

SERMONS UPON GENESIS XXIV. 63.

SERMON I.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide,—
GEN. xxiv. 63.

THE context is spent in describing the journey of Rebekah with Abraham's servant, and the text sheweth the occasion of the first interview between Isaac and Rebekah; he goeth out into the fields to meditate, and of a sudden he seeth the camels coming.

I cannot pass by this accident without some remark and observation. Isaac goeth to meet with God, and he meeteth with God and Rebekah too. Godliness hath the promises of this life and that which is to come; there is nothing lost by duty and acts of piety and worship. Seneca said the Jews were an unhappy people, because they lost the seventh part of their lives, meaning the time spent in the sabbath. This is the sense of nature, to think all lost that is bestowed on God. Flesh and blood snuffeth and crieth, What a weariness is it! and what need all this waste? Oh! let me tell you, by serving God you drive on two cares at once. Worldly interests many times are cast into the way of religion, and, besides the main design, these things are added to us. Wonderful are the providences of God in and about duties of worship. Some have gone aside to pray, and escaped such as lay in wait to destroy them; and Luther tells a story of one that balked a duty and fell into a danger, passed by a sermon, and was presently surprised by thieves. Others there are that thought of nothing but meeting God in his worship, and God hath made their duties an occasion of advancing their outward comforts. Certainly it is good to obey all impulses of the Spirit; there may be somewhat of providence as well as grace in it: 'Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide; and he lift up his eyes and saw, and behold the camels were coming.'

In the words you have several circumstances: the person, 'Isaac;' his work, 'He went out to meditate;' the place, 'In the field;' the time, 'At even-tide.'

1. For the person, Isaac, I need not say much, because I would not digress. He was Abraham's son, and God said of Abraham, Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that

which he hath spoken of him.' Good education leaveth a savour and tincture upon the spirit, at least an awe and a care of duties and exercises of religion; and therefore it is no wonder to hear of Abraham's son that had been trained up in the way of the Lord, to go out to meditate; it is a seal of the blessing of education. again Isaac was now in his youth; certainly he could not be very old. Sarah was ninety years old when the promise was first made to her of a son: Gen. xvii. 17, 'Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?' Now Sarah was but one hundred and twenty-seven years old when she died, Gen. xxiii. 1, and this match was immediately after her death; for just as he received Rebekah he left off his mourning for Sarah: Gen. xxiv. 67, 'And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.' Probably Isaac was now a little above thirty. Isaac, a young man, that was now entering into the world, goeth out to meditate. Usually we make religious exercises the work of grey hairs, and after we have spent the heat and flower of our spirits in the vanities of the world, we hope to make amends for all by a severe and devout retirement. Young and green heads look upon meditation as a dull melancholy work, fit only for the phlegm and decay of old age; vigorous and eager spirits are more for action than thoughts, and their work lieth so much with others that they have no time to descend into themselves. But the elder world was more innocent; the exercises of Isaac's youth were pious; he went out into the fields to meditate.

2. To open his work to you, 'to meditate,' or, as it is in the margin, to pray, פָּרַשׁ, the word used in the original is indifferent to both senses; it properly signifies muttering, or an imperfect and suppressed sound. The Septuagint sometimes renders it by *αἰδεω*, to sing, but here they render it by *ἀδολεσχῆσαι*, which signifies to exercise himself, and most properly a sportive exercise, as if his going abroad had been only to sport and recreate himself after the toil of the day. But that is not so probable; the Holy Ghost would not put such a mark upon such a circumstance. Therefore I suppose the Septuagint's word must be taken more largely to comprise also a religious exercise. But how is it? To pray or meditate? I would not recede from our own translation without weighty cause; most other translations look that way. Symmachus renders it *λαλῆσαι*, to speak; Aquila, *ὁμιλῆσαι*, to discourse as with others, that is, with God and his own soul; and so it suiteth with the force of the original word, which properly signifies to mutter, or such a speaking as is between thoughts and words. So that the meaning is, he went aside privately to discourse of God, and the promises, and of heavenly things.

3. The place, 'In the field.' Partly for privacy; deep thoughts require a retirement. Many of David's psalms were penned in the wilderness. He that would have the company of God and his own thoughts had need go aside from other company, and be alone that he may not be alone, that the mind, being sequestered from all distractions, may solace itself the more freely in these heavenly thoughts: Exod. iii. 1, 'Moses led the flock to the back-side of the desert and came to

the mountain of God, even to Horeb.' He goeth aside from the other shepherds, that he might converse with the great shepherd and bishop of our souls, and there he seeth the vision of the burning bush. When God would communicate his loves to the church, he inviteth her into the wilderness: Hosea ii. 14, 'Therefore behold I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.' The most familiar and intimate converses between God and the church are in private. So the spouse inviteth the bridegroom: Cant. vii. 11, 'Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us lodge in the villages.' In these solitary and heavenly retirements, to which no eyes are conscious and privy, we have most experience of God and of ourselves. Duties done in company are more easy; byends and man's eye and observance may have an influence upon our worship, and therefore meditation is difficult and tedious, because it is a work of retirement, that hath approbation from none but our Father that seeth in secret. Partly because the field is an help to meditation, fancy and invention being elevated and raised by the sweetness, variety, and pleasure of it, there being on every side so many objects and lively memorials of God. However in this sense the circumstance is not binding. Some do better in a closet than in a field or garden, where the senses being locked from all other objects, the mind may fall more directly upon itself, which otherwise in a field or garden would skip from object to object, without pitching upon any seriously.

4. The last circumstance in the text is the time, 'In the even-tide,' which is also a matter of an arbitrary concernment. Time in itself is but an inactive circumstance; all hours are alike to God; he taketh no more pleasure in the sixth or ninth hour than in the first hour; only you should prudently observe when your spirit is most fresh and smart. To some the morning is quickest, the fancy being fittest to offer spiritual and heavenly thoughts, before it hath received any images and representations from carnal objects abroad. Morning thoughts are, as it were, the virgin thoughts of the mind, before they have been prostituted to these inferior and baser objects, and so are more pure, sublime, and defecate; and then the soul, like the hind of the morning, with a swift and nimble readiness climbeth up to the mountains of myrrh and frankincense: Cant. iv. 6, 'Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense;' and it tendeth much to season the whole day when we can talk with the law in the morning: Prov. vi. 22, 'When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' To some the evening seemeth fitter, that, when the gayishness and vanity of the spirit hath been spent in business, their thoughts may be more serious and solemn with God; and after the weights have been running down all day through their employments of the world, they may wind them up again at night in these recesses and exercises of piety and religion; as David says, Ps. xxv. 1, 'Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.' To others the silence and stillness of the night seemeth to be an help, and because of the curtain of darkness that is drawn between them and the world, they can the better entertain serious and solemn thoughts of God. David speaks everywhere in the psalms of his nocturnal devotions: Ps. lxxiii. 6, 'When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the

night-watches.' The expression is taken from the custom of the Jews, who divided the night into so many watches. Whilst others were reposing their bodies on their beds, David was reposing his soul in the bosom of God, and he gave the less rest to his eyes that he might give the more to his soul. So Ps. cxix. 148, 'Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word.' Certainly in the night, when we are taken off from other business, we have the greatest command of our thoughts, and the covert of darkness that God hath stretched over the world begetteth a greater awe and reverence. Therefore Mr Greenham, when he pressed any weighty point, and perceived any careless, used to beg of them that, if God by his providence should suffer them to awake in the night, they would but think of his words. Certainly the mind, being by sleep emptied of other cares, like a mill falleth upon itself, and the natural awe and terror which is the effect of darkness helpeth to make the thoughts more solemn and serious. So that you see much may be said for the conveniency of either of these seasons, evening, or morning, or night. It is your duty to be faithful to your own souls, and sometimes to take the advantage either of the night, or of the day, or of the morning, or of the evening, as best suits us. David saith, Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh! how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' So he describes his blessed man: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' that is, sometimes in the day, and sometimes in the night; no time can come amiss to a prepared spirit. Isaac's hour was in the even-tide; in the evening he went out to meditate, in which two things are notable—

[1.] That he made duty his refreshment. He had wrought all the day, and in the evening he goeth to recreate himself with God. What a shame is it that what was his solace is our burden! If we had a spiritual discerning, we should soon see that there is no delight to that of duty, and no refreshment like that which we enjoy in the exercises of religion and in communion with God. The world's delights are vain and dreggy; they may provoke laughter, but they cannot yield any pure, solid, and true contentment. It was Christ's meat to do his Father's will: John iv. 34, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.' It was sweeter to Job than his appointed food to hear God's word: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.' And David saith, Ps. cxix. 54, 'Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.' All the comfort he had to drive away the sad and disconsolate hours of his pilgrimage was to exercise himself in the study and meditation of God's word. And it was Isaac's evening comfort to go out and meditate. Gracious hearts must have spiritual delights, the word, and obedience, and prayer, and meditation. As one said, *Aut hoc non est evangelium, aut nos non sumus christiani*—Either these histories are not true, or our hearts are much unlike theirs. Oh! how sweet would it be if we could make duty a recreation and our work our pleasure; that in the close of the day this might be our solace, after the work of the day to take a turn with God in the mount, and to walk in the garden of love, and, as David saith, Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.' Isaac went out at even-tide.'

[2.] That at the evening his spirit was still fresh and savoury ; this was the time not of necessity, but choice. Many spend their heat and strength in the world, toiling all day, and in the evening come and offer God a drowsy yawning prayer, when all the vigour of their spirits is wasted. You should bring forth the best wine at last ; never so engage in the world as to hinder a duty. It should be the wisdom of christians to guide their affairs with such judgment that duties may not become a burden and a weariness. Now a soul encumbered with business cannot act with such delight and freedom as it ought. Too often do we suffer the lean kine to devour the fat. Mary hath cause to complain of Martha ; so much time is spent in the world that we have no heart or strength for communion with God ; and usually when all are asleep and wearied out with the world, then we call to duty. Oh ! remember in the evening and close of the day your affections should be quick and free for spiritual things. Isaac went out ‘at evening-tide.’

I shall sum up the intent of the whole verse in this one point—

Doct. That it is the duty of christians to sequester and set apart some time and place for solemn meditation, or the exercising their souls in heavenly and holy things.

My purpose is to speak of meditation, a duty unaccustomed and unpractised ; both the practice and the knowledge of it are become strangers to us. The times are times of action and tumult, and we all think that we have so much to do with others, that few desire to converse with God and themselves. Our case is somewhat like theirs in Nehemiah’s time, Neh. iv. 17, ‘With one hand they wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.’ We are forced to fight and quarrel for our religion, that we may rescue the innocent and holy principles of it from violation and scorn. I observe that many christians use the sword, they spend the heat and strength of their spirits in controversies ; but I doubt they do not use the trowel enough, and are not so serious in private retirements as they are earnest in public defences. Therefore I shall make it my work to press the duty of meditation. My method shall be this : I shall show—(1.) What meditation is ; (2.) The necessity and profit of it ; (3.) The rules that serve to guide us in this holy work and business ; (4.) The lets and hindrances of it, with the helps and remedies against them ; (5.) The object or matters upon which you are to meditate, which I shall handle—first, generally ; secondly, particularly.

I shall give you some hints of meditation on those objects which are most usual and most practical.

I. What meditation is. Before I can define it I must distinguish it.

1. There is that which we call occasional meditation, which is an act by which the soul spiritualiseth every object about which it is conversant. A gracious heart is like an alembic, it can distil useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. Look, as it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things. Our Lord at the well discourseth of ‘the water of life,’ John xxi. 10. At the supper of the pharisee one discourseth of ‘eating bread in the kingdom of God,’ Luke xiv. 15. There is a chemistry and holy art that a christian hath to turn water into wine, brass into gold, to make earthly occasions and objects to minister spiritual and heavenly thoughts. God trained up the old

church by types and ceremonies, that upon a common object they might ascend to spiritual thoughts; and our Lord in the new testament taught by parables and similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices among men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with an heavenly mind, that, whether in the shop, or at the loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ and heaven. There is a parable of merchant-men, a parable of the sower, a parable of a man calling his servants to an account. In all these similitudes Christ would teach us that we should still think of God and heaven. So small a matter as a grain of mustard-seed may yield many spiritual applications.

2. There is set and solemn meditation. Now this is of several sorts, or rather, they are but several parts of the same exercise.

[1.] There is a reflexive meditation, by which we wholly fall upon ourselves. This is nothing else but a solemn parley between a man and his own heart: Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your own hearts upon your bed, and be still.' When in a solemn retirement, reason and inward discourse returneth and falleth back upon itself. Of all the parts of meditation this is the most difficult, for here a man is to exercise dominion over his soul, and to be his own accuser and judge; it is against self-love, and carnal ease. We see all our shifts are to avoid our own company, and to run away from ourselves. Guilty man, like a basilisk dieth, by seeing himself. Hence the worldly man choketh his soul with business, lest his thoughts, for want of work, like a mill should grind upon itself. The voluptuous person melteth away his days in pleasure, and charmeth his soul into a deep sleep with the potion of outward delights, lest it should awake and talk with him. Oh! then, necessary it is that a christian should take some time to discourse with himself, to ask of our own souls, what we are? what we have been? what we have done? Jer. viii. 6; what straits, what temptations we have passed through, and how we have overcome them? You would think it strange of two men that conversed every day for forty or fifty years, and all this while they did not know one another; yet this is the case between us and our souls; we live a long time in the world, and are strangers to ourselves.

[2.] There is a meditation, which is more direct, and that is of two sorts—(1.) Dogmatical, whose object is the word; (2.) Practical, whose objects is our own lives. There is more of search and apprehension in the first, there is more of plot and contrivance in the second; the one is more conversant about doctrines, the other about things; the latter catcheth hold of the heel of the former, for where dogmatical meditation endeth, there practical meditation beginneth.

(1.) Dogmatical meditation is when we exercise ourselves in the doctrines of the word, and consider how truths known may be useful to us. It differeth from study, partly in the object; study is conversant about a thing unknown in whole or in part: Rom. xii. 2, 'That ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God;' but meditation is an act of knowledge reiterated, or a return of the mind to that point to which it arrived before; it is the inculcation or whetting of a known truth, the pause of reason on something already conceived and known, or a calling to remembrance what we know

before. Partly in the end ; the end of study is information, but the end of meditation is practice, or a work upon the affections : Josh. i. 8, ' This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.' Study is like a winter's sun, that shineth but warmeth not ; but meditation is like the blowing up of the fire, where we do not mind the blaze, but the heat. The fruit of study is to hoard up truth, but the fruit of meditation is to practise it. Curious inquiries have more of the student in them than the christian. In study we are rather like vintners, that take in wines to store themselves for sale ; in meditation we are like private men, that buy wine for our use and comfort. A vintner's cellar may be better stored than a nobleman's, but he hath it for others' use. The student may have more of notion and knowledge, his cellar may be fuller, but he hath it not for taste and necessary refreshment, as the christian hath.

