

AN
APPENDIX
TO THE
FOREGOING DISCOURSE,
CONCERNING
The immoderate Desire
OF KNOWING
THINGS TO COME.

APPENDIX

OF THE

FOREIGN DISCIPLINE

CONCERNING

The Immigrant Trade

OF ENGLAND

THINGS TO COME

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THERE is yet another very vicious habit of mind, besides this of taking thought about the events of future time; namely, an intemperate appetite of foreknowing them. Which hath such affinity, and lies so contiguous, and bordering to the former, that it will not be incongruous to add somewhat concerning it; and, which is of so ill and pernicious an import, that it will deserve some endeavour to shew how we may discern and repress it. And it may be requisite to discourse somewhat to this purpose, both for the vindication of God's wisdom and goodness, in confining our knowledge of the events of future time, within so narrow bounds and limits; and that serious christians may the more effectually consult the ease and quiet of their own minds, by keeping themselves contentedly, as to this matter, within the bounds which he hath set them. This appetite of foreknowing is only to be animadverted on so far as it is inordinate, and a distemper. Our business therefore here must be, to specify and distinguish this distemper: and to offer somewhat for the cure of it.

I. For the finding out and specifying of it. It is not to be doubted but there may be a faultiness in the defect: a too great listlessness, and indisposition to look forward. Which indisposition will appear blamable, when it proceeds either—
from a sensual slothfulness of temper that addicts us wholly to

the present. It is too much a-kin to the beast, to be totally taken up with what now pleases. When all the soul lies in the senses, and we mind nothing but the grateful relishes of our present and private enjoyments, are quite unconcerned about the state of the world, or the Christian interest, or what shall hereafter come of the affairs of our country, in civil or religious respects; when we are held in a lazy indifferency concerning the state of things in succeeding times and ages; are conscious of no desire of any hopeful prospect for posterity, and those that shall come after us; and it is all one with us whether we know them likely to be civil or barbarian, Christian or pagan, freemen or slaves, because we care not which of these we be ourselves, so we can but eat on, and enjoy our own undisturbed ease and pleasure; this is a fatal mortification of the appetite of foreknowing. For it destroys it quite, when it should but rectify and reduce it within due bounds. And in what degree that, or any other inclination ought to die, it much imports what kills it; because that which doth so, succeeds into the dominion, and hath all the power in me which it before had. And surely no worse thing can rule over me, than a sensual spirit; that binds me down, and limits me to this spot of earth, and point of time. Or if it proceed—from a weak and childish dread of all futurity: as children apprehend nothing but bugbears, and hobgoblins, and frightful images, and appearances in the dark; this ill disposition is very intimately conjunct with the former. When a sensual mind, finding itself already well entertained with the gratifications of the present time, cleaves to it, and every thought of a change is mortal. It is death to admit the apprehension of a new scene. It is as true indeed, that the same temper of mind, in more ungrateful, present circumstances, runs all into discontent and affectation of change; as will be further shewn hereafter in the proper place. But in this region of changes, it is most imprudent and incongruous, to let the mind be unchangeably fixed upon any external state and posture of things; or irreconcilably averse to any. It is becoming, it is laudable and glorious, with a manly and a truly Christian fortitude, to dare to face futurity how formidably soever any thing within the compass of time may look. For, certainly, so far as we ought to be mortified to the knowledge of future things, it ought to proceed from some better principle, than only our being afraid to know them.

But, that distemper of mind which is now more principally to be noted and reprov'd, lies rather in the excess. That therefore it may be distinctly characterized and understood, I shall endeavour to shew—when this appetite of foreknowing the

events of future time is not to be thought excessive; or how far a disposition to inquire into such matters is allowable and fit, and—when, by its excess, it doth degenerate into a distemper so as to become the just matter of reprehension and redress.

First. Therefore (on the negative part) we are not to think it disallowed us; yea it cannot but be our duty, to have a well proportioned desire, of understanding so much of future event, as God hath thought fit to reveal in his word. As he hath there foretold very great things concerning the state of the Christian church and interest to the end of the world. Which predictions it cannot be supposed, are made public and offered to our view to be neglected and overlooked. Only we must take care that our endeavour to understand them, and the time and labour we employ therein, be commensurate to the circumstances of our condition, to our ability and advantage for such more difficult disquisitions, and be duly proportioned between them, and other things, that may be of equal or greater moment to us.

Nor, again, is it liable to exception, if we only desire to make a right use of other additional indications and presages also; whether they belong to the moral, natural, or political world or (if any such should be afforded) to the more peculiar sphere of extraordinary and immediate divine revelation.

1. It is not only innocent, but commendable to endeavour the making a due improvement of moral prognostics; or to consider what we are to hope, or fear, from the increase and growth of virtue, or vice in the time wherein we live. And herein we may fitly guide our estimate, by what we find promised, threatened or historically recorded in the Holy Scriptures (or other certain history) in reference to like cases. Only because God may sometime, arbitrarily vary his methods; and the express application of such promises, threatenings and histories to our times is not in Scripture, we should not be too positive in making it.

2. The like may be said of such unusual phenomena as fall out within the sphere, but besides the common course of nature: as comets or whatever else is wont to be reckoned portentous. The total neglect of which things, I conceive, neither agrees with the religious reverence which we owe to the Ruler of the world; nor with common reason and prudence.

