

day of judgment than for you.' So Luke xii. 47, 48, we read of many stripes and few stripes. It is true the reward is not of debt; yet there is an equity observed in his bounty.

6. The glorified state of the saints in all probability suiteth with all the rest of the creation. There is a difference and disparity in everything else. Among men in the world, in wisdom and rank, and quality and riches; in the church some have meaner, some larger gifts. There are degrees among the devils. We read of Beelzebub the prince of the devils. Among angels there are archangels, principalities, powers, thrones, dominions. So it is likely among the saints.

7. The profit: it encourageth to godliness: this inequality of rewards giving greater things to those that do more, and be more faithful, than to imagine that they who sow more sparingly shall reap as plentifully as those that sow liberally. It is a great damp to all worthy dealing and signal excellency, that all shall fare alike; but it quickeneth us to our utmost activity to remember that as our work is our reward will be.

Use. Is to quicken us to be more faithful to God for these considerations:—

1. Heaven being the perfection of holiness, if you do not desire more degrees of holiness, you do not desire heaven itself: 1 John iii. 2, 3, 'Behold now ye are the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself as he is pure.'

2. It is gross self-love to go as near the brink of hell and destruction without falling into it, and to beat down the price of salvation as low as we can; and he that will do nothing more than what is simply necessary to salvation will never be faithful with God. To save the stake of their souls they will serve God as little as they can.

SERMON XIV.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not straved: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.—MAT. XXV. 24, 25.

WE have seen the account and reception of the faithful servants; we now come to the master's reckoning with the unfaithful one. The order is observable: first he rewardeth the faithful servants, and then punisheth the careless and negligent. His own nature inclines him to reward; he doth good and showeth mercy out of his own self-inclination; but our sins force him to punish. And mark, he that had received one talent is called to an account as well as he that had received more, that no man may think to be excused for the meanness of his gifts and place. It is true he giveth an account for no more than he hath, but for so much as he hath he must give account.

Christians that have five or two talents must give an account for five or two; but heathens, that have but one talent, the light of nature, give an account for one. The apostle telleth us, 'That as many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law, but as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law,' Rom. ii. 12; every one according to the dispensation they have lived under. The apostle intimateth a distinction of two sorts that are to be judged: 2 Thes. i. 8, 'In flaming fire, take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Those that have great parts and great opportunities will not be accepted with the same improvement that others are that have fewer; neither from the same person will God accept a like service when sick as when well; but according to their abilities and opportunities he doth expect. Well, but let us see what account he bringeth that had but one talent. The parable offereth—

First, The servant's allegation or excuse.

Secondly, The master's answer or reply.

We are now upon the former; and there—

1. The remote cause of his neglect; his prejudice against his master, 'Lord, I knew thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.'

2. The effect of this prejudice; and so the next and immediate cause of this neglect, 'I was afraid.'

3. His negligence and unfaithfulness itself, in bringing his talent without improvement, 'I went and hid thy talent in the earth: Lo, there thou hast what is thine.'

[1.] In the prejudice, Christ impersonateth our natural thoughts and the secret workings of our minds; we dare not say so, but many think so: as if God were a hard and morose master, whom it is impossible to please. The servant in the parable had as little cause for his pretence as we have for our hard thoughts of God: he knew the contrary. If he would consult his own experience, he might have found his master to be good and kind, who had taken him into his family, intrusted him with a talent, waited long for his improvement. But this is the nature of man; self-love will rather blame God than acknowledge our own fault and sin, tax his severity than confess its own negligence.

[2.] In the servant's being afraid, Christ would teach us that ill opinions of God beget pusillanimity and slavish fear.

[3.] In his non-improvement, but rendering the talent as he received it, that pusillanimity or slavish fear and sloth go together, or those that are afraid of God will never do him hearty service.

I cannot handle all the points that will arise from this paragraph, yet I shall discuss one, that will take in the substance and effect of all. And that is—

Doct. That slavish fear is a great hindrance to the faithful discharge of our duty to God.