(2.) More practical and applicative meditation is when we take ourselves aside from worldly distractions, that we may solemnly debate and study how to carry on the holy life with better success and advantage, when we are wise in our sphere : Luke xvi. 8, ' The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light, *εἰς τὴν γενεάν*, in their generation ;' it is an Hebrew phrase for the manner, course, and sphere of our lives : Gen. vi. 9, ' These are the generations of Noah ; Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God ;' so to be wise in our generation is to be wise in our manner of living and business. So it is said, Ps. cxxii. 5, ' He will guide his affairs with discretion,' which noteth plotting and wise foresight, choosing our way, or devising our way, as Solomon calleth it : Prov. xvi. 9, ' A man's heart deviseth his way.' It is a great part of a christian's employment. The scriptures call for it for a minister : 2 Tim. ii. 15, ' Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,' to devise how to carry on his ministry with most honour and success. So for private christians : Heb. x. 24, ' Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works.' We should consider one another, each other's gifts, dispositions, and graces, that so our spiritual converse and commerce might be the more improved. By this kind of meditation piety is made more prudent, reasonable, and orderly. Christians that live at haphazard, and order their lives at adventure, without these rational and wise debates, if they do not stain their profession with foul indiscretions, yet find much inconvenience and toil in the holy life, and are not half so useful as others are. Certainly we should learn this of the children of this world. A wicked man is plotting for his lusts : Rom. xiii. 14, ' Make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof,' *μὴ ποιέισθε πρόνοιαν*. They make provision, they are catering how they may feed such a lust and satisfy such a carnal desire. Therefore certainly we should take care for the conveniences of the holy life, how we may be most useful for God, and pass through our relations with most advantage, and cast our businesses that they may be the least disadvantage to religion, and consider how particular duties may be the most dexterously accomplished : Ps.

cxvi. 12, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?'

These are the kinds of meditation. The definition may be formed thus: Meditation is that duty or exercise of religion whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn contemplation of spiritual things, for practical uses and purposes.

I shall open the description by the parts of it.

1. It is a duty and exercise of religion.

[1.] That it is a duty and exercise of religion appeareth by the evidence of scripture, where it is commanded, Josh. i. 8, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' It is made a character of a godly man: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' It is commended in the practice and example of the saints that were most famous in scripture; Isaac in the text, Moses and David. And as it is plain by the evidence of scripture; so by the light of nature and reason. God that is a spirit deserveth the most pure and spiritual worship, as well as such as is performed by the body. The thoughts are the eldest and noblest offspring of the soul, and the solemn consecration of them is fit for God. In the gospel meditation is called for. I find in the Old Testament the main thing there called for is meditation in the law; in the gospel we are directed to a new object, the love of Christ: Eph. iii. 17-19, 'That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;' that is the study of saints. I confess it is more called for in the Old Testament; being gross and carnal, they needed greater enforcements to spiritual duties; but now it suiteth every way with the nature of our worship: John iv. 24, 'God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' Now worship in spirit and in truth is more agreeable to our state. Meditation is a pure and rational converse with God; it is the flower and height of consecrated reason.

[2.] It is not a duty of an arbitrary concernment. It is not only a moral help that may be observed or omitted, but a necessary duty, without which all graces would languish and wither. Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises; as David saith, Ps. cxix. 92, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.' Thoughts are the caterers of the soul, that purvey for faith, and fetch in food and refresh it with the comfort of the promises. Hope is low, and doth not arise to such a fulness of expectation till by meditation we take a deliberate view of our hopes and privileges: Gen. xiii. 17, 'Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee.' Our hopes arise according to the largeness of our thoughts. It is a great advantage to have our eyes open to view the riches of our inheritance, and to have a distinct view of the hope of our calling. The apostle prays for the Ephesians, chap. i. 18, 'The eyes of your understandings being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' Men of barren thoughts are usually of low hopes, and for

want of getting to the top of Pisgah to view the land, our hearts sink within us. Certainly hope thriveth best on the mount of meditation. Then for love, the sparkles of affection will not flow out unless we beat upon the will by constant thoughts. Affection is nourished by apprehension, and the more constant and deliberate the thoughts are, the love is always the deeper. Those christians that are backward to the duty of meditation find none of those impulses and meltings of love that are in others; they do not endeavour to comprehend the height and breadth and length, and depth of the love of Christ, and therefore no wonder that their hearts are so narrow and so much straitened towards God. Affections always follow the rate of our thoughts, if they are ponderous and serious. Then for obedience, or keeping the spirits constantly in a religious frame; to others good motions come like flashes of lightning, and are as soon gone, as their thoughts are slight and vanishing, but deep musing maketh the fire burn, and keepeth a constant heat and flame in the spirits, not by flashes. And as for duty, so for comfort; a man that is a stranger to meditation is a stranger to himself. In acts of review you enjoy yourselves, and you enjoy yourselves with far more comfort in these private recesses; you have most experience of God, and most experience of yourselves. Moses when he went aside to meditate had the vision of the fiery bush. Usually God cometh in, in the time of deep meditation, and an elevated heavenly mind is fittest to entertain the comforts and glory of his presence.

Thus you see it is a necessary duty. Many think it is an excuse to say it doth not suit with their temper; that it is a good help, but for those that can use it. I answer—

(1.) It is true there is a great deal of difference among christians; some are more serious and consistent, and have a greater command over their thoughts, others are of a more slight, weak spirit, and are less apt for duties of retirement and recollection. But our unfitness is usually moral rather than natural, not so much by temper as by disuse; and moral unfitness cannot exempt us from a moral duty. Inky water cannot wash the hand white, or a sin exempt me from a duty. Indisposition, which is a sin in me, doth not disannul my engagements to God; as a servant's drunkenness doth not excuse him from work. That it is a moral unfitness appeareth by two things—

(1st.) Disuse and neglect is the cause of it. Those that use it have a greater command over their thoughts. Men count it a great yoke, but custom would make it easy. Every duty is an help to itself, and the more we meditate the more we shall. It is pleasant to them that use it: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' Fierce creatures are tame to those that use to command them, and if a man did use to govern his thoughts, he would find them more obedient.

(2d.) Want of love. Thoughts are at the service of love; we pause and stay upon such objects as we delight in: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' Love naileth and fasteneth the soul to the object or thing beloved; as we see we can dwell upon carnal pleasures because our heart is there; as Solomon gives this reason why a carnal man cannot dwell upon a sad and solemn object, because 'his heart is in the house of mirth,'

Eccles. vii. 4. We usually complain we want temper and we want matter ; but the truth is we want an heart. David saith, Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh ! how love I thy law ; it is my meditation all the day.' Delight-some objects will engross the thoughts. Therefore see if it be not a moral distemper.

(2.) Suppose it be a natural unfitness, yet while you have reason it is not total and universal, and therefore cannot excuse. We see in other duties, some have the gift of utterance, and have a great savouriness and readiness of expression for prayer ; others are more bound up and restrained ; but this can be no plea for them wholly to neglect prayer. Duty must be done as we are able ; God will hear the breathing, panting soul as well as the rolling tongue. So it is in meditation ; some are more for musing, and can better melt out their souls in devout retirements, others can show their love better in zealous actions and public engagements for the glory of Christ ; yet still, though there be a diversity of gifts, we are all bound to the same duties, and though we be fitter for some rather than others, yet none must be neglected in their order and course.

(3.) The rank and place that meditation hath among the duties. Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation, and meditation feedeth prayer ; we must hear that we be not erroneous, and meditate that we be not barren. These duties must always go hand in hand ; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer.

(1st.) To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful. We may hear and hear, but it is like putting a thing into a bag with holes : Hag. i. 6, 'He that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes ;' James i. 23, 24, 'He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass ; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' Bare hearing begets but transient thoughts, and they leave but a weak impression, which is rather like the glance of a sunbeam upon a wall ; there is a glaring for the present, but a man never discerneth the beauty, the lustre, and the order of the truths delivered till he cometh to meditate upon them ; then we come clearly to see into the truth, and how it concerneth us, and how it falleth upon our hearts. David saith, Ps. cxix. 99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation.' The preacher can but deliver general theorems, and draw them down to practical inferences ; by meditation we come to see more clearly and practically than he that preacheth. We see, in outward learning, they thrive best that meditate most ; knowledge floateth, till by deliberate thoughts it be compressed upon the affections.

(2d.) It is dangerous to meditate and not to hear because of errors. Man will soon impose a deceit upon himself by his own thoughts. Fanatic spirits that neglect hearing pretend to dreams and revelations. We have a sophister and an heretic in our own bosoms, 'which soon deceiveth without a stock and treasure of some knowledge ;' for men would be vain in their imaginations were not their thoughts corrected by an external light and instruction. Jude calleth those fanatic persons *ἐνυπνιαζόμενοι*, 'filthy dreamers,' Jude 8. All practical errors are men's natural imaginations gotten up into a valuable opinion.

(3d.) It is rashness to pray and not to meditate. What we take in by the word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer. These three duties must be so ordered that one may not jostle out the other. Men are barren, dry, and sapless in their prayers for want of exercising themselves in holy thoughts: Ps. xlv. 1, 'My heart is inditing a good matter;' and then it follows, 'I will speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.' The heart yieldeth matter to the tongue; the word signifieth, boileth and frieth; a word from *mincha*, their meat-offering; the oil and the flour was to be kneaded together, and then fried in a pan, and then offered to the Lord; implying we must not come with raw dough-baked offerings, till we have concocted and prepared them by mature deliberation. It is notable that often in scripture prayer is called by the name of meditation, because it is the product and issue of it; as Ps. v. 1, 'Give ear to my words, O Lord: consider my meditation. Implying that his prayer was but the expression of his deliberate and premeditated thoughts. So Ps. xix. 14, 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.' It is the vent of the thoughts.

2. Whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn consideration. I add this to distinguish it from occasional meditation, and those good thoughts that accidentally rush into our minds, and to note the care and intenseness of the soul in such an exercise: Prov. xviii. 1, 'Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom;' then is a man fit for these solemn and holy thoughts, and for intermeddling with all wise and divine matters, when he hath divorced himself from other cares, and is able to keep his understanding under a prudent confinement.

3. Of spiritual things. This noteth the object, and so I call matters that are of an useful consideration; as for instance, God, that we may fear him; sin, that we may abhor it; the works of God for the Creator's glory; any useful subject. So David limiteth it: Ps. xlix. 3, 'My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.' He meaneth of the state and end of man. Generally the object in the Old Testament is of the law.

4. For practical uses and inferences. This noteth the end. Meditation is not to puzzle the head with notions, but to better the heart. The proper use of this exercise is to set on those great practical heads of religion, to work the heart to a greater care of duty and detestation of sin. To a greater care of duty: Ps. cxix. 15, 'I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways;' and to a greater detestation and hatred of sin: Ps. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.'

SERMON II.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
GEN. XXIV. 63.

II. I AM now come to the necessity and profit of meditation, or motives to press to this duty. I shall urge such as will serve also for marks; for when it is well performed, you will find these effects wrought in you. Meditation is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace; it helpeth on the work of grace upon the understanding, affections, and life, for the understanding of the doctrine of godliness, for the provoking of godly affections, and for the heavenly life.

1. In point of understanding it is of great advantage to us in the entertainment of the doctrines of religion.

[1.] To give us a clearer and more distinct sight of them. A man seeth the meaning, scope, and order of all points of religion, when he cometh to meditate on them. Knowledge without meditation is but an hearsay knowledge; we talk after one another like parrots, and as the moon that shineth with another lustre without any light rooted in its own body: Rom. ii. 20, 'Which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law,' *μόρφῃσιν τῆς γνώσεως*, a map of knowledge; we have nothing but the lean apprehension of others. As the philosopher said, *τὰ μὲν λέγουσιν οἱ νεοί, ἀλλὰ οὐ πιστεύουσιν*, they repeat them by rote, without affection and belief; so we speak one after another by rote, but do not so distinctly discern the worth and excellency of christianity as when we come to meditate upon it: John iv. 42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' Most men's knowledge is but traditional; they never made an essay, and tasted the sweetness of Christ, or of their own thoughts. Oh! do but try; bare apprehensions of the report of Christ is but tradition, not religion. When we come to exercise our own thoughts thereon, then we see him ourselves; the sight is more clear when it is steady and fixed. To one that passeth by, to see men dancing and frisking seemeth lightness and madness, but when he cometh nearer, and heareth the music, and observeth that they keep time, and pace, and measure with it, he findeth art in that which he thought frenzy. The beauty and excellency of religion is not discerned by a transient glance; when we come to meditate, and so see what is our beloved above all beloveds, then we admire him. The christian religion is not to be taken up by chance, but by choice; not because we know no other, but because we know no better; then our affections to it are the more rational, the judgment having had a clearer sight and trial.

[2.] That we may the better retain them. When an apple is tossed to and fro in the hand, it smelleth of it when the apple is gone, as when civet hath been long kept in the box the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out. A constant light is a great friend to memory, and sermons meditated on are remembered long after they are delivered. We do not forget those friends whom we have entertained with any

solemnity. Solemn and serious thoughts leave a charge upon the memory.

[3.] That they may be always more ready and present with us. All sins do arise out of incogitancy or forgetfulness. As for instance, distrust: Heb. xii. 5, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children;' Luke xxiv. 6, 'He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee.' A temptation gets the start of holy thoughts. It were a mighty advantage to have truths always ready. Now this is the Spirit's office: John xiv. 26, 'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.' But now, for an outward help, there is no such thing as meditation: Prov. vi. 21, 22, 'Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck: when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee;' that is, shall be always present with thee. Continual meditation maketh religious thoughts actual and present.

2. It is a great advantage to the work of grace upon the affections. Ponderous thoughts are the bellows that kindle and inflame the affections; they blow up those latent sparkles of grace that are in the soul. Impure thoughts stain the heart, and convey a taint and filth to the soul: 2 Peter ii. 14, 'Having eyes full of adultery.' When the fancy is rolled upon unclean objects, lust is kindled. Lust, revenge, covetousness, they are all fed with thoughts; a wicked spirit distilleth sin into the quintessence of villany, the imaginations of the heart are evil. So suitably good thoughts leave a forcible impression upon the soul. The papists talk of St Francis and St Clara, that had the wounds of Christ impressed on them. It is true, in a spiritual way, deep thoughts leave the wounds and sorrows of Christ upon the heart, and do crucify us; it is true morally, as well as mystically: 'I am crucified with Christ,' Gal. ii. 20. Certainly you find this by experience, that when you know not things, you are not so thoroughly affected with them. Serious meditation hath this advantage, that it doth make the object present, and as it were sensible; therefore faith, which is a deep acting of the thoughts upon the promises, and upon glory to come, is called *ὑπόστασις*, 'the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1. It giveth the future blessedness a present subsistence in the soul, and therefore it must needs ravish it. It is a principle in nature, appetite followeth knowledge, and desire is answerable to that certain and clear judgment that we have of the worth, value, and dignity of the object. Now it is not enough that the judgment be once convinced, but that it stay upon the object, for things lose their virtue when we do not keep them in the eye of the soul. When the bird often leaveth her nest and is long absent, the eggs grow cold, and do not come to be quickened; so do our desires grow cold and dull, which otherwise by a constant meditation are hatched into some life. Instance in any affection. Hope and trust are ripened by constant thoughts of the grace, power, truth, goodness, and unchangeableness of God: 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.'

