thee, who make it their Trade to run up and down with Tales and News, give them no countenance; listen not to their Detractions; but rather sharply rebuke them, and silence their slanderous Tongues; and this will either drive the Slander from them, or the Slanderer from thee. *Prov. 25. 23. The North-Wind driveth away Rain; so doth an angry Countenance a backbiting Tongue.*

Fifthly, If you would not be Slanderers of others, be not Self-Lovers; for Self-Love always causeth Envy; and Envy Detraction. An envious Man cannot endure another's Praise; and therefore seeketh all he can to blast it by false Reports, and lying Slanders; as if all that were detracted from another, were added to his own Reputation. When his Neighbour's Fame begins to grow tall, and to spread about him, he then seeks what he can, to cut it down; because he thinks it hinders his Prospect, and the World cannot take so fair a view of him as he desires; and therefore he is still hewing at it, sometimes with oblique, and sometimes with direct Blows; sometimes striking at his Parts, and sometimes at his Piety; and if he can but make these fall in the esteem of the World, then he thinks none shall be so much

An Exposition upon

much respected and honoured as himself. A Man that is a Self-Lover, thinks all due unto himself; all Praise and Commendation must run in his Chanel, or else it takes a wrong course, and he accounts just so much taken from him, as is ascribed to another: And this puts him upon this Base Art of Detraction, that by depressing others, he may advance himself, and raise the Structure of his own Fame upon the Ruines of his Neighbour's. And therefore if thou wouldest not slander others, be sure do not too much admire thy self. For Self-Appause, and Self-Esteem is like a Pike in a Pond, that will eat up and devour all about it, that it self may thrive and grow upon them.

Sixthly, Be not too easie and facile to entertain suspicious and evil Surmises against others. For if thou begin to suspect evil of another, the next thing is to conclude it, and the next to report it. This Suspicion is a strange Shadow that every Action of another will cast upon our Minds; especially if we be beforehand a little disaffected towards them. Thus very Dreams increased Suspicion against *Joseph* in his Brethren: And if once a Man be out of Esteem with us, let him then do what he will, be it never so vertuous and commendable, Suspicion will still be the Interpreter. And where Suspicion is the Interpreter of Men's Actions, Slander and Detraction will be the Gloss and Comment upon them. Indeed Suspicion is always too hasty in concluding; and many times our Jealousies and Distrusts upon very small occasions, prompt us to conclude that what we have thus surmised, is certainly come to pass; and so we take Shadows for Enemies, and report that confidently for Truth, which yet we never saw acted, but only in our own Fancies.

Now, notwithstanding that this Sin of Slander and Detraction is so great and heinous; yet may it not be justly feared, that many place their whole Religion in it, and think themselves so much the better, by how much the worse they think

think and report of other Men? Do they not think it a piece of Zeal and Warmth for the Worship and Service of God, to cry down all as Superstitious that do not worship him in their Way? Do they not make it, if not a part, yet a sign of Holiness, to be still finding faults, and crying out against others, to be censorious and clamorous? Such a sort of Men are all leud and profane; and such a sort are all rebellious, and Hypocrites: And then to justify their Censures, instance, possibly in Two or Three, of whom perhaps they know no more than the bare Names: And what tends all this to, but mutual exasperation? Those that do not believe them, are exasperated against the Reporters; and those who do believe them, are exasperated against the Slandered: And as it tends to Exasperation, so likewise it encourageth and hardneth many in their Sins: For when they hear so much Evil blazed abroad in the World; and few or none escape without having some foul Blot rubb'd upon him, and infamous Crime reported of him, whether truly or falsely, they think that Sin and Wickedness is no such strange Thing, and so embolden themselves to commit that which they hear is so common.

I beseech you therefore, O Christians, for the Peace of the Church, which else will continue sadly rent and divided; for the sake of Christianity, which else will be discredited and reviled; for your Brethren's sake, who else will be discouraged or exasperated, be very cautious what reports you either receive, or make of others. Their good Name is very precious; precious to God, when their blameless Conversation deserves it; and precious to themselves; howsoever, unless there be absolute necessity, and you be constrained to do it for the Glory of God, and the Good of others, divulge not their Imperfections, though they be real, and in no case whatsoever feign or devise false Rumors concerning them. *Take heed lest if ye bite and devour one another, ye be not consumed one of another, and one with another.*

These:

An Exposition upon

These are the Rules to keep you from being guilty of Slander against others.

But now if any are guilty of raising an ill Report against you, observe these following Rules and Directions, how you ought to demean your selves in this Case.

First, If the Reproach they cast upon thee, be true and deserved, though they perhaps have sinned in disclosing it to the World; yet make this Use of it; go thou and disclose it in thy most humble and penitent Confessions unto God; yea, and if thou art called thereunto by due Form of Law, give Glory unto God by confessing it before Men. Men possibly may upbraid thee with it; but by this course God will forgive thee without upbraiding thee.

Secondly, If thou art falsely charged with that which never was in thine Heart to do, yet improve this Providence to stir thee up to pray the more fervently that God would for ever keep thee from falling into that Sin with which others slander thee; so shall all their Reproaches be thrown meerly into the Air, and fall at last heavy upon their own heads, whilst thou rejoycest in the Whiteness and Innocency of thine own Soul.