First, Let me observe to you that there is a twofold fear—filial and servile, childlike and slavish. The one is a lawful and necessary fear, such as quickeneth us to duty, Phil. ii. 12, and is either the fear of reverence, or the fear of caution. The fear of reverence is nothing else but that awe we are to have of the divine majesty as creatures, or

our humble sense of the condition, place, and duty of a creature towards the Creator. The fear of caution is a due sense of the importance and validity of the business we are engaged in, in order to salvation: certainly none can consider the danger we are to escape, and the blessedness we aim at, but will see a need to be serious. And therefore this fear is good and holy.

1. But there is, besides this, a slavish fear, which doth not further, but extremely hinder our work; for though we are to fear God, yet we are not to be afraid of God. This is that which the apostle calleth, *πνεῦμα δουλείας*, opposite to the 'spirit of adoption,' Rom. viii. 15, and a cowardly fearful spirit, opposite to that spirit of power and love and of a sound mind, which is the principle of all faithful service to God. They that are under the spirit of bondage serve not God as children serve a father, but as slaves serve a hard and cruel master. Fear is the inseparable companion of this spirit, which must needs be a great hindrance to our duty, because it begets hatred to God, and the torment it bringeth to ourselves. As it breedeth hatred to God: *oderunt quem metuant, quem odimus periisse cupimus*. When we only dread God for his vengeance, we keep off from him, as a dissolute servant hateth that master who would scourge him for his debaucheries. The nature of this fear is to drive us from God: Gen. iii. 7-10, 'I was afraid.' So because of the torment it bringeth to us, Eph. iv. 18, for the legal spirit, it is called a 'spirit of bondage,' Rom. viii. 15; it hath fear and torment in it, and is an enemy to us, for it banisheth all those sweet principles which should enliven our service; as love to God, and delight in our work, which doth enliven and inspire everything that we do with an earnest spirit. But where love is wanting, and all the comfort that should accompany our duties, it is lost; either a man doth nothing, or all that he doth is in a compulsory manner, by mere force; and so our hands must needs be weakened in God's service, if we be not totally discouraged; for often it endeth in a despair of pleasing, or being accepted with God. There is a lazy sottish despair, as well as a raging tormenting despair: Jer. xviii. 12, 'There is no hope; we will walk in the imagination of our own hearts.' Cast off all care of the soul's welfare. This was the fear of the slothful servant in the text; and such a fear have many others in the bosom of their hearts, by which they can never do anything effectually in the business of religion, by reason of their strong prejudices, occasioned by their own tormenting fear.

2. That this fear is begotten in us by a false opinion of God, that rendereth him dreadful, rigorous, and terrible to the soul. The servant in the text doth not only say, 'I was afraid,' but giveth a reason of it, 'I knew that thou wert an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowed, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.' A parabolical speech to set forth a cruel tyrant, that doth exact upon those that are under him without mercy and reason. Our affections follow our apprehensions, and we either love or fear according to the inward notions that we have of God in our minds: 'They that know thy name will trust in thee,' Ps. ix. 10. If we had righter notions of God, we would love him more and trust him more; but when we conceive amiss of him, accordingly we are affected to him. And therefore we