Presumption is an inconstant careless apprehension, and therefore soon overborne: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;' that is, that seriously consider it; for the Hebrew word is used for *consider*; they that know what a God thou art, how merciful, true, and powerful thou art, they will trust thee. So for fear, so far as it is sanctified it is fed by a consideration of the dreadfulfulness of Gods wrath and displeasure: Ps. xc. 11, 'Who knows the power of thine anger? according to thy fear, so is thy wrath;' that is, who doth seriously consider of it? According to those awful apprehensions that they form within themselves doth God's wrath more or less move them. So for desire, either of Christ or of heaven. Of Christ; a serious consideration of the excellency of Christ is that which ravisheth the heart. The spouse formeth a description of Christ, and then she saith he is all desires: Cant. v. 16, 'His mouth is more sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely.' Enough to ravish all our desires. The value of things lieth hid when we do but slightly and superficially look upon them, but when we meditate of them, they are double to that which is seen at the first blush: Job xi. 6, 'And that he would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is.' In natural things serious thoughts are necessary, much more in spiritual, because the mind, by long use, having been inured to earthly objects and profits, had need to be much raised. We see that we do insensibly receive taint from those objects with which we do converse, and therefore we had need to be often and serious in meditating of the excellences of Christ, that by a spiritual art he may be as usual an object to us as the world. So for heaven, when we do not hold our hearts to the consideration of the glory of it, it doth not work upon us. Moses, Heb. xi. 26, 'Had respect to the recompense of the reward,' ἐπέβλεπε; he had an eye to it. The word noteth a serious and intent consideration; we should again and again consider it, and be sending our thoughts as spies into the land of promise, to bring us reports and tidings of it, as love between men is maintained by constant visits and letters. So for sorrow for sin past: Ps. li. 3, 'My sin is ever before me;' and Jer. xxxi. 19, 'Surely after that I was turned I repented; and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' When we come deeply to consider our errors, and the unkindness of them, that begetteth a sad sense. So for hatred and displicency against sin. Evil affections are nourished by thoughts, and kept up in life and strength, for thoughts are *pabulum anime*, the food of the soul: Rom. vii. 13, 'Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.' The sinfulness of sin appears by considering the purity of the law, the majesty of God, and the kindness of Christ. So for joy and delight; the soul is feasted by meditation, it turneth the promises into marrow: Ps. lxxiii. 5, 6, 'My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches.' Hereby we discern their relish and savour: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh! taste and see that the Lord is good;' the thoughts, taste, and the relish is left on the affections.

3. It is an advantage to the fruits of grace in the life; it maketh the heavenly life more easy, more sweet, more orderly and prudent.

[1.] More easy, because it calleth in all the rational help that may be. Reason, which otherwise would serve the senses, and be enslaved to appetite and worldly desire, now is employed in the highest and purest use; and therefore when reason is gained, which is the leading faculty, the work cometh on more easily. Meditation putteth reason in authority, and rescueth it from being prostituted to sense: 2 Cor. x. 5, 'Casting down imaginations,' λογισμοὺς, reasonings, 'and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' And then for sense, it maketh our eyes to furnish us with matter: Job xii. 7, 8, 'But ask now the beasts, and they will teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.' Every element giveth in an help; he that doth not want an heart cannot want an object; the air, the sea, the earth giveth fuel for wisdom and spiritual advantage. But for want of consideration a man is worse than the beasts: Prov. vi. 6, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.'

[2.] More sweet. It bringeth the heavenly life into more liking with us. Duty to worldly men is irksome and unsavoury, because they lose the sweetness and blessedness of communion with God: Ps. xxvi. 3, 'For thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes; I have walked in thy truth.' This constraineth and enforceth to holiness, and gives encouragement to it. Others only attempt this work, but do not consider the fruit of it.

[3.] More orderly and prudent. Others do good duties by chance: Phil. iv. 8, 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things.'

III. That which I am now to do is to give you the rules to guide you in this weighty affair of the christian life. There are rules to be observed to fit the soul, but those I shall handle under the term of helps. I handle such now as must guide the soul.

1. Whatever you meditate upon must be drawn down to application: Job v. 27, 'Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' In meditation our aim and design is to promote the good of our souls. The heathen Emperor Antoninus had observations, which he called τὰ εἰς ἑμavτόν, 'things for myself;' that is the proper end of this exercise, things for ourselves. In conference we aim at the good of others, but the end of meditation is to fall directly upon our own souls. All the while we stay in generals we do but bend the bow; when we come to application we let fly the arrow, and we hit the mark when we come to return upon our own souls. Now this application must be partly by way of trial, partly by way of charge.

[1.] The first reflection upon ourselves must be by way of trial. This should always be the close of all, How is it with thee, oh! my soul? or, Is not this my state? When the apostle had taken a view

of the doctrine of justification, he shutteth up all with a practical return upon his own heart: Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' How am I concerned in this truth? So Nazianzen in his 41st Oration saith his custom was ἀποχωρῆσαι Θεῷ τὸ μικρὸν, to go aside to converse with God, but always in the course of the duty he did ἐαυτὸν ἐπισιμέψασθαι, search himself.

[2.] By way of charge and command. You should charge yourselves to serve God with greater care. Meditation is as it were the heat of the cause, and after the debate you should give sentence, and issue forth a practical decree, as David; now I see 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God,' Ps. lxxiii. 28. When he had been meditating of the providence of God in punishing the wicked, now, O my soul! thou seest what is best for thee, even to keep close to God. So in two psalms, when he had been meditating of the mercy and power of God, he layeth a charge upon his soul to bless God for his mercy: Ps. ciii. 22, 'Bless the Lord all his works, in all places of his dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul!' Of his power: Ps. civ. 35, 'Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more; bless thou the Lord, O my soul! praise ye the Lord.'

2. Do not pry further than God hath revealed; your thoughts must be still bounded by the word. There is no duty that a fanatic brain is more apt to abuse than meditation. When men are once able to raise their thoughts, they soar too high, and being puffed up with their fleshly mind, intrude themselves into things that they have not seen, Col. ii. 18. They are dazzled with ungrounded subtleties, and so, like a lark that have flown high, of a sudden fall down again. David saith, Ps. cxxxi. 1, 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things to high for me.' In spiritual exercises you must stint your thoughts with what is revealed; μὴ ὑ περφρονεῖν παρ ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν, Rom. xii. 3, 'Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith;' that is, as God hath revealed and dispensed the measure of faith to you. To pry into the mysteries of the divine decrees were to disturb affection, not to raise it; nice disputes feed curiosity, not religion. Again, regard must be had not only to the word, but to your own abilities. Those that soar too high fall low enough ere they have done. Consider what is fit for your pitch and size. Again, do not leave bread and wine and gnaw upon a stone, or leave practical matters for intricacy of dispute.

3. When you meditate of God you must do it with great care and reverence; his perfections are matter rather of admiration than inquiry. Some dispute whether it be best to meditate of God's essence or no. Certainly as it is discovered to us in his attributes it is very comfortable and useful: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord.' And though you should get as large thoughts as possibly you can of his majesty and power, yet you must not pry too curiously into his nature, lest you be oppressed by his glory. The mysteries of the trinity are matters of belief rather than debate, we may well cry out, ὦ βάθος, Oh, the depth! It is enough to know that it is so, we cannot search how. It is said, 1 Tim. vi. 16,

‘Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see;’ and Ps. xviii. 11, ‘He hath made darkness his secret place, his pavilion round about him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies.’ God is said to dwell in light to show his majesty, and to dwell in darkness to show his incomprehensibleness. Do not entangle yourselves while you go about to raise your zeal; the full knowledge of these things is our portion in heaven.

4. In meditating on common things, keep in mind a spiritual purpose. God hath endowed man with a faculty to discourse, and employ his mind on earthly objects to spiritual purposes: Eccles. iii. 11, ‘He hath set the world in their heart.’ *Mundum tradidit disputationi eorum*; the meaning is, he hath endowed him with natural light to contemplate on his handiwork. The mind is soon apt to grow common and vain, and therefore here you have need of more care and watchfulness: Ps. viii. 34, ‘When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?’ Basil calleth them *διδασκαλεῖον καὶ παιδευτήριον ψύχων*, a school to teach us not knowledge but religion: Ps. xix. 1, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.’ Philosophers study the creatures to find out their natural causes, we to find out arguments of worship and religion.

5. Take heed of creating a snare to your souls. Some sins are catching, like fire in straw, and we cannot think of them without infection and temptation; the very thoughts may beget a sudden delight and tickling, which may pass through us like lightning, and set us all on fire: Ezek. xxiii. 19, ‘She multiplied her whoredoms in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.’ Though the prophet speaketh of spiritual fornication, yet there is a plain allusion to outward; it is an allusion to an unchaste woman, who feedeth a new fire by remembering her vile lusts. Some temptations cannot be supposed without sin; it is less dangerous to suppose the temptation of Peter than the temptation of Joseph, of Peter that was tempted to deny his master, than of Joseph who was tempted to folly with his mistress. This direction is not unnecessary; you know not how apt a carnal heart and busy devil may be to taint the best duties, and how soon an innocent thought may degenerate into an unclean glance. The apostle would have some sins not named among the saints: Eph. v. 3, ‘But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.’

6. Meditate of those things especially which you have most need of. There is the greatest obligation upon the heart. The matter is not arbitrary; there you will find most help, and there the benefit will be most sensible. Seasonable thoughts have the greatest influence. The servants of God have sometimes meditated on his power, sometimes on his mercy, sometimes on his providence, according as their affairs and temptations call for it: Ps. lvi. 3, ‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.’ In a time of fear he would think of arguments of trust.

7. Whatever you meditate upon, take heed of slightness. Transient thoughts leave no impression. See that you meditate but of one thing at once. *Hoc age*, mind the work you are about, is a good rule in meditation as well as prayer, the thoughts should be under a restraint and wise confinement. A skipping mind, that wandereth from one meditation to another, seldom profiteth. In meditation be not like the dogs of Nile, that snatch here and there, or like the bee, that passeth from flower to flower. A constant fixed light worketh most. The apostle speaketh of apostates that they have flashy tastes: Heb. vi. 4, 5, 'They were once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.' They had vanishing and fleeting motions: James i. 25, 'He that looketh into the law of liberty,' *ὁ δὲ παρακύνῃας*, he that boweth down to take a deliberate view; it is a metaphor taken from them that stoop down, and bend their bodies toward a thing that they may narrowly pry into it. The same word is used to imply that narrow search which the angels use to find out the mysteries of salvation by: 1 Peter i. 12, 'Which things the angels desire *παρακύνειν*, to look into,' an allusion to the cherubim, whose faces bowed down towards the ark, as desirous to see the mysteries therein contained. There must be a deep sight and serious inculcation: Luke ii. 19, 'But Mary kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart,' *συμβalλουσα*; she examined, compared them, traversed them to and fro in her mind, which is afterwards expressed, ver. 51, 'She kept all these sayings in her heart.' There is a folly in man, when once we apprehend a thing; curiosity being satisfied, we begin to loath it, the first apprehension having as it were deflowered it, but at last they lose their power and virtue. When digestion is precipitated there is no nourishment, and when the meditation is not deep and ponderous we have no comfort, no lively perception and feeling of it in our hearts. A glance doth not discover the worth of anything; he that doth but cast his eye upon a piece of embroidery doth not discover the art of it.

8. Come not off from holy thoughts till you find profit by them, either sweet tastes and relishes of the love of God, or high affections kindled towards God, or strong resolutions begotten in yourselves. Usually God droppeth in sweetness into the hearts of his people, as all those ecstasies of love in the Canticles were occasioned by meditation. But we cannot always expect raptures and high elevations; it is some fruit if it maketh you fall to prayer and holy complaints.

9. Be thankful to God when he blesteth you in meditation, or else you will find difficulty in the next. Christians often forget to return God the glory: Cant. i. 4, 'Draw me, we will run after thee, the king hath brought me into his chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy loves more than wine; the upright love thee.' That which goeth up in vapours cometh down in showers. So the psalmist, Ps. lxvii. 5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee; then shall the earth yield her increase, and God even our own God, shall bless us.' There is a mutual access and recess between the rivers and the sea, so there is between blessings and praises. In this duty God is jealous lest we should give the honour to ourselves, because there is so much work of our own thoughts: Ps. lxiii. 4, 5,

'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee: thus will I bless thee while I live, I will lift up my hands in thy name.' Not only in my necessity, but for ever, for such sweet experiences.

10. Do not bridle up the free spirit by the rules of method. That which God calleth for is religion, not logic. When christians confine themselves to such rules and prescriptions, they straiten themselves, and thoughts come from them like water out of a still, not like water out of a fountain. Voluntary and free meditations are most smart and pregnant. In all arbitrary directions, that make only for the convenience of the duty, you must remember we come to you like Paul to the Corinthians: 1 Cor. vii. 12, 'To the rest speak I, not the Lord.' We do not prescribe, but advise.

11. Your success in the duty is not to be measured by the multitude and subtlety of the thoughts, but the sincerity of them. Christians puzzle and disquiet themselves because they look too much at gifts; you should covet the best gifts, but not inordinately: Ps. li. 6, 'Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.' In prayer God looketh more to the impulses of zeal than the flowers of rhetoric; so in meditation, if we are less subtle, it is no matter, so we be more devout.

12. You must begin and end all with prayer. Duties are subservient one to another. In the beginning you must pray for a blessing on the duty, and in the end commend your souls and resolutions to God. There is no hope in your own promises, but God's. They were in an high pang of zeal when they offered so freely to the service of the house of God; but David prays, 2 Chron. xxix. 28, 'O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imaginations of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their hearts to seek thee.' Our motions are fleeting and vanishing; God must preserve in us these resolutions of consecrating ourselves and all that is ours to him.

SERMON III.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
GEN. xxiv. 63.

My work now is to handle the lets or hindrances of meditation, together with the helps and means that may quicken you to the performance of it. The lets may be sooner discovered than remedied, as the nature of many diseases is better known than the cures, and therefore they are called *opprobria medicorum*, the disgrace of the physician's skill; so these remain as marks and memorials of the fall. Entire and uninterrupted visions are the privileges of heaven; we must be contented with our broken and imperfect measures; it is enough that we have 'doves' eyes,' Cant. iv. 1; that we can peck and look upward, and enjoy some temperate glances on the glory of our hopes, though we be not transported with the ravishments of a constant

and steady vision. We cannot expect to be absolute ; we shall still have cause to be humbled ; it is enough if we can be encouraged against despair ; for many find themselves so unfit that they have not hopes enough to attempt the duty. To these I shall speak chiefly in this discourse. I had thought to have handled the lets severally, and then the helps ; but I think it would be better to suit each discouragement with its proper helps.

The lets and hindrances are of several sorts, some common to this with other duties, and others more peculiar to the duty of meditation.

First, I begin with the first sort, such hindrances as are common to other duties, and they are four—sloth, love of pleasure, a guilty conscience, and an unwieldy mind.