Thirdly, If any unjustly slander thee, revenge not thy self upon them by slandering them again: I must confess this is a very hard Lesson; and requires almost an Angelical Perfection to perform it well. We read in the Epistle of St. Jude, That *When Michael and the Devil contended about the Body of Moses*, it is said, that the Holy Angel durst *not bring a railing Accusation against that wicked Spirit*; but only said, *the Lord rebuke thee*. And so, when Men of Devilish Spirits spue out their Slanders, and broach all the malicious

cious Accusations that their Father, the great Accuser, hath ever suggested unto them, return not Slander for Slander; for so the Devil would teach thee to be a Devil; but with all Quietness and Meekness desire of God to rebuke their Lies and Calumnies; and by all wise and prudent Means vindicate thy self; clear up thine Integrity, and make it appear, that though *the Archers have shot at thee, and sorely grieved thee with their Arrows, even bitter Words; yet still thy Bow remaineth in its strength.* What saith the Apostle? *2 Pet. 3. 9. Render not evil for evil, or railing for railing.* And indeed whosoever doth so, seeks only to heal a Wound in his Name, by making a much deeper one in his Conscience.

Fourthly, When thou art falsely aspers'd and slandered, refer thy self, and appeal to the all-knowing God; retire into the Peace and Refuge of thine own Conscience, and there shalt thou find enough for their Confutation, and thy Comfort. Know that a good Name is in the power of every slanderous Tongue to blast; but they cannot corrupt thy Conscience to vote with them. Possibly it is only the excellency and eminency of thy Grace that offends them; if so, glory in it; for the Reproaches of wicked Men are the best Testimonials that can be given of an excellent and singular Christian. In a strict and holy Conversation there is that contradiction to the loose, Profane of the World, as at once both convinceth, and vexeth them; reproveth, and provokes them. And if thou dost thus reproach them by thy Life, wonder not at it, if they again reproach thee by their lying Slanders. Be not too solicitous how they esteem of thee: It is miserable to live upon the Reports and Opinions of others; let us not much reckon what they say; but what Reports our own Consciences make; and if a Storm of Obloquy and Reproaches, Railings and Slanders do at any time patter upon thee, how sweet is it to retire inwards to the calm Innocency of our own Hearts: There are a thou-

M m m

land

An Exposition upon

and Witnesses will tell us we have not deserved them. How comfortable is it to remit our Cause unto God, and to leave our Vindication to him, for whose Cause we suffer Reproach? Thus *Jeremiah* appeals to God. *Jer. 20. 10, 12. I heard the defaming of many; report, say they, and we will report it: But, O Lord of Hosts, thou that triest the Righteous, and seest the Reins and the Heart; to thee have I opened my Cause:* Thus, if whilst wicked Men are maliciously conspiring how to blot and sully our Names, we can but keep our Consciences clear; what need we much trouble our selves how the Wind blows abroad, since we are harboured under the Retreat of a peaceable Heart? They may possibly persuade others to believe their Calumnies; but God who searcheth the Heart and Conscience, knows that we are injur'd; and he is hastening on a Day wherein he will clear up our Righteousness; and then the Testimony of a good Conscience shall put Ten Thousand Slanderers to silence.

And thus I have spoken of this second Sin, of Slander and Detraction.

The Third Sin against this Commandment, is base Flattery and Soothing; which is a quite opposite Extreme to the other, as both are opposite to Truth.

Now this is either Self-Flattery, or the Flattering of others.

First, There is a Self-Flattery. And indeed every Man is (as *Plutarch* well observed it,) his own greatest Flatterer; and however empty and defective we may be, yet we are all apt to love our selves, perhaps without a Rival, and to be puffed up with a vain Conceit of our own imaginary Perfections, to applaud and commend our selves in our own Thoughts and Fancies, and to think that we excel all others in what we have; and what we have not,
we

The Ninth Commandment

91

we despise as nothing worth. From this abundance of a vain Heart, break out arrogant Boastings of our selves, contemning of others, a presumptuous intruding our selves into those Employments and Functions which we are no way able to manage. Learn therefore, O Christian, to take the just measure of thy self. Let it not be too scanty; for that will make thee pusillanimous and cowardly; and through an Extreme of Modesty, render thee unserviceable to God and the World. But rather let it be too scanty, than too large: For this will make thee proud, and arrogant, and undertaking; and by exercising thy self in things too high for thee, thou wilt but spoil whatsoever thou rashly and overweeningly ventur'est upon. If thou art at any time called, or necessitated to speak of thy self, let it rather be less than the Truth, than more: For the Tongue is of it self very apt to be lavish, when it hath so sweet and pleasing a Theme, as a Man's own Praise. Take the Advice of Solomon. *Prov. 27.2. Let another Man praise thee, and not thine own Mouth; a Stranger, and not thine own Lips.*

Secondly, There is a sinful Flattering of others; and that, either by an immoderate extolling of their Vertues; or what is worse, by a wicked commendation even of their very Vices. This is a Sin most odious unto God, who hath threatned to *cut off all flattering Lips*, Psal. 12. 2. But especially it is most detestable in Ministers, whose very Office and Function it is to reprove Men for their Sins: If they shall *daub with untempered Mortar, and sew Pillows under Men's Elbows, crying, Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace to the wicked,* only that they may lull them asleep in their Security, they do but betray their Souls; and the Bloud of them God will certainly require at their hands.

Thus much for the Ninth Commandment.

M m m 2

THE