should take heed what picture we draw of God in our minds ; for if we have only such apprehensions as render him grievous and burdensome to us, these thoughts will leaven our hearts, and make us either neglect his service, or do it by constraint, in a very awkward and uncomfortable manner. If the devil can bring you to have a base opinion of God, as cruel and tyrannical, and once possess you with sour thoughts and fretful jealousies, or harsh surmises of his government, it will turn all your love and obedience into hatred and slavish fear. Therefore those that consider that love is the great principle of obedience should also consider that there is nothing so necessary to breed love as good thoughts of God, and a due sense of his goodness in Christ. Come to this once, and then all that he requireth and doth will be acceptable to us. His laws will not be grievous, nor his providences seem burdensome to you, nor his judgments intolerable. How can you love him till you represent him as an object of love, one upon whom you may cheerfully depend for life and defence, and from whom you may comfortably expect the rewards of obedience ? Therefore take heed of painting out God in your thoughts as a hard master. The apostle telleth us, Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' As soon as we apprehend his being, we should also pitch upon his bounty and goodness. First that he is, and then that he is a rewarder. There is in all men some impression of a godhead, which is clearly understood and seen 'by the things that are made,' Rom. i. 20. This apprehension of God calleth for worship ; for next that God is, we must believe he must be worshipped, John iv. 24. These two notions live and die together ; they are clear and blotted out together. As the apprehension of God is clear, and more deeply engraven upon the soul, so is this notion of man's duty of worshipping God clear, and imprinted upon the soul also. The one impression cannot be worn out without the other. But now, want of a true knowledge of God breedeth slavish fear, fearing God in excess, rather than loving him in any tolerable measure, because a man naturally looketh upon God with the same eye that a malefactor doth upon his judge. Fear is more natural to carnal men, because a bad conscience is very suspicious, and our sense of God's benefits is not so great as the sense of our bad deservings is quick and lively. Therefore naturally we have no other notions of God than as a rigid lawgiver and severe avenger. The heathens, who in all their worship discovered the natural sentiments of religion that are in the hearts of men, observed this in their straits, *Ut prius placarent iratos deos*, &c. Wrath and anger were the first thoughts they had of a divine power ; and it is as true among Christians. Guilty nature is more presageous of evil than of good, when it is serious. It is true, wicked men cry out, God is merciful, and that is generally the cause of their laziness and slightness in religion ; but it is when they do not mind what they say : these are but sugared words in their tongues ; when they are serious they have other thoughts. Bondage is more natural than liberty, fear than hope, because of the covenant we are under, which is a covenant of works, a ministry of death and condemnation, and so begetteth fear, and representeth God as terrible : yea, it is found in those that are more serious,

and have some beginnings of a good work upon their hearts; they are too apt to entertain ill thoughts of God, and looking upon him in the glass of their guilty fears, represent him as harsh and inexorable. All their terrors and troubles are raised by false apprehensions of God; and therefore the course of their obedience groweth the more uncomfortable. This is a truth, that the law and grace contendeth for the mastery in every heart that entertains thoughts of religion; not only corruption and grace, but the law and grace: and as their law notions prevail, so their slavish fear increaseth; but as the gospel apprehensions prevail, so their love of God increaseth, and their comfortableness in religion. Therefore still the caution is bound upon us, to take heed what notions we have of God, and that we have not any diminishing extenuating thoughts of his goodness and mercifulness; that we do not look upon him as one that lieth upon the catch, to spy out advantages against us; for that thought will mightily weaken our hands in the Lord's work. Do not think of him as one that delights in the creatures' misery. No; rather in showing mercy and goodness, and as ready to give out grace to the humble that lie at his feet, however he dealeth with the stubborn and obstinate refusers of his grace. And therefore, if I may digress into application, while I am yet in some doctrinal considerations, I would advise—

[1.] That to preserve the sense of religion in the general, men would consider how much God standeth upon the credit of his goodness, and that he giveth them no cause of discouragement as from him: Micah vi. 3, 'O my people, what have I done unto you, wherein have I wearied you?' That his commands are not grievous, Mat. xi. 29; 1 John iii. 5; that the trials sent by him are not above measure, 1 Cor. x. 13, nor his punishments above deservings, Neh. xi. 9–13; that he is not hard to be pleased, nor inexorable upon our infirmities, Mal. iii. 17. These things should be constantly in our minds, for the vindication and justification of God from our natural jealousies and evil surmises that we have of his conduct and government.

[2.] I would advise poor trembling souls that are alarmed by their own fears, which represent God as an enemy, and standing at a distance from them, that they would study the name of God; for surely things are known by their names, and poor disconsolate souls are bidden, Isa. l. 10, 'To trust in the name of the Lord,' &c. Now what is the name of God? Even that which he proclaimed: Exod. xxxiv. 5–7, 'I am the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.' Therefore take all his name, and meditate upon it. Satan laboureth to represent God by halves, only as a consuming fire, as clothed with justice and vengeance. Oh, no! It is true he will not suffer his mercy to be abused by contemptuous sinners; he will not clear the guilty, though he waiteth long on them before he destroyeth them; but the main of his name is 'his mercy and goodness.' Take it as God proclaimeth it, and see if you have any reason to have hard thoughts of God. You will find, that though he be a high and holy one, yet he is willing to be treated with; that he is great, but yet good, ready to receive returning sinners: if thou hast sin and misery, Christ hath compassion and pity; he is the