1. There is a spiritual slothfulness. Men lie upon the bed of ease, and are loath in good earnest to apply themselves to what is painful and difficult. If grace would drop to them out of the clouds, or God would be contented with some faint lazy wishes, or some cold and yawning expressions of a drowsy devotion, they would be religious ; but where duties must cost labour and self-denial, and put them to pains, men withdraw the shoulder, and hang off. Therefore Solomon saith, Prov. xxi. 25, ‘The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour.’ They would fain have grace, and perform what God requires, but are loath to take pains. Now, as this is a prejudice against all other duties, so especially against the duty of meditation ; partly because of all duties it is most difficult and tedious to the flesh ; it is a duty lying within the soul ; we cannot so easily command our own thoughts. Now inward duties are the most difficult, because we cannot always exercise a dominion over our own spirits. Partly because it is a private duty, to which God alone is conscious. In public duties secular interests and ends have a great constraint, and therefore we excite the heart to be more intent and serious. We see byends make men deny themselves, but where there is not this to prompt them, they either omit the work, or turn it into a slight and idle practice.

How shall we do to shake off this spiritual sloth ? I answer—

[1.] You must consider that a lazy spirit is most unfit for christianity. The whole christian life is carried on with much labour and diligence. You were as good never look after Christ and heaven as refuse labour. There is nothing required in the whole compass of religion but what will cost you a great deal of pains. Faith is a work : John vi. 29, ‘That is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.’ It is not a barren idle speculation, nor a naked apprehension, but a matter of difficulty and diligence to bring Christ and the soul together, and to lodge the soul in the bosom of Christ. Love is labour : Heb. vi. 10, ‘God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love.’ It is not a naked profession, but there is labour in it ; take it either for love to God or men. For love to God, that is not a fellow-like familiarity, but a laying out ourselves in his service ; or for love to men, that doth not consist in a few good words. Debts are not paid with a noise of money ; you do not satisfy the commandment by saying, ‘Depart in peace, be ye warmed, be ye filled, if you give them not those things which are needful to the body,’ James ii. 16. So for

obedience : it is expressed by a constant course of work and labour : 1 Cor. xv. 58, ' Be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' Religion is a constant exercise ; there are no loiterers in heaven. God's work must not be followed with a faint wish and a slack hand. Men mistake religion if they think it a broad and easy way where men may live at large. No ; the gate is narrow and the path is strait, and few there be that find it ; it is a work, not a sport and play ; and men had as good lay all thoughts of God and Christ aside as to resolve upon an easy course, and flatter themselves with an expectation that they shall go to heaven with a lazy wish, and fancy such a short cut and passage to heaven as will cost no pains.

[2.] It is better to take pains than to suffer pains, and to be bound with the cords of duty than with the chains of darkness. The bounds of duty are not gyves, but ornaments, for duty is the greatest freedom : Ps. cxix. 45, ' I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.' You will never be more free than when you once make experience of God's service. How sad is it to see men prejudiced against such pains as yield freedom and comfort for the present and glory for the future, and take pains for that for which they shall suffer eternal pains ! Isa. v. 18, ' Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with cart ropes.' They moil and toil in the work of Satan as a horse in a mill, and labour for their own destruction. Consider the devil's work is drudgery and his reward is death ; yet such is the wretchedness of man, that he accounteth nothing toilsome but God's work, and nothing pleasant but the accomplishment of his own lusts, to be lust's vassal and pride's slave, and to be at the command of every covetous and unclean desire. How do men toil in the world, go to bed late, rise early, eat the bread of sorrows, exhaust and waste their strength and spirits, and yet there is sin in the work, and hell in the wages ! Oh ! consider, if it seem difficult, which is better, to labour for a season, or suffer for ever ? which is the end of them that live in the constant neglect of a known duty.

[3.] There is nothing so hard in God's service but he hath manifested love enough to sweeten it. We begrudge a few thoughts of God, and God had thoughts of us before all worlds : Ps. xl. 5, ' Many, O Lord my God, are the wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward ; they cannot be reckoned up in number unto thee : if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered ;' Ps. cix. 13, ' How precious also are thy thoughts unto me O God ! How great is the sum of them !' Who can tell what a condescension it was for infiniteness to think of poor worms, and that he should before all worlds plot and design our salvation ? And when the plot came out, there was a great deal of love to sweeten duty. The Lord Jesus Christ thought no danger too great, no suffering or extremity too hard, no work too difficult for our sakes, what a mercy is this ! God hath not only required obedience, but discovered a love that may sweeten the difficulties of it.

[4.] There is no difficulty in religion wholly insuperable and too hard for an active and industrious spirit. Those that follow on after God do at length find him to their comfort. A faint pursuit is the

cause of discouragement. When a flint doth not strike fire at the first, we strike again : Prov. x. 4, 'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand, but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.' It is a rule in grace as well as nature ; let us therefore follow on till we have overcome the difficulty that is before us.

[5.] A lazy backward heart must be urged forward with the greater importunity. When David was shy of God's presence, he lays a command upon himself : Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ;' he maketh reason to issue out a decree and positive conclusion. So Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.' So by just analogy we may gather that the soul should in this case determine, I will go and try, and see what may be done ; I will keep off from God no longer, but will go to him.

2. Another let and hindrance is love of pleasures. Men that would pass their time in mirth are unwilling to be so solemn and serious. When children's minds are set to play, it is irksome to hear of school or of their books ; so when the heart is set for pleasure, it is a hard matter to bring the soul to religious performances.

How shall we do to wean the soul from pleasures ?

[1.] Consider to love pleasure is to gratify the beast in us rather than the angel. Man is in part an angel and in part a beast ; he hath a nature common to both. Now when men study altogether to gratify their sensual part, it is to turn men into beasts. To serve our lowest faculty, and to enjoy pleasures without remorse, is the happiness of the beasts ; to eat, and drink, and sleep, and sport is but to do as the beasts do ; a man's delight should be in the pure and free exercises of reason. If men would exercise themselves herein, they would find the greatest delectation would be in the contemplation and view of truth : Ps. xix. 8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.' That taste which hypocrites have of the good word of God, Heb. vi. 5, is merely such as scholars have in the height of speculation and study, because the gospel is such an excellent contrivance, and a sublime satisfying truth. *Nulla major voluptas quam fastidium voluptatis* ; there is no greater pleasure than a disdain of sensual pleasures.

[2.] Consider the sweetness of religious exercises is far better than that of carnal pleasures, as that heat is more manly that is gotten by exercise than by hovering over the fire. It is hard, I confess, to abjure accustomed delights ; pleasantness is connatural to us ; but we should consider that by communion with God in spiritual exercises delight is not abrogated but preferred, and advanced to a more noble becoming object ; it is taken out of Egypt that it may grow in Canaan, transplanted out of a fen into a paradise, that it may thrive in a better soil ; it is less dreggy, but more masculine and grave : Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet ; I will be glad in the Lord ;' Eph. v. 4, 'Neither filthiness nor foolish talking nor jesting which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' We keep the affection, but change the object. The comforts of christianity are expressed by terms proper to the delights of the senses, to teach us this excellent art, to keep the affection and change the object, and by an holy sleight and wile to cozen the soul into better joys. Here delight is most pure and

more free, no excess is vicious. *Castæ delicie mee sunt scripture tue*; thy scriptures are my chaste delights. The pleasures of the world are but sugared baits; a man may soon lose himself; but here by trial you will find the same sweetness with less hazard and danger.

[3.] We may make choice of matter more pleasant to allure the soul. All the objects of meditation are not dark and gloomy; there are some things pleasing to nature—the variety of providences, the beauty of the creation, the excellent contrivance of the gospel. All objects are not mournful, and in case of such a temptation we may allure the soul; and when we are not so fit for the severe exercises of the closet, we may, as Isaac, go out into the fields to meditate, and heighten fancy and imagination by objects more pleasant.

3. The next general hindrance is a guilty conscience. When the soul is under the burden of guilt, we are loath to be serious and alone, lest the mind should fall on itself; of all things we then desire to flee the company of ourselves, and therefore meditation is an unpleasant duty. We cannot think of God but as of a judge, nor of a world to come but as of our own ruin. A guilty conscience would fain obliterate the thoughts of God; as the guilty heathens, Rom. i. 28, ‘They did not like to retain God in their knowledge;’ that is actual, sound, distinct thoughts of God. It is said, James ii. 19, ‘The devils believe and tremble.’ Thoughts of God impressed the more horror on them, therefore they cried out, Mat. viii. 29, ‘Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?’ So guilty men are under these horrors, ‘They are all their lifetime subject to bondage,’ Heb. ii. 15; which, though it be not always felt, is soon awakened: Job xxi. 14, ‘Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.’

What shall we do to remedy this.

[1.] Get your conscience cleansed by the hearty application of the blood of Christ. A galled conscience is much discomposed and unsettled, and unfit for such an exercise; musing requireth a quiet sedate mind.

[2.] There are matters comfortable that may be of excellent relief to the spirit. When the soul is sadly humbled, and bondage is indeed revived, there is an hope set before us to which we may fly for refuge: Heb. vi. 18, ‘That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.’ The wounded soul may run up to the mountains of myrrh and frankincense. So David, Ps. xciv. 19, ‘In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.’

4. Another let and hindrance is unwieldiness of spirit to spiritual and heavenly duties. The heart is many times burdened and oppressed, and sunk down with its own burden and weight, that it cannot be lifted up to any holy duties, and so is unfit for any exercise of religion. This our Saviour bids his disciples have a care of: Luke xxi. 34, ‘Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life.’ Pleasures and cares do as it were hang a weight upon the soul that it cannot mount up to God in heavenly exercises. This is expressed by a fat heart: Isa. vi. 10.

‘Make the heart of this people fat;’ that is, spiritually dull, as it is observed of the ass, which is the simplest of all creatures, it hath the fattest heart. There is a spiritual dulness and listlessness that is apt to seize upon us.

What shall we do to help this?

[1.] Learn a holy moderation and sobriety in outward businesses and pleasures. As the apostle says of prayer, Eph. vi. 18, ‘Watching thereunto;’ the same rule holds good in meditation. Watch that you may always keep the soul in a fitness for the duty; order your affairs with great wisdom, that you may not jostle out so necessary a duty. When a man is encumbered with business, there is no room left for such an exercise; if he let loose his heart disorderly all the day, he will find this spiritual dulness to seize on him.

[2.] Keep the body in a fit frame, that it may not be a clog to the soul, but a dexterous instrument. There is a sanctification of the body: 1 Thes. v. 23, ‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ And the apostle commands, 1 Thes. iv. 4, ‘That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.’ Men emasculate and weaken their strength and spirits, and so the body loseth its fitness.

Secondly, There are hindrances that are peculiar to the duty of meditation. I shall name but two—barrenness of thoughts and inconstancy.

1. Leanness and barrenness of thoughts. When we go about to meditate, we have no matter whereupon to bestow our time and thoughts, and so christians are much discouraged. This is opposite to that which the scripture calls the abundance of the heart: Mat. xii. 34, ‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;’ that is, when there is a holy treasure in the soul.

Now to remedy this—

[1.] You must not give way to it, but try and use constant exercise. When we give way to such indispositions, they prove an utter bondage. Voluntary neglects are punished with penal hardness, and evils grow upon us; as to lie in the dirt will make us more filthy, and by little and little men are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. The apostle speaks of them that have *αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα*: Heb. v. 14, ‘Who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.’ All habits are increased by frequent acts, long disuse makes the duty uncouth. Wells which are at first a puddle are the sweeter for draining. If we are under indisposition, should we not strive to come out of it? The more we work, the more vigorous and free is the soul for the work of God.

[2.] Get a good stock of sanctified knowledge. Let there be a treasure in your hearts: Mat. xiii. 52, ‘Every scribe which is instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.’ Those that buy by the penny will be sometimes in want: Prov. vi. 21, 22, ‘Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee.’ This is the way to make

truths present and ready in the thoughts; when we have laid them up, we can the better lay them out.

[3.] When the heart is barren, think of your own sins and corruptions, and the experiences of God to your own souls. If we did not want an heart we could never want matter, did we but consult with our own experiences: Ps. xl. 12, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore mine heart faileth me.' And if nothing else will come to hand, meditate upon your present unfitness for any holy duty.

[4.] You may season and affect your mind before meditation with some part of God's word. Reading is a good preparative, and when we have taken in food, we may exercise our depastion and digestion upon it.

2. A loose garish spirit, that is apt to skip and wander from thought to thought. There is a madness in man; his thoughts are light and feathery, tossed to and fro, and like the loose wards in a lock, only kept up whilst we are turning the key. This doth much discourage christians, that they cannot keep up their affections and command their thoughts.

How shall we help and remedy this?

[1.] When you go to meditate, you should exercise a command and restraint upon yourselves. This is expressed in scripture by trussing up the loins of your minds: Luke xii. 30, 'Let your loins be girded about;' an allusion to their hanging garments, that they trussed up when they went about any work, that they may be compact and succinct. Lay a command upon yourselves: Zeph. ii. 1, 'Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired!'

[2.] Pray and call in the help of God's Holy Spirit: Ps. lxxxvi. 11, 'Unite my heart to fear thy name.' Lord, make my heart one. He that could stay the sun can stay the fleeting of your thoughts.

[3.] Dry up these swimming toys and fancies with the flame of heavenly love. Love unites the heart, and where we have a pleasure, there we can stay: Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.'

[4.] Let the course of your lives be grave and serious. The mind is according to the course of the life. You flatter yourselves when you think you are able to command spiritual thoughts on a sudden, when you have suffered your thoughts to rove and wander: Prov. xvii. 24, 'Wisdom is before him that hath understanding, but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth;' here and there and everywhere.

[5.] Watch against the first diversion; how plausible soever it be, look upon it as an intruding that breaks the rank. The devil injects good thoughts sometimes that he might divert your other thoughts. Charge your thoughts that they may not disturb your meditation: Cant. iii. 5, 'I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my love till he please.'

[6.] When you come to meditate in God's presence, do not bring the world with you; purge yourselves of all carnal affections: Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 'Their heart goeth after their covetousness.' Always consider this, the prevailing lust will engross the thoughts. To a distracted

mind no place is a solitude; the very closet is a market-place. Therefore before meditation we should purge our hearts of worldly affections.

SERMON IV.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
GEN. xxiv. 63.

I SHALL not wholly divert from the subject in hand, though I shall a little interrupt the method of it. My purpose is now to speak of that meditation that is proper to the sacrament.

The main part of that worship is dispatched in thoughts. Here we come to put reason to the highest and most sublime use, to be an instrument and servant to faith and love.

But now the thoughts proper to the Lord's supper are many. There are an union of mysteries, yea, so many, that they are a burden to some christians, and a snare to those that are most scrupulous. It will be necessary therefore to give you some directions how you may guide yourselves in this duty for your best advantage. It is a matter of great profit to be wise and skilful in duties. Many that know the general nature of them know not how to manage them. David saith, Ps. cxix. 27, 'Make me to understand the way of thy precepts, so shall I talk of thy wondrous works;' intimating that then we perform duties with most success when we go about them with most wisdom and understanding; and when we are skilled in the way of God's precepts, we shall understand those marvellous acts of grace which he vouchsafeth to his people.