It belongs not to the present design, as to comets particularly, to discourse the philosophy of them. Their relation to our earth, as meteors raised from it, is a fancy that seems deservedly exploded; but it seems to require great hardiness to deny they have any relation as tokens. Their distance from us may well argue the former. But, the constant luminaries of heaven,

that in other kinds, continually serve us, might by their distance (most of them) be thought quite unrelated to us as well as they. And if we should suppose all, or most, of those useful luminaries primarily made for some other nobler use, that makes not the constant benefit we have by them less in itself. The like may be thought of the use which these more extraordinary ones may be of to us, in a diverse kind; that they should cause what they are thought to signify. I understand not, nor am solicitous how they are themselves caused; let that be as naturally as can be supposed, (of the rejected effluvia of other heavenly bodies, or by the never so regular collection of whatsoever other celestial matter,) that, hinders not their being signs to us, more than the natural causation of the bow in the clouds, though that, being an appropriate sign for a determinate purpose, its signification cannot but be more certain. And, if we should err in supposing them to signify any thing of future event to us at all, and that error only lead us into more seriousness; and a more prepared temper of mind, for such trouble as may be upon the earth; it will, sure, be a less dangerous error, than that on the other hand would be, if we should err in thinking them to signify nothing; and be thereby made the more supine and secure, and more liable to be surprized by the calamities that shall ensue; besides, that we shall be the less excusable, in departing from the judgment of all former times and ages, upon no certainty of being more in the right. And why should we think such things should serve us for no other purpose, than only to gratify our curiosity, or furnish us with matter of wonder, invite us to gaze and admire? when (as an ancient well observes*) "things known to all in the common course of nature are not less wonderful, and would be amazing to all that consider them, if men were not wont to admire only things that are rare. It is neither fit, indeed, we should be very particular, or confident in our interpretations and expectations upon such occasions; or let our minds run out in exorbitant emotions, as will be further shewn in the positive account which is intended of this sort of distemper. But I conceive it is very safe to suppose, that some very considerable thing, either in a way of judgment or mercy may ensue; according as the cry of persevering wickedness or of penitential prayer is more or less loud at that time.

3. There are, again, very strange and extraordinary aspects of providence that sometimes offer themselves to our notice, in the course of human affairs, and in the political world, where God presides over rational and free agents. And these also must

*August. de Civit. Dei, l. 21. c. 8.

be allowed to have their signification of what is likely to be future. For, otherwise, if we were to reckon they imported nothing, either of good or evil (so much as probable) to be expected from them; we should be to blame, if our minds should admit any impression from them, either of hope or fear (which both refer to the future) though in never so moderate a degree. And should be obliged to put on an absolute stoicism, in reference to whatsoever may occur beyond what human nature is capable of; and which would have more in it of stupidity, than prudence, or any human or Christian virtue. When, therefore, the face of providence seems more manifestly threatening, clouds gather; all things conspire to infer a common calamity, and all means and methods of prevention, are from time to time frustrated; if we so far allow ourselves to think it approaching, as that we are hereby excited to prayer, repentance, and the reforming of our lives; this sure is better than a regardless drowsy slumber.

And again, if in order to our preservation from a present utter ruin, there fall out, in a continual succession, many strange and wonderful things which we looked not for, without which we had been swallowed up quick; we be hereupon encouraged unto trust, and dependance upon God, and the hope we shall be preserved from being at length quite destroyed whatever present calamities may befall us; and be the more fortified in our resolution not to forsake him, whatsoever shall: this seems no immodest or irrational construction and use of such providences. Yea, and at any time, when there is no very extraordinary appearance of a divine hand in the conduct of affairs; it unbecomes us not to use our reason and prudence, in judging by their visible posture and tendency, as they lie under human management, what is like to ensue; upon supposition the over-ruling providence do not interpose, to hinder or alter their course: (as we find they often run on long, in one current, without any such more remarkable interposition) only we are to be very wary, lest we be peremptory in concluding; or put more value than is meet upon our own judgment (as was noted before) both because we know not when, or how, a divine hand may interpose; and may be ignorant of many matters of fact, upon which a true judgment of their natural tendency may depend, and our ability to judge, upon what is in view, may be short and defective. Others that have more power, and can do more, may also have much more prudence, and can discern better. But observing such limitations, it is fit we should use, to this purpose, that measure of understanding which God hath given us. In what part of the world soever he assigns us our station, we are to consider he hath made us reasonable creatures, and that

we owe to him what interest we have in the country where we live. And therefore, as we are not to affect the knowledge which belongs not to us; so, nor are we to renounce the knowledge which we have; to abandon our eyes, and be led on as brutes or blind men. But to endeavour, according as we have opportunity, to see where we are, and whither we are going; that we may know accordingly how to govern our spirits; and aim to get a temper of mind suitable to what may be the state of our case. And for aught we know, this may be all the prophecy we shall have to guide us. As it was the celebrated saying of a Greek poet, quoted by divers of the sager heathens, "He is the best prophet that conjectures best." Nor is it so reasonable to expect, that in plain cases (which do ordinarily happen) God should, by any extraordinary means, give us notice of what is to fall out.

4. But we are not suddenly to reject any premonitions of that kind, that appear to deserve our regard, if there be any such. It is indeed a part of prudence not too hastily to embrace or lay much stress upon modern prophecies. But I see not how it can be concluded, that because God hath of latter time, been more sparing, as to such communications; that therefore prophecy is so absolutely ceased, that he will never more give men intimations of his mind and purposes that way. He hath never said it: nor can it be known by ordinary means. Therefore for any to say it, were to pretend to prophesy, even while they say prophecy is ceased. The superstition of the vulgar pagans was, indeed, greatly imposed upon by the pretence of divination; but among their more ancient philosophers none ever denied the thing, except Xenophanes and Epicurus, as Cicero* and Plutarch† inform us, and concerning the latter Laertius.‡ It seems he did it over and over; and, indeed, it well agreed with his principles about the Deity to do so. Cicero himself, after large discourse upon the subject, leaves at last, the matter doubtful according to the manner of the academy which he professes to imitate. Yet a great father in the Christian church, understands him to deny it, but withal observes that he denied God's prescience too (as one might, indeed that he doubted it at least) in that discourse. Plato discourses soberly of it, asserting, and diminishing it at once, (as we shall afterwards have more occasion to note,) the generality were for

* De divinat. † De Placit. Phil.