'Father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3. *Misericors est, cui alterius miseria cordi est*—mercy hath its name from misery, and is no other thing than laying another's misery to heart, not to despise it, nor to add to it, but to help it. And therefore, if thou be miserable, and knowest it indeed, his nature giveth a strong inclination to succour the miserable. Ay! but saith the convinced soul, there is nothing in me to be regarded. The Lord telleth, 'I am gracious;' and grace doth all freely, and from a self-inclination; it giveth all the qualifications he requireth. But I have been long a presumptuous sinner. Why, God telleth you his name is 'long-suffering.' He that gave not the angels one hour's space for repentance, hath long delayed the execution of our sentence, and calleth us to himself, that we may escape the condemnation of angels. But I am exceeding perverse and wicked. The Lord telleth you he is 'abundant in goodness.' I am full of fears and doubtings. Still he is 'abundant in goodness and truth.' I have abused much mercy, and can mercy pity me? The Lord telleth you, he 'keepeth mercy for thousands, and can forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin.' His treasure of mercy is not soon spent and exhausted: no sin can exclude a willing soul; mercy will pardon thy abuse of mercy, if thou repentest of it.

[3.] To the people of God, who having a clearer sense of their duty, and a larger heart towards God than others have, and so are the more troubled for the poverty of their graces, and weakness and imperfection of their services than others are, which may breed bondage and uncomfortableness. I would have them consider that humility and meekness doth still become them, but not dejection and despondency of mind, that they should ever be complaining, fearful, and disconsolate. We have not a hard master; he hath made joy a part of our work, Phil. iv. 4; he gave his Son, Luke i. 74, 75, 'That being delivered from our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness.' We should consider that he is ready to bear with failings where there is an upright heart; that God accepteth what we can through grace well and comfortably perform. It is a general maxim of the gospel, though spoken upon a particular occasion, 2 Cor. viii. 12, 'That if there be a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, not according to that he hath not:' that the God whom they serve in the spirit can put a finger on the scar: 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job,' James v. 11. Ay! and we have heard of his impatience too, his cursing the day of his birth, and his bold expostulations with God; but this is passed over in silence, and his patience commended. Nothing should be a discouragement from serving cheerfully so good and gracious a God, who is so ready to accept and assist us, 1 Peter iii. 6, compared with Gen. xviii. 12. He will own a pearl on a dunghill, the least act of sincere obedience, though there be many failings. But I must return.

3. The usual ill thoughts of God are these three—(1.) That he is rigorous in his commands; (2.) Niggardly and tenacious in his gifts and helps of grace; (3.) And as to acceptance, that he is hard to please and easy to offend. All these may be gathered out of the words of the unfaithful servant, and all these lie deep in the hearts of men against God's sovereignty.

[1.] Hypocrites accuse God of tyranny in his laws, as if he dealt hardly with his creatures, to leave them with such affections in the midst of the snares and temptations of the present life, and requiring such duty from them. Certainly, all that God hath required of us is holy, just, and good, conducing not only to his glory, but to the rectitude and perfection of our natures. Man would not be man if such things were not required of him ; so that if we were in our right wits, and were left to our own option and choice, we would prefer subjection to such laws before exemption and freedom, Micah vi. 8. Are justice, temperance, chastity, piety, patience gyves and fetters to human nature? We cannot be without these and preserve the nobleness of our being and the good of human societies. It is true this lower world furnisheth us with many temptations to the contrary, but these temptations work not by constraining efficacy, but only by enticing persuasion ; and have we not more earnest persuasions to love God and please God? Are not God and Christ and heaven more lovely objects than all the pleasures and profits and honours of the world? These things do not force the will, but draw your consent ; and surely God hath propounded more lovely things in his covenant to draw this consent from them. The great fault is in our lust, 2 Peter i. 4 ; as the poison is not in the flower, but in the spider.