Now it is good that every one according to his talent should help one another's joy, and therefore I shall now speak a little to this purpose, and the rather because it will much conduce to the opening of the doctrine of meditation in the general. My method shall be this—(1.) I will show the usual defects of christians in this service, with their necessary remedies; (2.) I shall handle some cases.

First, The usual defects and faults of people in this duty, I mean so far as they concern meditation, and they are four—barrenness, stupidity, roving of thoughts, and a lazy formality.

1. Barrenness. This is a great trouble to christians, when their understandings are unfruitful, and they cannot enlarge themselves in pertinent and necessary thoughts.

Now how shall we do to get our hearts to be fruitful in holy thoughts?

[1.] There must be a solemn preparation for this service. It is good to breathe ourselves in some religious exercises beforehand, that we may run the more freely without fainting. Spiritual dispositions do not come on us of a sudden; christians are deceived that look for rapt and sudden motions; there must be a time to put off the shoes off our feet when we come upon holy ground to converse with God in so sweet a service; we must lay aside the distractions of the world,

and not come reeking from the world into God's presence. There must be a time to raise the soul into a zealous height and ardour; there must be a blowing of the fire, for here you come to flame, your thoughts are to flame out in great and raised ascents: Cant. i. 12, 'While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.' Wood doth not blaze and flame as soon as it is laid on.

[2.] Those solemn and preparative thoughts are chiefly to be spent in these two things—the nature of the supper, and the love of Christ in the institution of it.

(1.) The nature of the supper. You are to consider the great things that are offered to you, and the great blessings and benefits which God cometh to represent, exhibit, and seal up to your souls: Mat. xi. 7, 'What went ye out into the wilderness for to see?' Christ examineth the grounds of their resort and concourse to him. It is good to consider what we are about, and the dainties of the banquet we are invited to, what assurance the outward signs are to give you, what communion we have with Christ and his graces. We are barren, because we do not consider our work, and the nature and importance of it.

(2.) The love of Christ in the institution of it. (1.) The time when it was instituted: 1 Cor. xi. 23, 'The Lord Jesus Christ the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread.' The Lord Jesus Christ had thoughts of the greatest good to man when man was executing the greatest spite and malice against him. And the rather because it is an act of mercy that Christ frequently useth to surprise sinners in the midst of their wickedness. When Saul was breathing out threatenings against the disciples, God had a design of love to him, and smites him from his horse. Some are smitten with conviction in the height of provocations. We read in ecclesiastical story of a young man that came to stab St John who was converted by him; so many come to jeer and catch at a sermon, and have been converted by it. (2.) The rights which he instituted, appointing bread and wine, symbols of pleasure and delight. As a physician conveys health to us in a golden pill, so doth Christ convey spiritual nourishment to us by those elements which we take pleasure in. The outward observance is comfortable. God doth not require us to lance ourselves, and to exercise the body with whips and cords; the rites are not bloody, as in circumcision, but bread and wine. And yet this is nothing to the inward sweetness, meat and drink which the world knows not of: John iv. 32, 'I have meat to eat which ye know not of.'

(3.) The advantage and relief that faith has from these things of sense. God speaketh to you now, not by words, but things. He doth as it were embody religion, and represent it to the senses: Gal. iii. 1, 'O foolish Galatians! who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you?' that is, in the word or sacraments; here God doth as it were hold forth Christ dying before your eyes. It is a pleasure to see things by picture, though we know the person; so though we have an image of Christ in the word, and may know his person there, yet it is a great relief to us to see Christ in the supper by

these outward symbols, where sense may teach faith what strength of grace and what sweetness of comfort to expect from Christ. These thoughts through the blessing of God will raise the soul into a frame of religion, that when you come to this ordinance you will not be so dry and barren.

2. Wandering when the heart is prepared and set towards God, how shall we do to keep it from roving, and prevent those excursions which are apt to carry away the heart.

[1.] Get an awe and dread of God. Labour to have the deepest apprehensions of the presence of God as possibly may be. Strong affections, especially fear, lock up the mind, and do not suffer it to flit abroad. Now fear is not unseasonable to this duty, but rather proper, because of the excellent mysteries by which God condescendeth and approacheth us. Chrysostom calls it *terribilis mystica mensa*, the dreadful mysterious table, and therefore now our apprehensions should be most awful. When Jacob had a sight of God, says he, Gen. xxviii. 17, 'How dreadful is this place!' And the psalmist saith, Ps. lxxviii. 35, 'O God! thou art terrible out of thy holy places.' Mixed affections do best in the sweetest worship: Ps. ii. 11, 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling;' Hosea iii. 5, 'They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.' Here we are to have distinct thoughts of his holiness and goodness, and therefore we should fear before him, lest we forget ourselves to be poor guilty creatures; and fear confineth the soul, and will not suffer it to run abroad.

[2.] Chide the heart for your vain excursions. Christians might have more command over their hearts if they would but hold the reins a little straiter, and check their souls; they are not so sadly sensible of the idle roving of the brain, which do not so directly carry them after the evil, though they make them to neglect the good. Take up yourselves, as David doth about his lumpishness: Ps. xlii. 5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?' Did I come hither to think of anything but Christ and heaven? Did I come to think of news, vanity, business, and lust? My work is to discern the Lord's body, not to think of worldly toys. Is this to remember and fruitfully to insist upon his death? Look, as Christ did chide his disciples, Mat. xxvi. 40, 'What! could ye not watch with me one hour?' so chide your heart. Cannot I keep my heart free for God a little while? In heaven duty will be my constant work, and if my heart wander now, how shall I be able to hold it for ever? In the supper God ties my soul by outward rites; lest my eyes should carry away my heart, God would exercise my eyes. Certainly if you would chide your souls the heart would not steal so many glances. But usually our hearts do not steal away; we dismiss them, and let them go. God gave reason a command of your thoughts at first, and we might exercise it more than we do.

3. Stupidness. Many times the soul is surprised with deadness and amazement; it neither actually thinks of evil nor of good, but is at a dead pause and stay. For this I shall urge a double help.

[1.] By earnest ejaculations call in the help of the Spirit: Cant. iv. 16, 'Awake, O north-wind, and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.' Desire God to breathe

upon the soul with a fresh gale and excitement ; that he would take a coal from his own altar, that the perfume might burn bright. Censers must not be kindled with strange fire. Oh ! raise and quicken this dead soul ! Remember 'the first Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit,' 1 Cor. xv. 45.

[2.] Call upon your own hearts. It is a mistake of christians to think they are only to call upon God ; you are also to call upon yourselves, and to deal with your own souls by way of quickening : Ps. lvii. 8, 'Awake up, my glory ; awake, psaltery and harp : I myself will awake early.' Charge your souls, awake to the consideration of heavenly mysteries. Speak to your own hearts, as David lays a charge upon himself : Ps. ciii. 1, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul ; and all that is within me bless his holy name.' The children of God are brought in speaking to themselves, Oh ! my drowsy, blockish heart ! how coldly dost thou think of Christ ! This dead heart will not become the service of the living God.

4. A lazy formality. Either we cannot get the soul to this worship, or we perform it slightly. We content ourselves with a few careless glances, and lazy barren thoughts. To remedy this, consider, in so sweet a duty God doth not only require affection, but height of affection, an holy ardour, earnestness and raisedness of spirit : Cant. iv. 6, 'Until the day break and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense ;' an allusion to the censers used in the Levitical worship. God requires such thoughts as will comfort, revive, and quicken our souls. Such thoughts as end in affection. Leave not off till you can say as the spouse, Cant. ii. 5, 'Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love.' Do not leave meditating of Christ till you can bring your souls to a holy ravishment, and your hearts are wounded with impatient desires after communion with Christ. No thoughts will work but those that are serious.

Secondly, I will propound some cases, which shall not only concern the duty of the Lord's supper, but some of them the duty of meditation in general.

Case 1. How can we do, because of variety of matter that is to be meditated upon, that plenty makes us barren ? And in such straits of time, how can we run through all ? I shall answer to this in three propositions.

1. The mind of man is *ἐνεργῆς*, working, and much may be done by thoughts in a short time. The mind's motion is not so slow as that of the body, which is burdened with a mass and clod of flesh, and therefore must have time for its action, but the soul is quick. There are two sorts of meditations in the supper, as indeed in all other matters—pregnant apprehensions and enforcing reasons. (1.) Pregnant apprehensions, suitable to each circumstance of the duty. Now these are absolutely necessary ; as in blessing the elements, and setting them aside for this use, think of the eternal decrees of God, by which Christ was separated to the office of mediator. In breaking the bread, your thoughts must act afresh on the sorrows of Christ's cross, and those bruises wherewith he was broken for our iniquities. Thus it is good to follow every part of the duty with some devout and religious

thoughts. (2.) Enforcing reasons, when we pitch upon one matter, and inculcate it, and whet it upon the soul according to our present distress and exigencies, which is a pleading with our own hearts from the main design and end of the duty.

2. It is not good to skip from matter to matter hastily ; partly because a light touch leaves very little impression, and therefore, as long as milk cometh, suck on the breasts of consolation. Hold reason and faith to its work ; when things drop thus on their own accord, they are sweetest, as life-honey that drops of itself from the comb, or as marrow, that the bone droppeth of its own accord ; as the lamb sucks the dam's dugs till they cease dropping. When thoughts come, freely entertain them. Partly because we cannot think of all at once ; one thought would but intrude and thrust out another ere we have received comfort and profit, and in a throng and crowd of thoughts there is little good done. And besides it would draw a tediousness upon the soul if every time we should renew the same thoughts ; God appointed this variety for our relief, not our burden.

3. There must be a wise choice in such variety of matter according to your necessities and wants : Job v. 27, ' Hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' Things that nearly concern us do most affect us, and thoughts in season are most affecting ; while we are here in the world we are always humbled with some present want. Now these wants are known by search and trial, and therefore is examination appointed as a preparative to receiving, that we may know our wants.

Case 2. Is it good to bind ourselves to such or such a meditation ? Will not this hinder much sweetness, which we should otherwise reap by the duty ? and will it not exclude other thoughts which God by his spirit might raise up in our minds ? and so we shall defraud ourselves of much sweetness and comfort in the duty. To this I answer—

1. In every particular duty a christian should have one main particular aim, either the removing of such a doubt the relieving of such a want, the beating down of such a corruption, or the receiving of such a grace. Upon a trial you will find some special need for the supply of which you wait upon God. And there are several reasons why it is good for a christian to be thus particular ; partly because it discovers sincerity, and prevents much guile ; partly because one case may be best managed and carried on at one time, either in prayer, by wrestling with God, or in meditation by argument and pleading with ourselves ; partly because the comfort and success will be most sensible, as a needle that toucheth but in one point entereth sooner than a blunt thick piece of iron that toucheth many, so particular things are most sensible, and leave a quicker and smarter sense upon the soul ; partly because when you are thus particular it will make you come with fresh and renewed affections. It is good to drive on this main care, and the bent and design of your thoughts must run that way : 2 Cor. xii. 8, ' And for this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me.'

2. God usually comes in over and above our aims and expectations : Eph. iii. 20, ' He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' Solomon asked wisdom, and God gave him riches and honour in great abundance. Jacob desired of God to be kept in the way, and God made him two bands. The prodigal comes with a

modest request, Make me a hired servant, and the father puts on him the best robe, and entertains him with the fatted calf. We seek to subdue such a lust, and the Lord comes in with an overflow of comfort. He would have such a doubt removed, and it may be the Lord comes in with a high tide of sensible appearance to his soul and increase of grace.

3. You should do in the Lord's supper as in prayer. You meditate in prayer, but not to exclude supervenient thoughts and sudden motions; so here, you meditate on your own wants and needs, and leave the Spirit to his free assistance. When we use the most prudent course, it is no straitening to the Spirit of God. In all preparations we leave ourselves at a liberty to receive his free breathings and coming into our souls. We keep matter ready at hand to kindle our thoughts to feed our confessions and petitions, so it is good to keep matter ready at hand to feed our meditations, and to drive on the main care, waiting for supervenient assistances.

Case 3. Whether there be required of a christian a fixing of the soul in a steady view and contemplation of God in quietness and silence, without any variety of discourse? Or whether God doth now raise and heighten the soul to a sole act of vision and intuition without any discourse, or the traverses of reason, in the supper or any other ordinance?

That you may understand the case, you must know that the schoolmen and other writers of devotion usually distinguish between consideration, meditation, and contemplation. Consideration is a thinking of truth, and a rolling of it in the understanding and memory. Meditation is an enforcing of truth upon the soul by discourse or variety of pressing arguments. Contemplation is the fruit and perfection of meditation; and this they make a supernatural elevation of the mind, by which it adhereth to God, and pauseth in the sight of God and glory without any variety of discourse; the soul being dazzled with the majesty of God, or the glory of heaven, and transported into a present joy, the use of reason is for a time suspended, and the soul is cast into a kind of sleep and quietness of intuition, staring and gazing with ravishing sweetness upon the divine excellences and the glory of our hopes. In short, contemplation is a ravishing sight without discourse, the work of reason not discoursing, but raised and ecstasied into the highest way of apprehension.

Now it is inquired whether there be any such thing required of a christian? or whether there be any such dispensation in these latter times of the gospel? As, for instance, Paul had the glory of God and Christ presented to him; he did not barely think of these things by the apprehensions of the mind, or discourse of these things by the enforcement of reason, but he had an intuition, a steady view or sight of these things, such as did, as it were, ravish his soul from his body. Doth God use such a dispensation now? I answer in these propositions—

1. In the primitive times these dispensations and raptures were more usual. We read of John's rapture, Rev. i. 10, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.' Mark, he doth not say the Spirit was in him, as it is present in the heart of every child of God; but he was 'in the Spirit,'

which intimateth height and plenty of revelations. So we read of Peter's rapture while he was praying: Acts x. 10, 'He fell into a trance,' *ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἔκστασις*, a trance fell upon him, noting that those raptures are things of dispensation rather than choice and duty; they fall upon us, we do not work ourselves into them. So we read of Paul's rapture: 2 Cor. xii. 2, 'I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth), such an one caught up to the third heaven.' Whether these things were framed by way of representation to the soul, or whether the soul were for a time separated from the body and was transported into heaven, Paul himself was at a loss, and could not determine and resolve the case.

2. These dispensations may still be, though not in the same height and manner which the apostles enjoyed. God may do it still, for he is left to the liberty and sovereignty of his own dispensations; and though sight, and the beatifical vision and contemplation be the happiness of the next world, yet in some measure God may begin it here, that his children may enter into their inheritance by degrees, and may be beforehand led into the suburbs of heaven. As a father gives the child not only a part of the estate, but sometimes the liberty of the whole house, so God may give us here in this world not only those more temperate enjoyments of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and the first-fruits of the Spirit, but he may lead us into the suburbs of heaven, and put us above the clouds into the glory of the world to come. Though there may be such a dispensation, yet not in the same manner that the apostles enjoyed it, for that was peculiar to them; and therefore when the apostle Paul had reported his rapture, he pleaded that he had the sign of an apostle: 2 Cor. xii. 12, 'Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. With these raptures there was a concomitant revelation of the will of God. And they were for other ends; these raptures were not so much excesses of religion, but revelations for the great ends of the gospel. John's rapture was to receive the visions of God for the comfort of the churches; Peter's to go to the Gentiles; Paul's that he might have commission for the apostleship, and the mark and sign of an apostle. Therefore though God may use some such dispensation (for we know not what he may do out of sovereignty), yet not in the same way, and for the same end.