‡ Μαλιχὴν δὲ ἀπῶσαν ἐν ἄλλοις ἀναίρειαι ὡς καὶ ἐν τῇ μικρᾷ ἐπιτομῇ.

He hath abolished every act of divination in others, as well as in this small epitome.

‡ In vita Epic.

it, as is evident. And indeed the many monitory dreams related in Cicero's books upon that subject, and by Plutarch in several parts of his works, shew that notices of things to come were not uncommon among the pagans; and in a way that seemed more remarkable, and of more certain signification, than their so much boasted oracles. How they came by them, from whom, or upon what account, we do not now inquire. But since the matter was really so, it seems no incredible thing, that some or other in the Christian church, even in these latter ages, should, upon better terms, partake somewhat of some such a privilege.* Nor is it difficult to produce many instances, within the latter centuries, that would incline one to think it hath been so.

But whosoever shall pretend it, I see not what right they can claim to be believed by others, till the event justify the prediction; unless they can, otherwise, shew the signs which are wont to accompany and recommend a super-natural revelation. Where any such is really afforded, it is like it may produce a concomitant confidence, that will exclude all present doubt in their own minds, without external confirmation. But then, as the apostle speaks in another case, if they have faith, they must have it to themselves. They can never describe their confidence to another, so as to distinguish it from the impression of a mere groundless (and often deluded) imagination. Nor are others to grudge at it, if some particular persons, be in this or that instance privileged with so peculiar a divine favour, as to have secret monitions of any danger approaching them, that they may avoid it, or direction concerning their own private affairs, which none else are concerned to take cognisance of. But, if the matter be of common concernment, the concurrence of things is to be noted; and a greater regard will seem to be challenged, if several of these mentioned indications do fall in together. As, supposing a gradual foregoing languor and degeneracy of religion, in the several parts of the Christian world. And Christianity (with the several professions, which it comprehends) looks less like a religion; or a thing that hath any reference to God. But rather, that men have thought fit to make use of this or that various mode of it, as a mark of civil distinction, under which to form and unite themselves into opposite parties, for the serving of secular interests and designs. It, generally, makes no better men than paganism. A spirit of atheism, profaneness, and contempt of the Deity, and of all things sacred, more openly shews and avows itself, than perhaps, heretofore, in any pagan nation. And not in a time of gross darkness, such

* Savanrola, G. Wischard, of Scotland, and several others.

as formerly, for several ages, had spread itself over the whole face of the Christian church; but in a time of very clear and bright light. Worse and more horrid principles, even in the ancient sense of mankind, apparently destructive of common order, and of all human society, are inserted into the religion of christians; and obtain with them that have, in great part obtained the power in the Christian world, and would wholly engross the Christian name. Better principles, in others, are inefficacious and signify nothing, too generally, to the governing of their lives and practice. Men are let loose to all imaginable wickedness, as much as if they were not christians, and many (namely, that more vastly numerous and bulky party) the more for that they are so. Yea, and not let loose, only; but obliged by their very principles, to those peculiar acts, and kinds of wickedness, and violence, which directly tend to turn Christendom into an Aceldama, and involve the Christian world in ruin and confusion. When multitudes stand, as it were prepared, and in a ready posture, to execute such vengeance, as is highly deserved by others, and make judgment begin at (that which our profession obliges us rather to account) the house of God to rebound afterward, with greater terror and destructiveness upon themselves who began it.

If now some eminent servant of God much noted, and of great remark, for knowledge, wisdom, and sanctity, remote from all suspicion of levity, or sinister design, shall have very expressly foretold such a time and state of things as this, and what will be consequent thereupon; and with great earnestness and vehemency inculcated the premonition; and if, in such a time, God shall set again and again a monitory torch, high and flaming in the heavens over our heads; methinks it doth not savour well to make light account of it, or think it signifies nothing. For, (to speak indeed, as himself doth allow and teach us to conceive;) the majesty of God doth in such concurrent appearances seem more august. His hand is lifted up, and he doth as it were *accingere se, prepare and address himself* to action, raise himself up in his holy habitation, (Zech. 2. 13.) whereupon, all flesh is required to be silent before him. A posture both of reverence, in respect of what he hath already done; and of expectation, as to what he may further be about to do. And of what import or signification soever, such things, in their concurrence, may be to us, it surely ought to be attended to, and received with great seriousness, yea, and with thankfulness. Especially, if there be ground to hope well concerning the issue (as there will always be to them that fear God) and we can see the better, what special sort and kind of duty, we are more peculiarly, to apply ourselves to, in the mean time.

And whereas we know a mind and wisdom, govern all affairs and events through the whole universe. It is fit we should meet mind with mind, wisdom with wisdom. That, on our part, an obsequious, docile mind should advert to, and wait upon that supreme, all ruling, divine mind, in all the appearances, wherein it looks forth upon us. And with a dutiful veneration, cry hail to every radiation of that holy light; accounting, whatever it imports, it opportunely visits the darkness wherein we converse, and should be as gratefully received as the sun, peeping through a cloud, by one travelling in a dusky day. His is the teaching wisdom. It is well for us if we can be wise enough to learn; and unto that, there is a wisdom requisite also, Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. (Ps. 107.) And again, I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye; (Ps. 32. 8.) which implies our eye must diligently mark his, and that (as it follows) we be not as the horse or mule that have no understanding, &c. v. 9. And whereas, all the works of God, even those that are of every days observation, do some way or other represent God to us; and should constantly suggest unto us serious thoughts of him; those that are more extraordinary, ought the more deeply to impress our minds. And excite in those higher acts of a religious affection, which the circumstances of our present state admit not that they can be constant in the same degree. As though subjects ought always to bear a loyal mind towards their prince; upon such greater occasions, when he shews himself in solemn state, it is becoming there be correspondent acts of more solemn homage. But upon the whole, since all the certain knowledge we can have of such futurities as naturally, and in themselves are not certain, must be by God's own revelation only; and all probable pre-apprehension of them, by the use of our own reason and prudence, upon any other *apt Media* that occur to us. While we can confine our desire of seeing into the future within these limits, it will be just and innocent. And therefore we may now go on,