[2.] He accuseth God as backward to give grace and help our impotency, and as if he did require more than he giveth. This is obvious and express in the words of the naughty servant : ‘ Reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.’ But this also is an unjust charge ; for God requireth nothing but according to the talents received. Now he needeth not take anything from the creatures, for he giveth all ; he had one talent, and God expected the improvement but of one. Let men try to the utmost, and see if they have cause to make this complaint ; they will find, that ‘ the way of the Lord is strength to the upright,’ Prov. x. 29, and that all these jealousies are but a slander against God’s government. Why do you complain that he would reap where he hath not sown? Is it because you would have God force you to be good whether you would or no, and by an absolute constraining power drive you out of your flesh-pleasing course? Consider how unbecoming it is the wisdom of God that men should be holy and good by necessity, and not by choice. Virtue would then be no virtue, not a moral, but a natural property, as burning is to fire ; and it were no more praiseworthy to mind heavenly things than it is for a stone to move downward. It is true God must make us willing, but willing we must be. Now there is no such thing on your parts, when you wilfully refuse the hopes God offereth : Acts xiii. 46, ‘ Since ye put away the word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.’ At least you do not apply your hearts to work with God, or frame your doings to turn to him, as it is in the prophet ; you do not improve means, and mercies, and providences, and helps vouchsafed. And will you, after all this, think God a Pharaoh, that requireth brick and giveth no straw? Here it is verified, Prov. xix. 3, ‘ The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.’ We usually ruin ourselves, and then complain that God giveth no more

grace. But do not we justify this conceit of wicked men, when we say, God requireth duty of the fallen creatures, who have no power to perform it? I answer—

(1.) We must so maintain God's goodness as still to keep up his sovereignty and right of dominion. Man had power, which was lost by his own default; but God doth not lose his right, though man hath lost his power: their impotency doth not dissolve their obligation. A drunken servant is bound to the duty of a servant still. It is against all reason the master should lose his right to command by the servant's default. A prodigal debtor, that hath nothing to pay, yet is liable to be sued for the debt without injustice. God contracted with us in Adam, and his obedience was not only due by covenant, but by law and immutable right; not by positive law only, or contract; and therefore he hath a right to demand obedience, as the fruit of original righteousness.

(2.) It is harsh, men think, to answer for Adam's fault, to which they were not conscious and consenting. But every man will find an Adam in his own heart: the old man is there wasting away the relics of natural light and strength; and shall not God challenge the debt of obedience from a proud prodigal debtor? We are found naked, yet we think ourselves clothed; poor, yet we think ourselves rich, and to have need of nothing: therefore God may admonish us of our duty, demand his right to convince us of our impotency, and that we may not pretend we were not called upon for what we owe him. Man is prodigal; we spend what is left, lose those relics of conscience and moral inclinations which escaped out of the ruins of the fall.

(3.) God requireth it that we may acknowledge the debt and confess our impotency, being practically convinced thereof, and so humbly implore his grace.

(4.) God is still offering recovering mercy, and never forsaketh any but those that forsake him first: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever;' 2 Chron. xv. 2, 'If you forsake him, he will forsake you.' Did you improve yourselves, and beg God's grace, and carry on the common work as far as you can, then it were another matter. He that useth God's means as well as he can, he lieth nearer to the blessing of them than the wilful despiser and neglecter of them. Unsanctified men may do less evil and more good than they do: therefore if they neglect the means, they are left inexcusable; not only as originally disabled, but as wilfully graceless: so that no such prejudice can lie against God; he offereth grace and power, and men will not have it.

[3.] The third prejudice is, that he is hard to please, and easily offended; as if he did watch advantages to ruin and destroy the creature. Oh, no! This cannot be thought of God. He that rewarded the picture and shadow of duty, as in Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 29, the first offers of it in his servants, Isa. xxxii. 5; that regarded the returning prodigal, Luke xv. 20; Isa. lxxv. 24; whose bowels relent presently; who hath promised to reward a cup of cold water given for Christ's sake, Mat. x. 42, and that our slender services should receive so great a reward; that beareth with his people's weakness; that 'spareth them as a man spareth his only son,' by their failing, surely he is not harsh and severe.