3. Those raptures and transportations, which the children of God now feel sometimes, proceed from strong pangs and ecstasies of love, which for a while do suspend and forbid the distinct use of reason, and cast the soul into a quiet silent gaze. Observe that love, where it is moderate, venteth itself in thoughts and words, and it is a great help to make the inward sense more acute and sharp; but where it is vehement and strong, it is contented with itself, and satisfied with its own heat, ardour, and intenseness, therefore there is not such a distinct actual discourse. As when a man huggeth and embraceth a friend, the closer he huggeth him, the less distinctly doth he behold and take a view of him; so in the embraces of love, when the soul falleth into the arms of Christ, and claspeth about Christ with the arms of its own love, it hindereth the distinct exercise of reason, and

those offices of discourse by which the soul would otherwise reflect upon him. A man that desireth a precious jewel, at first he vieweth it with greediness and delight, but afterwards he layeth it up in his bosom, and wholly pleaseth himself in the possession of it: so the soul that thirsts after Christ pleaseth itself in the consideration of his beauty and perfection, and dwells upon it with religious thoughts, but afterwards love growing very strong, and being heightened unto the utmost degree, shutteth the eyes of our souls, and we only please ourselves in a more intimate feeling, and in the sweetness of our embraces. Great and high affections must needs hinder the use of reason, because all our strength and vigour runneth out into one faculty, and then such a poor limited creature as man is cannot attend other offices and employments of the soul. It is very notable in the whole life of Christ that he had no ecstasy, *propter maximam capacitatem supernaturalem animæ*, because of the extraordinary perfection of his person, and the large capacity of his soul; he had a transfiguration, yet all the while in the midst of that he had a temperate use of reason, Mat. xvii. The disciples were indeed surprised by those glimpses and emissions of his glory; they were overwhelmed, so that 'they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid,' ver. 6. Poor man, being of a lesser capacity, cannot suffer such a feeling and high tide of affection without some transportation and ravishment beyond the support of reason, for the strength and vigour of his soul is melted out to Christ in love. Now the soul being of a limited power and capacity, the more strongly it attendeth one office and function, the less can it serve others. Look, as a flame, when it ascendeth, endeth in a point, and groweth narrower and thinner, so such high flames and such glorious ascents of affection usually mind but one thing, and do not permit the soul any variety of discourse, but fix it in one thought, and in one steady and deliberate gaze.

4. Usually such experiences of God's children are given in to them in the most social duties. As in the time of prayer; Peter's trances fell upon him in prayer. Ordinary ecstasies carry some proportion with that which is extraordinary, and usually the soul flames out to God, and breaks forth in religious accents in the time of prayer. And so such strong affection oversets the soul in the time of the Lord's supper: Cant. v. 1, 'Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' Be drunk with loves. That whole song concerneth our communion with Christ in heaven and in the ordinances; above all, in the ordinance of the supper, which is the pledge of heaven. So also in the height of meditation; when the soul hath been spent and much exercised itself in that work, after the labour of meditation God giveth in this silence and rest in the steady contemplation of his love and glory, and the mind being inflamed and heightened with spiritual thoughts and exercises, suffereth a kind of transportation. It is very notable that those ravishments that were between Christ and the spouse were in the palm-tree: Cant. vii. 8, 'I said, I will go up to the palm-tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof; now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples.' There Christ would satisfy himself with the church's breasts, and there she should be satisfied with his love. The palm-tree hath a long naked bark, and carrieth all its leaves, branches and fruits upwards;

it noteth the religious ascent of the soul in spiritual exercises, when the thoughts do not run out in underwood and lower branches, in earthly thoughts and carnal distractions. Well, then, in the top of the palm-tree there we taste the sweetness of Christ, and the soul is ravished and spiritually made drunk with the clusters of his grapes.

5. These experiences, where God seeth fit to give them, are given to persons of much holiness and religion : Mat. v. 8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Those bright and clear souls are more fit to enjoy the sight of God ; when by constant and daily exercise the heart hath been subdued to a religious frame, the Lord may then give in those ravishing sweets, and those gazes upon his beauty and glory. There are degrees in the sense of God's love. Hypocrites have but a taste and a little sip, as the merchant that selleth wine will give a taste to those that do but cheapen it. Christians whose spirits are not defecated or cleared from the clouds of passion or purged from the dregs of carnal interests seldom meet with those sweet and rich experiences ; to such an intimate discerning the senses had need be exercised. The lute had need be rightly strung and tuned that maketh a ravishing melody ; easy, lazy, and gross hearts feel none of these rapt motions and strong qualms of affection : God usually gives them to those that are purged and purified.

6. These rich experiences are very fleeting and vanishing, and but now and then bestowed. We have not such high experiences under lock and key, and at the command of our own endeavours. God gives them when he seeth fit, and when he pleaseth they pass away again. If they were constant, and God should continually pour in, the vessel would break, and the soul could not sustain itself under the burden of it. The disciples in the transfiguration were astonished and fell down for fear, they could not bear the glory, though but for a little while : Mat. xvii. 6, 'And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid.' Our present state is not capable of these transports long ; the soul is not extended and enlarged to such a capacity and fitness, neither is the body qualified. We are in the animal state now, the deliberate contemplation is our portion in heaven, when sin and weakness is done away, and when we have that which the apostle calls a spiritual body, 1 Cor. xv. 44 ; that is, a body fit for those high communications, and for the continual presence of God. This is an extraordinary indulgence, which, if continued, would destroy and abrogate the economy and dispensation of grace. This pause of reason upon the majesty of God and the glory of heaven is somewhat like the sun's standing still in Joshua's time, which, if it were so always, would burn up the frame of nature ; therefore God hath ordained that it should roll hither and thither. Motion and change is fitter for this state to which God hath subjected us.

7. Such ravishing experiences are not to be sought for, but referred to the good pleasure of God. We cannot pray for them in faith, having no promise of them, and we must not be too hasty to eat of the fruits of paradise before our time. It is enough for us to go to heaven in the usual roadway, and not like Elijah, in a fiery chariot. Look, as in outward things we are not to desire riches, but a competency ; if God casteth them in upon our endeavours, we should be thankful ; so

in meditation we must mind those enjoyments which are more temperate, and leave other things to God. It is good to content ourselves with grace, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, though we have not those transports and high ecstasies of love and affection. We must not tempt God with immodest requests and expectations, but sit down humbly and quietly, and if the master of the feast bid us to sit higher, and call us to a more choice dispensation, well and good. These experiences are not to be ranked among duties, but among enjoyments; we shall not be called to an account for the want of them, for we are not obliged to pursue them; they are acts of God's magnificence and indulgence to the soul. Many times christians oppress their souls by their indiscreet aims; it is good to keep an even hand, that we may not vex ourselves with the disappointment of a rash and foolish trust. Some are altogether careless, and content themselves with any frame of spirit in worship; others are not satisfied but with ecstatic and rapt motions. Look, as it is with a lute-string, if it be too slack, it doth not sound at all, if it be too high stretched, it is hoarse and screeching; so it is with our souls in duty; when we are careless, there is no melody made to God, but if we be too high strained, then the soul is oppressed with its own aims, and with a pursuit of things above our reach; the temperate middle way should be our aim.

8. Upon all such experiences we should be careful and watch our hearts, because many times herein we delude ourselves; we call that a rapture which is but the suppositions of a troubled fancy, or some fanatic delusions by which Satan abuseth an over-credulous and superstitious soul. Dotage many times passeth under the pretence of vision, and the extravagances of a wild zeal seemeth rapture. Always observe their end and scope; if they end in pride, and prove a temptation, they are from the devil, and not from God. Experiences from God enlarge our hearts for service, and make us more humble, as the highest flames tremble most. These souls that are called to the highest enjoyments are most humble. It is true we are apt to be puffed up with a revelation from God, as Paul was puffed up with the abundance of revelations, but there was a subsequent dispensation, some cross to humble him: 2 Cor. xii. 7, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' This is through the corruption of our nature, which God preventeth in his children by such dispensations. But if it tendeth to make us neglect piety, and to be above duties, it is against the nature of religion, which presseth us to wait upon God with the more encouragement, because we have already discerned his beauty and glory: Ps. lxi. 2, 'To see thy power and glory so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.'

Thus I have done with this case, in which I have been in the high mountains. I shall come to the valleys, which, as they are more easy of access, so usually they are more fruitful. What follows will be more plain.

SERMON V.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
 GEN. XXIV. 63.

CASE 4. When must we meditate?

1. In the general, something should be done every day; seldom converse begetteth a strangeness to God, and an unfitness for the duty. It is a description of God's servant, Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' At least we should take all convenient occasions. It is an usual way of natural men to make conscience of duties after a long neglect; they perform duties to pacify a natural conscience, and use them as a man would use a sleepy potion or strong waters; they are good at a pinch, not for constant drink. Alas! we lose by such wide gaps and distances between performance and performance; it is as if we had never done it before.

2. For the particular time of the day when you should meditate, that is arbitrary. I told you before you may do it either in the silence of the night, when God hath drawn a curtain of darkness between you and the things of the world; or in the freshness of the morning, or in the evening, when the wildness and vanity of the mind is spent in worldly business.

3. There are some special solemn times, when the duty is most in season; as—

[1.] After a working sermon; after the word hath fallen upon you with a full stroke, it is good to follow the blow; and when God hath cast seed into the heart, let not the fowls peck it away: Mat. xiii. 19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.' Ruminates on the word, chew the cud; many a sermon is lost because it is not whet upon the thoughts: James i. 23, 24, 'He is like a man that beholdeth his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was:' Mat. xxii. 22, 'When they heard these things, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.' You should roll the word in your thoughts, and deeply consider of it.

[2.] Before some solemn duties, as before the Lord's supper, and before special times of deep humiliation, or before the sabbath. Meditation is, as it were, the breathing of the soul; that it may the better hold out in religious exercises, it is a good preparative to raise the spirits into a frame of piety and religion. When the harp is fitted and tuned, it doth the better make music; so when the heart is fixed and settled by a preparative meditation, it is the fitter to make melody to God in worship.

[3.] When God doth specially revive and enable the Spirit. It is good to take advantage of the Spirit's gales; so fresh a wind should make us hoist up our sails. Do not lose the Spirit's seasons; the Spirit's impulses are good significations from God that now is an acceptable time.

Case 5. What time is to be spent in the duty?

I answer—That is left to spiritual discretion. Suck the teat as long as milk cometh. Duties must not be spun out to an unnecessary length. You must neither yield to laziness, nor occasion spiritual weariness; the devil hath advantage upon you both ways. When you rack and torture your spirits after they have been spent, it makes the work of God a bondage; and therefore come not off till you find profit, and do not press too hard upon the soul, nor oppress it with an indiscreet zeal. It is Satan's policy to make you out of love with meditation by spinning it out to a tediousness and an unnecessary length.

Case 6. Whether should the time be set and constant?

I answer—It is good to bind the heart to somewhat, and yet leave it to such a liberty as becomes the gospel. Bind it to somewhat every day, that the heart may not be loose and arbitrary. We see that necessity quickeneth and urgeth, and when the soul is engaged it goes to work the more thoroughly. Therefore the Lord asks, Jer. xx. 21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me?' It is good to lay a tie upon the heart; and yet I advise not to a set stinted hour, lest we create a snare to ourselves. Though a man should resist distractions and distempers, yet some business is unavoidable, and some distempers are invincible. I have observed this, that even religious persons are more sensible of their own vows than of God's commands; when men have bound up themselves in chains of their own making, their consciences fall upon them, and dog them with restless accusations, when they cannot accomplish so much duty as they have set and prescribed to themselves. And besides, when hours are customary and set, the heart groweth formal and superstitious.

Case 7. Are all bound to meditate? are the ignorant? are men of an unquiet nature? are servants? are ministers?

1. Are the ignorant, and men of barren minds, that have not a good stock of knowledge? I answer—Yes, they are bound to this as well as other duties, though they cannot do it well; it is their duty to strive that the word of God may dwell richly in them. It is a mark of a godly man; every man is bound to be skilful in the scriptures: Jer. xxxi. 34, 'They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord.' God hath no child so little but he knows his father, therefore all are bound in some measure to be able to discourse of God and of the things of God.

2. But some are of an unquiet nature, fit for public duties, but not for private exercises; are they bound as well as those of softer spirits, and fitter for meditation? I answer—This is not temper, but distemper, the unquiet spirit must not *totaliter cessare*, wholly discontinue this work. They are to mind wherein they may serve God most, but not totally desist from a work so necessary, and of such great importance.

3. Are servants bound to it, whose time is not their own? I answer—They should do what they can; God is more merciful to them, but those that are in bondage to others may find some leisure for God.

4. Are ministers obliged? Their whole work is a study, their employment is a continual meditation. I answer—There is a difference between meditation and study. In study we mind the good of others, in meditation the good of our own souls. Things work with us accord-

ing to our end and the aims that we propose to ourselves. Public teaching is no such trial of our hearts; there is a natural pride in us to urge us to teach others, and that makes so many intrude into the ministry; there is some kind of authority in it, that we exercise over others; but we are to mind the good of our own souls, and to regard private duties. There is a greater engagement upon us than others, because we have the help of art and education, and have greater advantages than others, and therefore we should not lose so sweet a comfort. It is strange that papists confine it altogether to spiritual men, as if it were not a lay duty, and usually we lay it aside, as if study would serve the turn, and it did not belong to us.

V. My work is now to speak of the object of meditation, which I am first to handle in general, and then in special.

First, In the general consideration of the object I am to speak—(1.) Of the choice of the object; (2.) The manner how to work upon it.

1. For the choice of the object, I need not press you to choose that which is seasonable, and what suiteth with your own case. A sermon worketh more forcibly when it is suitable, so do thoughts when they are seasonable, and direct to the present case of the soul: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul;' he meaneth sad thoughts, then it was his advantage to exercise himself in seasonable comforts, like a shower of rain on new-mown grass; it would be burnt up with the drought, which if rain had come seasonably might have flourished and grown up with a fair herbage; so the soul is parched with a temptation, if it be not watered with suitable thoughts. 'We faint not,' saith the apostle, 'for we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are not seen,' 2 Cor. iv. 16–18, viz., by reviving our christian hopes; and therefore the exigencies of the soul must be served. Food in thirst doth enrage rather than please. It is not enough to consider what is good, but what is seasonable. Things mistimed and misplaced lose their force and operation; as the blood when it is in vessels is the continent of life, but when it is out it breedeth diseases, so truths out of their order and place do not nourish the heart, but oppress it; as if you should talk of hell and the severity of God's judgment to those that are dejected, this were to speak to the grief of those whom God hath wounded, and when the back is ready to break to lay on more load.