Secondly. To the positive discovery wherein this appetite is inordinate and degenerates into a distemper of mind. And it may, in general, be collected from what hath been now said, namely, that when we remain unsatisfied, with what God is pleased to reveal about such things; and with what a well-governed prudence, can any other way discern; and have an itch and hankering of mind, after other prognostics, that lie not within this compass, and are no proper objects either for our faith or our reason. This is the distemper we are to get redressed, and

are concerned to take heed lest we indulge or cherish. And that we may yet be somewhat more distinct in making this discovery. These that follow, will be plain indications, that our inquisitiveness and thirst after the knowledge of future things is a distemper of mind, and ought to be considered, and dealt with accordingly. As,

1. If it be accompanied with discontent, and a fastidious loathing of our present lot and portion in the world. Which is so much the worse if when our affectation and desire of change, proceeds really, and at the bottom from private self-respect; we endeavour to delude others, or flatter ourselves into a belief that it is only the public good we are intent upon, and the better state of God's interest in the world. And worst of all, if our desires be turbulent, vindictive, and bloody, that is, if not only they are so fervent towards our own hoped advantages, that we care not through what public confusions, and calamities our private ends be promoted and carried on; but should like it the better to see at the same time our heart's desire upon them we have allowed ourselves to hate; yea, though it be never so true that they hate us, and have been injurious to us. Thus with the study and desire of a new state of things, which in itself may be, in some cases, innocent; and, limited to due methods and degrees of the desired change, not only innocent but a duty (for there is no state of things in this world so good, but being still imperfectly so, we ought to desire it were better) a twofold vicious appetite may fall in, that of avarice, and revenge, of good to ourselves beyond what comes to our share; and of hurt to other men. Which complicated disease must taint and infect every thought and look, that is directed forward towards a better state of things.

If this be the case, it must be great negligence and indulgence to ourselves not to discern it. For the incoherence and ill agreement of what is real, and what is pretended would soon appear to one not willing to be mistaken. Sincere devotedness to God and his interest, would be always most conjunct with that complacential faith in his governing wisdom and power, and entire resignation of ourselves and all his and our own concerns to his pleasure and goodness, that we will never think his procedure too slow; or suspect him of neglecting his own interest; or of that which he judges (and which therefore is, most truly) ours. And it is ever accompanied with that placid benignity, and universal love to other men (enemies themselves being by the known rules of the gospel included) as that we would not wish their least injury, for our own greatest advantage. And should most earnestly wish, that if God see good,

the advantage of his interest in the world, might be so carried on as to comprehend and take in therewith, their greatest advantage also. And if we should see cause to apprehend it may fall out to be otherwise; that, surely, ought to be our temper, which the prophet expresses (and appeals to God concerning it) upon a very frightful prospect of things, "I have not desired the woful day O Lord thou knowest," Jerem. 17. 16. So remote it should be from us to press forward with a ravenous, cruel eye towards a tragical bloody scene; or to accuse the divine patience which we should adore, and (perhaps, as much as any others) do also need.

2. If there be a greater inclination to look forward into the future things of time than those of eternity. If in the former we find a con-naturalness, and they seem most agreeable to us, these other are tasteless, and without sap and savour. If it would be a great and sensible consolation, to be assured such a state of things as we would choose, shall very shortly obtain. But to think of a state approaching, wherein all things shall be perfectly and unexceptionably well for ever, is but cold comfort. Blessed God! what a mortal token is this? Do we apprehend nothing of distemper in it? Do we see ourselves the men of time (as the hebrew expresses what we read men of this world, Ps. 17. 14.) and do not our hearts misgive at the thought? How little likely is it we are designed for that blessed eternity to which our spirits are so little suitable? When, as it is said of them that are for the state wherein mortality shall be swallowed up of life, that he that hath wrought them for that selfsame thing is God? (2 Cor. 5. 4. 5.) Can the felicity of heaven belong to them that value it not as their best good? but count a terrestrial paradise of their own devising better?

3. If we be so intent upon this or that future event, as that hereby the due impression is worn off, of much greater and more important things that are already past. What so great things have we to expect in our time, as we know have come to pass in former time? What so great, as that the Son of God came down into our world! did put on man! lived a life's time among us mortals! breathed every-where heavenly love, and grace, and sweetness; and with these grateful odours perfumed this noisome, impure, forlorn region of darkness and death! died a sacrifice for sinners! and overcame death! ascended in triumph to the throne of God, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high! What so great as the mystery of Godliness, that God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory! (1 Tim. 3. 16.) Are any

of those little futurities, whereof we have but an uncertain expectation, fit to be compared with these things which we certainly know to have come to pass, ? Or have we anything so important and great to fix our eye upon, as a Redeemer now in his exaltation ? invested with all power in heaven and earth, to whom every knee must bow, and every tongue confess ! The arbiter of life and death to men ! who hath established so admirable a frame of religion for the reduction of apostate man ! made it triumph over the obstinate infidelity of the Jews, and the idolatry of the Gentile world ! And what the glorious issue of his administration will be, we already know ; and are not left about it to suspenceful dubious inquiry. Nor do we need a more certain revelation than we have. Is all this to be waved and overlooked ? while we stand at a gaze, expecting what shall be the height of the French monarchy, or the fate of the Dutch republic, or of this or that particular person, now upon the stage ! It must surely be an ill symptom, and an indication of a sickly mind, when things have all their value and regard with us, not as they are great but as they are new. And are only considerable to us, because they are yet future and unknown.