[4.] These prejudices are very natural to us, and therefore should be regarded by all. This appeareth partly by the first fall of man. Prejudice against God was the fiery dart that wounded our first parents to death. The first battery that Satan made was against the persuasion of God's goodness and kindness to man; he endeavoured to make them doubt of it by casting jealousies into their minds, as if God were harsh, severe, and envious in restraining them from the tree of knowledge, and the fruit that was so fair to see to, Gen. iii. If once he could bring them to question God's goodness, he knew other things would succeed more easily; for the sense of the Creator's goodness was the strongest bond by which the heart was kept to God. And partly because still the devil seeketh to possess us with this conceit, that God is harsh and severe, and delighteth in our ruin; and casteth jealousies into our heads, as if God did infringe our just liberties by the restraints of his law. And we have the same impatience of restraints which they had; and the flesh being importunate to be pleased, we are apt to find out excuses; and as the naughty servant condemneth his master when he should beg pardon, so such is the perverse disposition of man, when we should confess our fault, we will abuse God himself; as Adam, Gen. iii. 12, 'The woman thou gavest me, gave me, and I did eat.' This monstrous conceit of God we further by observing his injuries (as we count them), rather than his benefits. We take notice of afflictions, but not of daily mercies. David had much ado to hold his principle: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart: but as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped.' These thoughts are very incident to us.

Use. Oh! then, when we set our hearts to religion, let us take heed of slavish fear; and if so, take heed with what thoughts of God you are leavened, and that you do not draw a monstrous and horrid picture of him in your minds. Oh! look upon him as full of grace and mercy, ten thousand times more inclined to do good than any friend you have in the world. The devil governeth the dark parts of the world by slavish fear, but God governeth by love. To this end consider—

1. That in his word God representeth himself by mercy and goodness rather than any other attribute. Mercy is natural to him; he is 'the father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3. God is not merciful by accident, but by nature. The sun doth not more naturally shine, nor the fire more naturally burn, nor water more naturally flow, than God doth naturally show mercy. It is pleasing to him, Micah vii. 18; James ii. 13, 'Mercy rejoiceth over judgment.' Punitive acts are forced from him, but gracious acts drop from him of their own accord, like life-honey. Nay, God is mercy itself: 1 John iv. 8, 'God is love.' It cannot be said of a man that he is learning and wisdom, though learned and wise. But God is not only loving, but love, an infinite sea of love, without banks and bounds. It was well observed of *Cæcolampadius*, that men were taught amiss to know the nature of God by vulgar pictures and representations (for their fashion was then to picture God in some fair and beautiful form, and the devil in some foul ugly shape). *Puerorum major pars nescit quid sit Deus, quid sit Sathan.* But he adviseth parents, if they would teach their children to know what God is, they would first teach them to know what goodness is and justice

is, what mercy is, what bounty and loving-kindness is; *per illius enim proprie quid Deus sit discimus*. Again, if they would know what kind of creature the devil is, they should first know what malice is and filthiness, and what villany and treachery is; for Satan is a compound of all these. The best picture that could be taken of the devil would be by the characters of malice, falsehood, and envy. But God is justice itself, goodness itself, mercy itself, as it is expressed in scripture.

2. In Christ, who is the 'express image of his person,' Heb. i. 3. Now, Christ disdained not the company of sinners, went about healing sicknesses and diseases, and doing good. His miracles were acts of relief, not done for pomp and ostentation.

3. In his providence: Acts xiv. 17, 'He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

SERMON XV.

His lord said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reaped where I sowed not, and gathered where I have not strawed; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.—MAT. XXV. 26, 27.

HERE is the master's reply to the servant's allegation. In the words we have two things:—

1. An exprobration of his naughtiness and sloth.

2. A retortion of his vain excuse upon his own head, 'If thou knewest,' &c. Not as if the lord did grant it to be true that the slothful servant had alleged; but his own opinions and conceits were enough to convict him.

[1.] Here is a *συγχώρησις*, a concession; for dispute's sake, be it as thou hast said.

[2.] The inference, 'Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, that at my coming I might have received mine own with usury.' The argument is returned upon himself. The bankers and usury here mentioned are only by way of comparison, and can no more be urged to justify the putting money to use than, 'Behold, I come as a thief,' can justify theft; or that parable Luke xvi. should justify fraud and injustice; the unjust steward did wisely, *non servi fraudem, sed prudentiam*, &c. Parables are not taken from those things that *de jure* ought to be done, but *de facto* are done. Therefore I shall not interpose any judgment of mine upon this occasion as to that case, whether any putting money to use be lawful, yea or no: only observe, that Christ will have his own with usury; some improvement he expects when he cometh.

First, I begin with the exprobration. It was a sharp but well deserved reproof; if the bad servant had feared this beforehand, it might have been better with him; shame is the fear of a just reproof. Mark