I shall for the present (having spoken largely in the general directions) give you but two rules—

[1.] Choose that which is profitable. There is a great deal of difference between the objects of meditation; some are more speculative, others altogether practical. There are matters speculative revealed in the word which yet have their use and profit; as the fall of the angels, the order of providence, &c.; yet out of these the heart may distil matter of practical use and profit. All the benefit we receive from these truths lieth in our meditation of them. But then there are others that are altogether practical, and these should chiefly be chosen. The mind of man is the mill of God, not to grind chaff, but wheat. Matters practical are there to be ground for bread to the soul; they that hunt after fancies do but misemploy their thoughts, and beat chaff into dust, and do not grind good corn for nourishment; and that is the

reason why many times mean christians excel those of the best gifts, because they spend their time in subtle inventions and inquiries, and whilst we strive to be more subtle they are more sincere. Oh! consider the soul is diseased while it is only fed with quails and fine notions; there is more delicacy but less nourishment. Notions that are airy tickle the fancy, and move the lighter part of the affections, but those considerations that are grave and masculine convince most soundly, and work most deeply: 'Wisdom entereth into the heart,' Prov. ii. 10. Look, as wicked men do not please themselves in abstractions of sin, they devise wickedness to accomplish it, so the christian should not satisfy himself with nice speculations, but employ his thoughts about practical matters to promote holiness in his heart and life.

[2.] Choose matters to meditate upon in an orderly and apt method. But you will say, Do you think this useful to confine the soul to method in meditation, to prescribe a set course to ourselves? Shall we not jostle out seasonable thoughts? I answer—

(1.) It is lawful and necessary to prescribe to ourselves a course and method, partly that we may know our work, and that we may not be to seek both of a subject and how to work upon it; therefore, that you may keep your religious exercises together, and know how to pass from one to another, it is good to keep a set course. Partly because things work with us according to method; it is the way of knowledge and affection; the soul finds it an excellent advantage when things are aptly suited and ranked in their order. God himself hath disposed all his works in order, so should we ours. You will find an advantage when you take your rise low, and go on from matters more plain and obvious to those that are more mysterious. There are shallows for the lambs of God, and there are deeps for those of an higher growth and stature. You must pass from the most obvious matter of christianity to those that are of more sublime speculation. The rise of the sun is first low, and gildeth with its beams the eastern parts, and then riseth higher to the top of the heavens; so in your progress there are the third heavens to which you must ascend, but first you must pass the first and second heavens. Before we search the depths of the Spirit, it is good to search the depths of the belly (I compare Paul's expression with Solomon's), to begin with the knowledge of ourselves before we come to the knowledge of God. *Prius redi ad te quam rimari presumas quæ supra te*, is a rule of Bernard, who was of much experience in these exercises; first return to ourselves, and by an orderly progress to go on from examination of ourselves, before we soar up to the contemplation of the divine glory. You know what Christ saith, John iii. 12, 'If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?' They were spiritual matters he spake of, regeneration and principles of religion; yet in comparison of deeper mysteries of religion, and because he had set them out by earthly similitudes of generation, water and the wind, he called them 'earthly things.' Christ trained up his own disciples this way; first he begins with plain matters: John xvi. 12, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them yet.' There were greater mysteries above the reach and size of their present capacity. So the

apostle Paul speaketh of wisdom for them that are perfect : 1 Cor. ii. 6, 'Howbeit we speak wisdom to them that are perfect;' that is, for them that had made some progress in religion ; perfect, not absolutely, but in comparison with babes and novices. Therefore it is good, with Mary, to sit at the feet of Jesus, and not presently with the spouse to beg the kisses of his mouth, but to go on by degrees.

(2.) Though we must contrive a method and course, yet there must be a liberty left for things, for all seasons and occasions. As in the world, though a man hath disposed his business, yet he reserveth a liberty for incidental and unthought of occasions ; so in these spiritual matters, and in the course of religious exercises, you must not bind up yourselves from these occasions. I shall name four—

(1st.) Working and forcible sermons. It is not good to lose the heat that we have gotten at the word, but to go home and chew the cud. In the word there is ingestion ; in meditation you turn it into nourishment. There must be a time for concoction, and when the seed is scattered, it must be covered.

(2d.) For present impulses, keep yourselves free, that you may not lose the advantage of such impulses. Many times Christ cometh 'leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills,' Cant. ii. 8. He impelleth our hearts on a sudden and unlooked for, by causing holy thoughts to shoot into our minds ; by representing our unworthiness, coldness, and deadness of life ; or else he inflameth us by representing the beauty and loveliness of grace. Then it is good those thoughts should take the next turn, and our method must give way to God's dispensation. As general nature altereth its course in some great particular exigencies, fire descendeth, and water ascendeth, so in this case the general work must be interrupted. It is a kind of resisting God not to entertain these motions ; I do not mean when they come upon you in the necessary work of your callings, but only that they may have the next turn.

(3d.) For remarkable providences, when God casteth us upon such objects as stir up special veneration and reverence, as some marvellous events, or creatures that discover his wisdom and glory, or sudden death of one near us, it is of excellent use while such experiences are warm to go home and consider of them ; as Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons, was conversing with a friend, and he fell down dead, and presently he went home, and thought of the uncertainty of life, and the necessity of providing for a future state, and God blessed these thoughts for his conversion. Or else the sad falls of a person eminent for religion, when we see some glorious star fall like lightning from heaven, these are accidents that must not be passed over without some mark and consideration, and then God doth as it were call you off from your usual thoughts.

(4th.) The present exigence of the Spirit. Choose that which is seasonable, and what suits with your own case ; a sermon works more forcibly when it is seasonable. Thus David : Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' He means his sad thoughts ; it was an advantage to him then to solace himself with those comforts God had provided. The scripture useth this similitude of rain upon new-mown grass. Rain when it comes season-

ably refresheth the grass and causes it to spring up, which otherwise would be burnt up with the drought and heat of the season; so the soul would be parched with a temptation if it be not watered with seasonable thoughts. But I have spoken to this point before.

But you will say, What is the method that we should use?

Ans. Though I cannot exactly prescribe it, yet give me leave to advise—

(1.) For those that are wholly to begin this duty, it is best first to meditate about meditation, the nature, use, and excellency of it, and how they may carry it on with success; it is a good preparative to the whole work. I do direct you to this course, because this is that which the soul standeth in need of; this will lay a charge and necessity upon the soul. As to pray is a good preparative to prayer, so to meditate on meditation is a good preparative to meditation. To quicken you, consider the motives alleged, and when you have done all, say, O soul! do but go and try! O Lord! help me, and keep this up in the thoughts of thy servant!

(2.) For the general method, it is good to keep the method of the Spirit. The method of meditation should follow that of God's dispensation: John xvi. 8, 'When the Spirit is come, he shall reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.' First begin with sin, which is more easy and familiar to the understanding; it is good to lay the foundation of all in the mortifying and purgative way; and then go to righteousness, and after the extermination of sin we shall be fitter to entertain the love of God, and then go to judgment. Take another method; first consider the great end of man, that you may come to yourselves; then the evil of sin, that you may bemoan and avoid it; then the miseries of the world, or the vanity of the creature, that you may condemn it; then the horrors of death, the severity of judgment, the torment of hell, that you may prevent it; then the excellences of Christ, the privileges of the godly, the rare contrivance of the gospel; then of providence, of heaven, of God and his attributes, his power, his wisdom, his eternity, &c., with suitable scriptures for each of these.

2. For the manner how you must work upon these objects.

[1.] There must be pregnant thoughts and apprehensions. Deep consideration begins the work; you must set your hearts to consider the subject, for when the heart is once set, these thoughts through the blessing of God will come in freely. It is often spoken in scripture of setting our hearts to seek the Lord; when the heart is set for prayer, God comes in with a great enlargement; so when the heart is set to consider, you will have serious and solemn thoughts. If vain thoughts trouble you and interpose, yet still set the heart and go on; as a man in a journey, though dogs come out and bark upon him, he rideth on; to run after every cur would be a great hindrance and diversion; so if you stand quarrelling with ever vain thought, you lose your purpose, and so the devil will gain that by a reflex act which you seek to reject in a direct act; as criers in a court in calling for silence many times make the greatest noise. Mr Greenham was wont to lift up his heart in a short ejaculation, and so go on.

[2.] There are serious enforcements and rational inculcations. Things barely propounded do not work; it is by lively reasons they are whetted

upon the soul. Look, as it is in going to sea, those that only mind passage do not stay upon the ocean, and therefore do not fetch up the treasures of the great deep, but those that go to fish cast out the net again and again, so must you ; you must cast in reason upon reason, enforcement upon enforcement, till you bring up treasure, cast on weight upon weight till it weigh down. Now these rational enforcements are four—by arguments, similitudes, comparison, colloquies or soliloquies.

(1.) By arguments that are most effective. Inquire what kind of arguments have most force upon the spirits. The usual arguments you should look after are causes and effects ; by the one knowledge is increased, and by the other affections are stirred. Do not emptily declaim, but see that your eye may affect your heart. Choose such arguments as are evident and strong ; you have them in the word and in sermons, and you should have them in your hearts : Luke vi. 45, ‘A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’ A good man should be able to bring forth good arguments, that he might bring his heart powerfully to the acknowledgment of the will of God ; for what did God give you faculties, and the use of reason and discourse, and such helps in the ministry, but for such a purpose ?

(2.) By similitudes. The word will furnish you upon every point. Heaven speaketh to us in a dialect of earth. Heavenly mysteries are clothed with a fleshly notion. In the Book of Canticles communion with Christ is set forth by banquets and marriages, and spiritual things are shadowed out by corporal fairness and sweetness. In other places of scripture Christ’s kingdom is set forth by an earthly kingdom, the word of God by a glass, the wrath of God by fire. Now apt similitudes have a great force upon the soul for two reasons—partly because they help apprehension, and partly because they help discourse. There is as it were a picture for the thoughts to gaze upon. By similitudes we come to understand a spiritual thing that we know not, being represented by sensible things with which they are acquainted ; the thing is twice represented to the soul—in reality and in picture, as a double medium helpeth the sight, the glass and the air in spectacles ; a shilling in a basin of water seemeth bigger, so it is here. Yea, they yield matter for much enlargement, and help discourse, as when they brought God the blind and the lame : Mal. i. 8, ‘Offer it now unto thy governor ; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person ? saith the Lord of hosts.’ Sin is expressed by death ; now the soul may reason thus : I tremble at death, why do I not tremble at sin ? So mortification is physic ; I can dispense with the trouble of physic for my body, this will make my soul healthy.

(3.) By comparisons, wherein other things are like or unlike the things we meditate upon. I urge this because it is a natural help ; it is a rule of nature that contraries being put together do mightily illustrate one another ; as when you compare fairness and deformity, black and white, deformity is more odious, and black is more black. So if I would contemplate the beauty of virtue and of the spiritual life, I would compare it with the filthiness of vice, and of the profane life. So when you

compare the pleasant path of wisdom with the filthy and dreggy delights that are in the path of sin, you gain upon the soul. Put earthly things into the scales with heavenly, and see which weigheth heaviest, set heaven against hell, and heaven against the world. Our Saviour teacheth us to meditate by way of comparison: Mat. xvi. 26, 'For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' So by comparing yourselves with other creatures, as thus; when you would shame yourselves for your disobedience, you may argue thus: All things obey the law of their creation, the sun delighteth to run his race, the stars keep their course, and do not go beside the path God hath set them, and I only have found out my own path. So for your uncomfortableness in the ways of God; you may say, Wicked men delight to do wickedly, but I do not delight in the service of God; shall it not be a pleasure to me to be exercised in the duties of religion? shall I not rejoice in the Lord?

(4.) By colloquies and soliloquies; colloquies and speeches with God, and soliloquies with ourselves. Thoughts are more express and formal, but when turned into words and speeches, it is a sign the affections are stirred. Strong affections must have vent in words; speech is an help in secret prayer.

(1st.) In colloquies with God, either by way of complaint: Lord, I am poor, and needy, and worldly. Lord, my heart is naked, and void of grace. Or else by way of request; as the infant will show the apple or jewel, or whatever it hath received, to the parent or nurse, so the soul representeth to God whatever it hath gotten by meditation, and taketh occasion further to converse with God, and beg grace of him.

(2d.) In soliloquies with your own souls, and these are either by way of urging the heart or charging it. (1.) By way of urging the heart. As suppose you have been meditating on the glorious salvation that was purchased by Jesus Christ, let this be the close of all, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Heb. ii. 3. So if you have been meditating on the sinfulness of sin, fall upon your own hearts: Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit shall we have in those things whereof ye are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death?' Or if you have been meditating of hell and the wrath of God, speak to your heart: Ezek. xxii. 14, 'Can thy heart endure, or can thine hand be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee?' Art thou stronger than God, that thou canst wrestle with him? Or if you have been meditating on your sinfulness, or the course of your own wicked lives, you may return upon your heart: Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee;' and ver. 6, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?' How shall I get a ransom to redeem my soul from the guilt of sin?

(2.) By way of charge and command. Suppose you have been meditating of the benefit of God's service, and the danger of going a-whoring from him: Hosea ii. 7, 'She shall say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.' Or if you have been meditating of the benefits of God to your souls, you may return upon your hearts by way of charge: Ps. cxvi. 7, 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with me.' God hath

opened his good treasure to thee, this hath been thy portion, therefore 'Return unto thy rest.' Well, then, thus do, and then be watchful that you do not lose what you have wrought. Isaac digged wells and the Philistines dammed them up; so when the soul hath digged a well of salvation, Satan will seek to dam it up; therefore be watchful.

SERMON VI.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—

GEN. xxiv. 63.

SECONDLY, I come now to the particular objects of meditation—

First, I begin with that which is the chief end of man, a necessary work that you may come to yourselves: Luke xv. 17, *εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν*, 'When he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' That is, when he began to consider of his condition, it put better thoughts into him. Therefore, that we may come to ourselves, it is good to consider the end why we were created, and the errand upon which God sent us into the world, to reason thus with ourselves: Why was I sent into the world? Why do I live here? to get an estate, or to get into Christ? to wallow in pleasures, or to exercise myself in communion with God? to heap up perishing things together, or to make my everlasting state more sure? When the end is rightly stated, men know their work, and so live up to the purposes of their creation. But alas! many know other things, but are ignorant of themselves, and so pass on carelessly to their own ruin; like him that gazed on the stars, and fell into a deep pit, their eyes are upon the ends of the earth, but they do not consider their souls. Others, for want of considering the end of their lives, are so far from living as christians, that they scarce live as men, but either as beasts or as devils. Delight in the pleasures of the world transformeth a man into a beast; it is their happiness to enjoy pleasures without remorse, and to gratify the body; and delight in sin transformeth a man into a devil. Worldly pleasures are not bread, and sinful pleasures are poison. You that are allured by the pleasures of the world, which are lawful in themselves, you lay out your money for that which is not bread; and you to whom it is meat to do evil, you feed upon that which is rank poison; the world cannot satisfy, and sin will surely destroy. Thus men beguile themselves, and do not consider of the end of their lives, till their lives be ended, and then they make their moan. Usually when men lie a-dying, then they cry out on this world how it hath deceived them, and how little they have fulfilled the end of their creation. Partly because then conscience is awake, and puts off all disguises; and partly because present things are apt to work upon us, and when the everlasting estate is at hand, the soul is troubled that it did no more think of it. Oh! consider, it is better to be prepared than to be surprised. Think not only of your

last end, but of your chief end; what should be the great aim of your lives, even before death comes? All religion lies in this, in fixing the aim of your life; all the difference between men and men is in their chief good and utmost end.