4. If we more earnestly covet to foreknow the approach of an external state of things that would be better, in our account, than to feel the good effect upon our spirits, of one that we take to be worse, and that is externally afflictive to us. This excludes the apprehension of a wise providence, governing the world ; That pursues a design in what it doth or permits. As if we thought God did afflict us for afflictions sake, as more intending, therein, his own pleasure than our profit, Or as if we would impute a levity to providence, and reckoned it inconstant and desultory, even beneath the ordinary prudence of a man. That it might forget and desist, and would not drive on a design to an issue. Or that (contrary to what God tells Eli by Samuel, 1. Sam. 3. 12.) when he began, he would divert and alter his course, before he made an end. Or it implies, we place our felicity in somewhat without us, more than in a good habit and temper of spirit within. Whereas, surely things are much amiss with us, if we do not account that a mortified heart, towards whatsoever is temporary and terrene, is a thousand-fold more desirable than the best external state of things that is ever to be enjoyed under the sun. As calamitous as the condition of Job was, it had been a worse evil than any he suffered ; if that censure of him were true, that he chose iniquity rather than affliction. Job. 36. 21. Or if that were not true, which he seems to intimate concerning himself, that he was less intent

upon a present release from the furnace, than, at length to come out like gold. Job. 23. 10.

5. If the other parts of Scripture be less savoury to us than the prophetic. And especially when these are of more grateful savour than the preceptive part. This is of great affinity with the foregoing character. For the precepts in God's word, describe to us that excellent frame of spirit, which afflictions are designed (as one sort of means) more deeply to impress. And what there is of ill character, here, lies in this, when anything is of greater value than that comely, amiable, well complexioned temper of spirit. And surely it less concerns us, what God will do without us, than, what he will have us do, and be, ourselves. It is an ill circumstance with a diseased person, when he hath less inclination to such things as tend to bring him to a confirmed habit of health, than such as more serve to nourish his disease. And whereas *Quicquid recipitur—ad modum recipientis, whatever is received, is received according to the measure of the recipient*, there is little doubt, but where this distemper we are speaking of, prevails; men may be much inclined to make that use, even of Scripture prophecies as to feed their distemper. When they can relish and allow themselves to mind no other parts of the Bible: when they take more pleasure to be conversant in these obscurer things, than those that are plain, and concern us more, (as God hath mercifully provided that such things in his word, should be plainest, that are of greatest concernment to us,) and they perhaps, neither have the requisite helps, nor the ability, with them to master the obscurity: when our prepossessed fancy must be the interpreter: and we will make the prophecy speak what it never meant; draw it down to the little particularities of the time and place wherein we live: and are peremptory in our applications, and so confident, till we find ourselves mistaken, that when we do, we begin to suspect the Bible. As if divine truths, and our attachments to them, must stand and fall together.

6. (And lastly) when we have an undue regard to unscriptural prophecies. Which we may be supposed to have, if we either much search after them, or give hasty credit to them without search.

(1.) If we much search after them. As, weak and sickly appetites are wont to do for rarities and novelties, we are not content with what occurs, nor with our own allotment, and God's ordinary dispensation, if things of that kind occur not, but purvey and listen out after them; as if we had not considerable things enough, both for our employment, and our entertainment and gratification besides.

(2.) If we believe them without search; only because they seem

to speak according to our mind ; imbibe all things, of that import, promiscuously and on the sudden, without examining the matter. The simple believeth every word; Prov. 14. 15. It is the business of judgment, to distinguish and discern. We therefore call it discretion. It totally fails, when we can find no medium, between believing every thing and nothing. Some things indeed of this pretence, are so apparently idle and ridiculous, that it will become a prudent man to reject them at the first sight. Some may perhaps, partly from the matter, or partly from the person, and other concurring circumstances, have such an appearance, as ought to stay our minds upon them, detain us awhile, and hold us in some suspense, while we consider and examine whether any further regard is to be given them or no. It is a very distempered, ravenous appetite that swallows all it can catch without choice : that allows no leisure to distinguish between what is suitable, or fit for nourishment, and what is either noxious, or vain.

II. And now for the cure of this distemper. We are to consider the nature of the things the fore-knowledge whereof we so earnestly affect. And we find they are not such futurities as have their certain causes in nature. As when the sun will rise and set ; or be nearer us or remoter ; when there will be an eclipse, &c. These are not the things which will satisfy this appetite. But mere contingencies that depend upon free and arbitrary causes, that is especially, upon the mind and will of man ; as it is under the direction of the supreme, and all-governing mind. And again, we are to consider the nature of the knowledge we covet, of these things, namely, that it is not conjectural (which indeed were not knowledge) but we would be at a certainty about them. Now hereupon we are further to consider, that there is no reasonable appetite which we may not seek to have gratified in some apt and proper way, that is, by means that are both lawful, and likely to attain our end.

In the present case, we can think of no course to be taken for the obtaining of this knowledge (even giving the greatest scope and latitude to our thoughts) but it must suppose one of these two things ;—either that we look upon it as an ordinary gift to be acquired by our own endeavours that is, by art and industry, and the use of natural means and helps, whereby we imagine our natures may be heightened, and improved to this pitch—or else that we reckon it an extraordinary immediate gift of God ; so that if we affect it, we have no course to take but to seek it at his hands by prayer ; either that God would confer it upon ourselves, or upon some others, by whom we may be informed. And we are now to bethink ourselves, what

encouragement or allowance we can suppose is given us to seek it either of these ways. For, if we can seek it in neither of these, we must be obliged either to assign a third (as we never can) or abandon it as an unreasonable; and vicious appetite; the satisfaction whereof is no way to be so much as attempted, or sought after. And now

First. As to the former of these ways. There is nothing more to be despaired of, the very attempt being both foolish, and impious; both most impossible, and unlawful.

1. It is plainly an *impossible* attempt. For what natural means, what rules of art, can give us the knowledge of such futurities as we are speaking of? or improve our natural faculties to it? It is a knowledge quite of another kind, and alien to our natures. For besides the notices we have of things by sense, which is limited wholly to things present, as its object, and our knowledge of first, and self-evident principles (from which how remote are the future contingencies we now speak of?) We have no imaginable way of coming by the knowledge of any thing, otherwise than by reasoning and discourse, which supposes a natural connexion of things. Whereupon, when we have sure hold of one end of the thread, we can proceed by it, and lead ourselves on, by such things as we know to other things we know not. But what such natural connexion is there, between any present thing, known to us, and this sort of future things? Which, for the most part, are such as must be brought about, by the concurrence of great multitudes of free agents, who may be opposed by as great, and prevented of accomplishing what they designed, though their minds were never so constantly intent upon the design. But we have no way to know with certainty the present minds of so many men, nor of any man at all, by immediate inspection; or otherwise, than as we may collect, by the former series of his actions or professions. Wherein men may deceive the most quick-sighted, and really intend otherwise, than they seem. Much less do we know that so mutable a thing as the mind of man is, will not alter, and especially, of so many men. And their condition and outward circumstances may alter, if not their minds. What can be certain in such a region of changes, where the effecting of purposes depends upon the body, as well as the mind, and many external aids and helps besides? And where all are subject to so many accidents, to maims, sicknesses, and deaths? Nay who can tell what his own mind shall be hereafter, supposing any such futurity to be within his own power, or that his power shall be the same, if his mind should not change. And add, what is more than all the rest, who know-

eth the mind of God, or being his counsellor hath taught him? Isa. 40. 13. Rom. 11. 34. Who can tell what he will do? or enable, or permit men to do? What event could ever have been thought more certain, before-hand, than the destruction of the Jews by Haman's means? And who could ever have foreseen a few days, or hours before, that he should be hanged on the gallows he prepared for Mordecai. Who can ever think or hope, to measure that boundless range, and latitude, wherein infinite wisdom and power may work this way or that? Or, within that vast and immense scope? who can be able to predict what way God will take? Or what he will do, or not do? When all human contrivance and forecast is at an end, still more ways lie open to him. Or his power can make more, and break its way through whatsoever obstructions. We know not what to do (says Jehoshaphat in his distress) but our eyes are upon thee. 2. Chron. 20. 12. A dutiful confession of the limitedness of human wit, and power, and of the unlimitedness of the divine, both at once! To offer at comprehending his profound designs, and abstruse methods only shews how little we understand ourselves, or him. Our own scant measure, or his immensity. We might better attempt to sound the ocean with our finger, or gather it into the hollow of our hand. It were happy for us, if our confessed ignorance might end in adoration; and that the sense of our hearts were such as the apostle's words would aptly express. (Rom. 11. 33.) O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out. Such as affect to be wiser, but not so pious, and go about to form models, and ideas for the future, apart from him; how often doth their great wit only serve to expose their folly! And make them the sport of fortune (as some would call it) we may say rather, of that wise and righteous providence, that delights to triumph over baffled insolence! for *ludit in humanis*, &c.) and deride a confidence that is founded only in proud impotency! He that sits in the heavens laughs, the most high hath them in derision. How often are the wisest politicians disappointed and despised! all their measures broken! their models shattered and discomposed! and all their fabrics overturned in a moment! So remote is human wit, at the utmost stretch, from any certainty, about the futurities we speak of. And if any imagine it may be helped to foresee, by some art or other; or by rules framed and collected upon former experience; according whereto judgments are said heretofore to have been happily made, of what would come to pass.

It is not here intended to examine the several ways that have-

been taken, and trusted in, for this purpose. That they are all such as have been, and are, much disputed, if they were not with manifest evidence disproved, would argue that, that foreknowledge of things is not likely to be very certain, which must be obtained by arts and rules that are themselves uncertain. How much hath been said (anciently, and of late) to discover the vanity of that sort of astrology that relates to the futurities we have under consideration ! Such as have a mind may view what is written to that purpose, and may save themselves much vain labour by perusing the learned Dr. More's late Tetractys, and what it refers to in his mystery of godliness. Have we heard of none of our later pretenders this way, that have incurred the like fate with that wise man of Greece, that was laughed at by a silly girl (as Laertius tells us) for so long gazing upon the stars (though perhaps upon a better account) till at length, in his walk, he fell into a ditch ; that he minded so much what was over his head, that he took no notice what was at his feet ! And for the ancient augury of the pagans, in the several sorts of it, how much was it had in contempt by the wiser among themselves. Inasmuch that one of them says, he wondered how they could look upon one another, and not laugh. As who would not, that such strange things should be foreshewn by the flying or the singing, or the feeding of birds ! Their usual haruspicy was as wise, and as much regarded by some greater minds among them, As Alexander that reproved and jeered the impertinency of his sooth-sayer that would have withheld him from action, upon the pretence of some ill omen he had observed in the entrails : telling him that he would surely think he were impertinent, and troublesome if he should go about to interrupt him in his employment, when he was busy viewing his sacrifice, and asked him, when he pressed further, what greater impediment a man could have, that had great things before his eyes, than a doting superstitious fortune-teller ? And where there was not so much wisdom and fortitude, as to despise such fooleries, how ludicrous was it that great and momentous affairs were to be governed by them ! That a general was not to march an army or fight a battle, but first such observation must be had of the flight of birds, and the entrails of beasts ! or other things ; as idle as they, as the whirlings, rollings and noise of rivers, the change of the moon, &c. Upon which in Germany (as is observed) when Cæsar had invaded it, their presaging women were to be consulted before it was thought fit to give him battle. Clem. Alexand. Strom. L. 1. Besides, what was not less vain, but more horrid, presaging upon the convulsed members, and the flowing blood, of a man slain for the purpose.

Diod. Sic. Bibl. Hist. l. 5. Nay and the excess of this desire hath tempted some, to try the blacker practices of necromancy or what might be gained to satisfy and please it, by converse with departed souls; or what if it be other familiar spirits? We here consider the folly of such courses, apart from the impiety. As what reason have we upon which to apprehend, that they can ascertain us, or be, ordinarily, certain themselves of such futurities as we speak of? But also the thought of any such course we are to presume is horrid to the minds of serious christians. Unto whom, what we find in the holy Scriptures, concerning any such ways of presaging, as have been mentioned, should, methinks, be enough to form their spirits both to the hatred, and the contempt of them, and, by consequence, of the principle itself (this vain appetite) that leads unto them, and hath captivated whole nations into so miserable delusion by them. Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad, that turneth the wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish. (Isai. 44. 25.) Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the flame, &c. (Isa: 47. 13, 14. Isa. 8, 19, 20. Dan. 2, 27.)

And though it be true that God hath often given premonitions of future things, by dreams (which is a matter that belongs not to this head) yet the rules that are given, by some learned men, for the interpreting of such dreams as contain not the things expressly, pretended to be signified are generally, so very ridiculous, that it is hard to say, whether they were learnedly busy or idle, that thought fit to trouble themselves or the world with them. Oneirocrit. Artem. Archmi. &c. And surely, though some dreams have been divine; such rules of interpreting any, are so meanly human, as to be fit enough to be thrown in hither and thrown away with the rest of the trash noted before. And may help to let us see, that the foreknowledge of the future things we are considering, is so impossible to human nature, improved by whatsoever rules and precepts of our devising, that while men seek to become wise in this kind, by such means, they do but befool themselves, and are not a whit the more knowing, but shew themselves the less prudent and sober. And if such knowledge be a thing whereof human nature, by itself, is not capable; to be impatient of ignorance in these things, is to be offended that God hath made such creatures as we find we are. That is, if this had been the natural endowment of some other

order of creatures, how unreasonable were it that a man should quarrel with his own nature, and with the inseparable circumstances of his own state? All creatures are of limited natures to one or other particular kind. This or that creature admits of all the perfections of its own kind. It admits not those of another kind. How foolish were it if a man should vex himself that he cannot fly like a bird, or run like a stag, or smell like a hound, or cannot as an angel fly, at pleasure, between heaven and earth, or visit the several orbs, and exactly measure their magnitudes and distances from one another!

2. We are therefore to consider that the affectation of such foreknowledge (that is, to have it in and of ourselves, or by any means of our devising) is *unlawful* as well as *impossible*. Indeed this might be collected from the former; for the capacity of our natures ought to limit our desires. And it hence also, further appears unlawful upon the highest account, in that it were to aspire to what is most peculiar, and appropriate to the Deity. For hereby the great God demonstrates his Godhead, and expostulating with idolaters, insults over the unactive ignorance of their impotent and inanimate deities upon this account. Produce your cause (saith he) bring forth your strong reasons. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen. Shew the things that are to come hereafter that we may know that ye are gods, Isa. 41, 21, 22, 23. As if he had said, If they be gods why do they not, as gods predict things to come, that if they be gods we may know it? So in the 42 ch. of the same prophecy, v. 8, 9. I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. This is a thing (saith he) that doth peculiarly belong to me. It is a glory of mine that shall never be imparted. And to the same sense is that in the 46 ch. of that prophecy, v. 9, 10. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else, I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying; my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. So also did our blessed Saviour, when he had a mind to convince that he was, as he gave out the Son of God, design the same medium for that purpose. Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. And again, I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe. John 13, 19. ch. 14. 29. It was indeed the great temptation used to our unhappy first parents; you shall be as gods, knowing good and

evil. Undoubtedly that knowledge wherewith they were tempted, must include at least, foreknowledge in it. You shall be as gods knowing &c. They were tempted by an expectation of being, in this respect, made like God, and we are become by it in this respect, like beasts that perish, and in other respects, like the devils themselves, who joy in our deception and perdition : too like beasts in ignorance, and devils in malignity!

What can be a more presumptuous arrogance, than to aim at the royalties of the Godhead! If to affect what belongs to the nature and capacity of another creature were foolish : to aspire to any prerogative, and peculiarity of God himself, cannot but be extremely impious and wicked! Are we to be offended that we are creatures? that our natures and the capacity of our understandings are not unlimited, and all-comprehending, when we owe it to the mere benignity and good pleasure of our Maker that we are anything? and much more that we have any such thing as an understanding at all. Yea, and if this knowledge were not peculiar to God, yet inasmuch as he hath not given it us, nor appointed us any means of attaining it, is an uncreaturally disposition, not to be satisfied without it. The rebuke our Saviour gave his disciples in one particular case of this nature, ought also to be monitory to us, in all such cases, that is, when they inquire wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Acts 1. 6. His answer is reprehensive. It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. The expression is remarkable, which the Father hath put in his own power, (*εθερο*) it implies, as if, by a positive act, God had reserved, and locked up from us, the things which he hath not vouchsafed to reveal. And we may see how he hath, as it were industriously, drawn a curtain between the present and future time, that we cannot see so far as one moment before us. Shall we with rude and irreverent hands, as it were attempt to rend, or draw aside the curtain?

Secondly. And from hence we may also see, in the next place how little encouragement we have in the other way to expect this knowledge, namely, by supplicating God for it, as an extraordinary gift to be obtained immediately from him. If we have not wisdom enough, to present unto him reasonable desires, we may expect his wisdom will deny us such as are unreasonable. He is never so apt to dislike our requests for their being too great, as too little. Or for their having nothing valuable, or important in them, nothing suitable to him, or to us, fit for him to give, or for us to seek or receive. In the present case, it is true, he hath sometimes favoured men with this kind of knowledge, ordained and inspired prophets,

who were to signify his purposes and pleasure to others. But it was rather modestly declined, than sought; and was, mostly, upon great and important occasions for high and very considerable ends, and to be effected, at seasons, and by persons of his own choosing. Nor doth it seem a thing fit for men to make the matter of petition. For if they should, either it must be for some reason peculiar to themselves, and which others cannot generally allege, as well as they; which it is not supposable any can be able to assign. Or for some common reason that concerns the generality of men as much. And then, we are sure, it can be of no weight; for, upon the same reason, all should, as much, be prophets. Which it is plain he doth not judge fit (who can best judge) in that he hath not made them so, which is concluding, as to things he hath not made it our duty to seek. And that this is a communication not fit to be constant and general at all times, and to all persons, is evident in itself. And may appear by divers considerations that partly respect God and his government, partly ourselves and our own interest, and concernment.

1. On God's part. It would greatly detract from the majesty of his government that it should have no arcana, and that all things should lie open to every eye. We may easily apprehend that the dignity of the divine government was, in this respect, designed to be kept up to an awful height, when we find there is somewhat mentioned to us (and how many things more may there be that are not mentioned?) which the angels in heaven know not, nor the human soul of our Lord himself, but the Father only. Nor again, was it suitable (particularly) to the government of God over man, in this present state, which we find designed for a state of probation; to be concluded, and shut up at last by a solemn judgment. For unto this state, the final judgment hath its peculiar, only reference. Therein we are to receive the things done in the body, that is, (as it is explained 2 Cor. 5. 10,) according to what we have done whether good or evil. How unfit were it that probationers for eternity, should, generally foreknow events that shall fall out in the state of their trial? Wherein they are to be strictly tied up to rules without regard to events. And are to approve themselves in that sincerity, constancy, fortitude, dependance upon God, resignation of themselves, and their concerns to him, that could have little place or opportunity to shew themselves, in a state wherein all things were at a certainty to them.

2. On our own part. It is to be considered that the foreknowledge of temporary events, is not a thing of that value to us, which we may, perhaps, imagine it is. It would serve us

more for curiosity than use. An unfit thing for us to petition in, or expect to be gratified. The wiser heathens have thought meanly of it. They have believed, indeed, that *God did sometimes enable men to prophesy* but have reckoned it, as one of them speaks, *a gift indulged unto human imprudence*.* That author accounts weaker minds, the usual subjects of it. That *no man in his right mind*, attained it, but either being alienated from himself, by sleep or a disease. And that they were not wont to understand, themselves, the meaning of their own visions, but must have them interpreted by others. The result of a larger discourse, he hath about it, than is fit here to be inserted comes to this, that fools divine, and wise must judge. Whereupon another (Cicero) thinks such prophecies little to be regarded, counting it strange that what a wise man could not see a mad-man should. And that when one hath lost human sense he should obtain divine!

They were not acquainted indeed with those ways wherein God revealed his mind to holy men whom he used as his own amanuenses or penmen, or who were otherwise to serve him for sacred purposes. But when we consider Balaam's being a prophet, methinks we should not be over fond of the thing itself, abstractly considered. How unspeakably is the Spirit of holiness as such, to be preferred! To have a heart subject to God, willing to be governed by him, to commit to him, even in the dark, our less considerable, temporal concernments; and confidently to rely for our eternal concernments, upon his plain word in the gospel, wherein life and immortality are brought to light, would make us little feel the need of prophecy. The radical principle of holiness is love (for it is the fulfilling of the law) in the absence whereof, the apostle esteems the gift of prophecy (with the addition of understanding all mysteries, and all knowledge) to go for nothing. 1 Cor. 13. 2. And if we strictly consider; wherein can we pretend it needful to us to foreknow the events that are before us? they are either bad and ungrateful or good and grateful. For the former sort, what would it avail us to foreknow them? That we may avoid them? That is a contradiction. How are they avoidable, when we know they will befall us? Is it that we be not surprized by them? We have other means to prevent it. To bear an equal temper of mind towards all conditions; to live always, in this region of changes, expecting the worst. At least not to expect rest on earth, to familiarize to ourselves the thoughts of troubles, apprehending, as to those that are private, we are always liable.

* Ὡς μαντικὴν ἀφροσύνη Θεὸς ἀνθρωπίνῃ δέδωκεν, ἔδειξ' ἔννεγς

Plat. in Tim.

And for any greater, common calamities that we may share in with the generality usually, they come on more slowly. There, often, are premonitory tokens, such as were before-mentioned in this discourse, sufficient to keep us from being surprized. And with the rest this may concur (as was said) that perhaps some or other of that value, and consideration, as to deserve our regard may, in such a case, have great apprehensions of approaching trouble, which whether they proceed from their greater prudence and sagacity; or from any more divine impression upon their minds, we need not determine. If it should be the latter, the design may yet be, not to ascertain, but to awaken us. Upon which supposition, a serious consideration of the thing, may well consist with suspending our belief of it. And whether it prove true or false, if we are put thereby, upon the doing of nothing, but what a prudent man, and a good christian should do, however; and unto which we only needed excitation, a very valuable end is gained. Affairs are generally managed in human, yea and in the Christian life, upon no certainty of this or that particular event; it is enough that we are put upon seasonable consideration of what concerns us, in the one kind or the other, and do accordingly steer our course. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh upon that ungrateful errand; and came a stranger into that luxurious paganish city, though he brought them no credentials from heaven, nor (that we find) wrought any miracle to confirm his mission, yet the matter he published in their streets, being in itself most considerable, and they having (no doubt) sufficient light, to know their practices were such as deserved the doom they were threatened with, and needed redress, they hereupon consider what he said, reform, and are spared. And what harm was now done in all this? except that Jonah had too tender a concern for his own reputation, and lest he should be thought a false prophet. Whereas the event that happened did better prove the impression, upon his mind, divine; than the destruction of the city, after their repentance, had done. It being a thing more agreeable to the divine nature, and more worthy of God, to save, than destroy a penitent people. If we see no such disposition to repentance, we have the more reason to expect the overflowing calamity; and have enough to prevent our being surprized, without fore knowing the event. But for events that are pleasing and grateful, no matter how surprising they be. The more, the better, the sweeter, and the pleasanter. When God turned again the captivity of Zion we were as them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. (Psal. 126.) It enhanceth mercy, when it is preventing, and unexpected.