In the managing of this meditation, I shall pursue it in this method; not that I prescribe to you, but that I may set some bounds to my own discourse. However I shall use such a method as is most facile and obvious, not exceeding the capacity and reach of the meanest. The work of such a meditation may be divided into three parts—(1.) The considering work; (2.) The plotting and contriving work; (3.) The arguing work.

First, In the considering work you may propound these or such like things to your thoughts.

1. Man was made for some end. All God's works are referred to the service and use of his glory: Prov. xvi. 4, 'The Lord hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of wrath.' God, being a wise agent, must have an end; now God could have no other end but himself and his own glory, for the end must be more worthy than the means, something better and above all created things; and if God made all things for himself, then man, who was the visible masterpiece of the creation, the lesser world, the compendium and sum of all God's other works. So the apostle, Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' All things are of him as a creator, through him as a preserver, and to him, or to his glory; from him as the first cause, to him as the last end. Certainly God did not make such a glorious creature as man for any low use. The whole creation was for man's use, and man was for God's glory: Ps. viii. 3, 4, 'When I consider the heavens, the works of thy fingers, the moon and the stars that thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?' He was God's deputy and vicegerent, created to enjoy the comfort of other creatures, and to exercise dominion over them; the whole world is his palace, arched with heaven, and floored with earth, but still, that he might be faithful to his Maker, and do his homage to God, and give him the rent and tribute of his glory and praise. And therefore if the heavens do declare the glory of God, and the creeping things, and all beasts in their rank and place, much more should man, who was furnished with higher privileges, and with an higher capacity. We have faculties that are especially suited to this purpose; therefore it is said, 1 John v. 26, 'He hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true.' Certainly God never made such a glorious creature for wealth or pleasures, but for an higher use and purpose, even for himself. If you do but look upon his mind and understanding, you will find it to be a wrong and debasement to take it off from a spiritual use, and put it to a carnal.

2. This end is the enjoying and glorifying of God. To enjoy God is man's happiness, and to glorify God is man's work; by glorifying God he comes to enjoy him, and he enjoyeth him that he may glorify him. Herein he differeth from other creatures; they were made only to glorify him, not to enjoy him, but man to glorify him, and enjoy him too.

[1.] He was made to enjoy him, for that is his happiness. *Domine, fecisti nos propter te, et irrequietum est cor nostrum, donec perveniat ad te.* The soul is made up of unlimited and restless desires; there are such crannies and chinks in the soul that cannot be filled up but by the enjoyment of God; we were made for him, and we are not quiet till we do enjoy him. Nature will teach us to grope after an eternal good, as the Sodomites did after Lot's door in the dark: Acts xvii. 28, 'That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.' So Ps. iv. 6, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good?' It should be translated, The many say, &c.; for this is the voice of the multitude; all are for good, for something that is every way satisfying and contentful. There are some remains of entire reason and right nature, as Job's messengers said, Job i. 15, 'And I only am escaped alone to tell thee.' There are some obscure instincts that are alone escaped out off the ruins of the fall, to tell us that God is our chiefest good, and therefore must be our utmost end. But the scriptures go further, and teach us that there is no way of enjoying God but in Christ, and till then man can never be happy. God is the centre of the soul, the place of the soul's rest. All things move to their own place, so should man to God. It is monstrous to see things move contrary to the impulse of nature, to see fire to descend, or a stone to leap upward; so it is as monstrous in grace for our souls to descend, and to cleave to those things which are without us, which were made only to rest in God; our souls are of a heavenly original, and therefore should tend thither. Say then, This is that which will make me happy here and hereafter, and therefore why should I run elsewhere? It is against grace and nature. There is a principle in nature by which all creatures aim at their own satisfaction; there is a weight and propension that poise them to their happiness. If I would show myself a christian or a man, all my comfort lieth in enjoying God in Christ: Isa. xlv. 8, 'Remember this, and show yourselves men.' He is a beast that can satisfy his soul with the world, and he is a devil that can satisfy his soul with sin. Let me show myself a man, and return to my own rest. Things are miserable when they do not attain their end; so shall I be out of my place, tossed to and fro till I return to God; the faculties of the soul are misplaced, and are as a member out of joint.

[2.] He was made to glorify God. The creatures do it necessarily; we must do it voluntarily and by choice. This must be the care of our hearts—(1.) In every business; (2.) In every enjoyment.

(1.) In every business, be it never so trivial and low, even in the ordinary refreshments of nature: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' These common actions of eating and drinking must be done upon reasons of religion. In a king's house there are many officers, but they are all to please the king; so in my calling, in my duties, all must be done for the glory of the great God. All things must be measured by this rule, and give place to this great end, how I may glorify God, whether in the shop or in the closet, in my outward calling or in my private duties, or in my public relations or engagements, so far am I to mingle with any outward business as I may still enjoy God, and be serviceable to his glory.

This is to make religion your work, and not your play and recreation, when still in every business God is at the utmost end, whatever present ends I have. If nature interpose to make us look after our particular conveniences, yet this is but in subordination to God's glory.

(2) In every enjoyment, whether it be natural or spiritual. I am to desire outward increase and estate, but I cannot desire it lawfully, but so as I may honour God with it. Agur measureth every estate by ends of religion: Prov. xxx. 8, 9, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord; or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of God in vain.' As God should be at the end of every business, so at the end of every enjoyment, though it be spiritual. It is a mistake in christians to think that spiritual blessings are only to be desired for themselves. I must desire the pardon of my sins, not merely for itself, but that God may be glorified in pardon. I must desire grace not only that I might be saved, but that God may be glorified in my salvation: Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.' The creature's aims are never regular but when they suit with God's. In the work of redemption Jesus Christ pleased not himself, but had an aim at the Father's glory: Rom. xv. 3, 'For even Christ pleased not himself.' So should we in the comforts of redemption, not please ourselves merely in the consideration of our own happiness, but rejoice in it as God's ends are promoted in it, that God is glorified in pardoning my sin, or giving me grace and salvation. Though it be a difficult, yet it is a necessary piece of self-denial to desire salvation in a subordination to God's glory.

Secondly, For the contriving plotting work. The end being once fixed, we are to consider generally by what means it may be accomplished, and more particularly how you may observe and carry it on to the glory of God.

1. Generally, by what means we may accomplish it. Every end is obtained by apt and fit means, and God, as he hath ordained the end, so he hath appointed the means. The whole duty of man is to 'fear God and keep his commandments,' Eccles. xii. 13. The whole duty is comprised in obedience and fear; obedience respects the rule, and fear the principle. Or obedience and love; he instanceth in that principle that was most suitable to the present dispensation. In the Old Testament, fear is the beginning of wisdom, fear is represented as the great principle of duty and worship, as in the New Testament, love: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us;' 1 John v. 3, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.' The meaning of that place is, that God hath required entire obedience out of an holy and upright principle. Look, as God hath appointed to the creatures a law of creation by which they are bounded to their stated times and paths, as the psalmist saith of the waters of the sea, Ps. civ. 9. 'Thou hast set a bound, that they may not pass over, that they turn not again to cover the earth,' so God hath given a moral law and rule to the rational creature, which must be observed by love and reverence. So it is said, Eph. ii. 10, 'We are the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath before ordained that we

should walk therein.' God having by the same decree and wise counsel ordained both end and means, he hath given us a rule by which we are to be guided in serving his glory.

2. More particularly, how you may observe and carry it on in this way according to the will of God. A christian is to be wise in his generation; that is, in the course and sphere of his employments to manage the holy life by a wise foresight. A man that is a child of God hath wisdom if he would improve it: Luke xvi. 8, 'For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' Christ makes it to be the application of the parable of the unjust steward; he was plotting aforehand how he should maintain himself when he was turned out of his service; so Christ would hence commend to us spiritual wisdom, how the children of light should plot and contrive how to manage their course according to the will of God; as the prodigal contrives aforehand how he shall make his address most acceptably to his father: Luke xv. 18, 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.' He is searching out meet words, words of humbleness and submission, by which he might work upon his father's bowels. So if this be my end, to enjoy God and glorify him, how shall I order my life so as to maintain most communion with him, and so as I may most promote his glory? Neh. i. 11, 'Grant me mercy in the sight of this man; for I was the king's cup-bearer.' He sheweth the reason why he did undertake the work; he was a courtier, and had the liberty of address to Artaxerxes; Mnemon, he was devising what he might do for God in that station. So you should be contriving: This is my place, and these are my relations; what shall I do for God as I am a minister, a magistrate, a master of a family? how may I serve the great end of my creation, and promote the glory of God? Such foresights make the holy life to be a life of care and choice; not merely of chance and peradventure, but managed and guided with discretion for the glory of God.

Thirdly, For the arguing work. In such a meditation as this is you must dispute and argue with the soul, that you may gain it from base and inferior objects, which would divert you from looking after the great end of your conversation, which is the glorifying and enjoying of God.

Follow the method formerly prescribed by pregnant reasons, apt similitudes, forcible comparisons, and by holy colloquies and soliloquies.

1. By pregnant reasons. Debate thus with yourselves, Why should I look after other things, when my end is to enjoy God? Take these reasons—

[1.] Other things cannot satisfy and yield any solid contentment to the spirit: Isa. lv. 2, 'Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' Carnal affections are most irrational; why should I lavish away my choice respects upon those things that will do me no good? The things of this world cloy rather than satisfy. A man is soon weary of worldly comforts, therefore he must have shift and change. When we have wealth and honour, we want peace and contentment; nay, sometimes the particular pleasure must be changed because of satiety

and loathing which will grow upon us. A man may be weary of life itself, and it may be a burden to him, but never of the love of God; you never heard any one complain of too much communion with God. Heavenly comforts are more lovely when they are attained than when they are desired; one taste ravisheth, and imagination is nothing to feeling. Worldly things cannot satisfy the affections. Man's heart is made up of vast and unlimited desires, because it was made for God, and cannot be quiet till it enjoy God. He that is all-sufficient can only fill up those crannies and chinks that are in man's heart. But alas! if they could satisfy the affections, they cannot satisfy the conscience; they cannot calm and lull conscience asleep. There is no proportion between conscience and worldly things; these are a covering too short for us; there will be trouble, though we have abundance.

[2.] They are not durable and lasting. An immortal soul is for an eternal good. It is the greatest misery that can be to outlive our happiness. We have a soul that will never perish, and why should we labour after things that perish? When the things are gone, our affection will increase our affliction; we shall be the more troubled because we loved them so much. All things under the sun are therefore vexation, because vanity: Eccles. i. 14, 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit.' That which is vain and flashy will vex the soul with disappointment; we can enjoy nothing with contentment but what we enjoy with security: Isa. xl. 6, 'All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.' The flower may be gone, the blustering of the wind and the scorching of the sun may soon deface the beauty and glory of the flower, and then it remains a rotten and neglected stalk: Prov. xxiii. 5, 'Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?' The men of the world call them substance; they think they are the only things, when of all these Solomon says they are not. How fading are honours! Haman was one day high in honour, and the next day high on the gallows. Therefore these things being so fickle and of such uncertain enjoyment, they cannot give the soul any quiet.

[3.] They are inferior, and below the soul; they do not perfect nature, but abase it; they suit only with the outward and baser part of man, and serve only the conveniences of the body. That which makes a man happy must be something above a man, better than himself; now this is beneath your souls. You would count it absurd to adorn gold with dirt, or lay on brass upon silver; it is a stain and disgrace, not an ornament to it. One soul is more worth than a whole world: Mat. xvi. 26, 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' God created the world only with a word, but Christ redeemed the soul with his blood and sufferings, and why should you degrade yourselves? Heaven thought your souls worthy of the blood of Christ, and you should think them too worthy to be prostituted to the world. Men do not know the worth of a soul till they come to die, and then what would a man give in exchange for his soul, to redeem his soul from the destruction of fears? Job xxvii. 8, 'For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God

taketh away his soul ? ' When God comes by a fatal stroke or a mortal disease to take away your soul, you will see that a soul once lost can be redeemed by no price, and how little doth the hypocrite then think of all his gain that he hath heaped together ? Oh ! then do not debase your souls. It is dishonourable among men to match beneath their birth and dignity ; oh ! why will you match your souls, that are of a heavenly original, to these base outward things ?

[4.] All these things which we think increase our happiness do but add to our trouble, both to our outward, inward, and eternal trouble.

(1.) Many times to our outward trouble. The greater gates do but open to the greater cares, and the more any are endowed with any excellency in the world, they have proportionable sorrow and encumbrances. Moral wisdom is the best of all outward enjoyments, yet that increaseth our portion of sorrow : Eccles. i. 18, ' For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' Many have observed that never was a man eminent for any outward endowment, but the joy of it was abated with an answerable proportion of sorrow and trouble, and their encumbrances have been every way suitable to their comforts. Those that have been most famous for outward qualities have come to some dismal end, as Sampson for strength, Saul for stature, Absalom for beauty, Achitophel for counsel and parts, Asahel for swiftness, Alexander for warlike prowess, Nabal for riches ; and God hath made it good by many experiences in our times ; the wheel of providence hath rolled upon them, and they have come to some sad end. So for wit and parts. Wit has been many a man's ruin : Isa. xlvii. 10, ' Thy wisdom and thy knowledge hath perverted thee.' Many are undone by their own wisdom and knowledge, and the greatness of their parts, and come to sad accidents.

(2.) For inward troubles. As children catch at painted butterflies, and when they have taken them, their gaudy wings melt away in their fingers, and there remaineth nothing but an ugly worm, so we catch at those things which perish in the using, but the worm of conscience remaineth. Many times outward blessings are salted with a curse ; we never have outward things as a blessing till we have an higher interest in them : Ps. cxxvii. 2, ' So he giveth his beloved sleep.' Those that have an interest in God can rest quietly in the bosom of providence ; and outward comforts are given as a blessing when they are additional and appendices to the covenant of grace : Mat. vi. 33, ' Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' God doth not say, Seek the world, and heaven shall be added to you ; but, Seek heaven, and the world shall be added ; for by seeking of heavenly things first, you drive on two trades at once—for earth and heaven. But when men cumber themselves with the world, there is a snare upon the conscience, and they cannot enjoy the comfort of their condition. It will add to your inward trouble when God is neglected and the world sought.

(3.) For eternal trouble. These things are temporal, and we hazard the loss of eternal things for them. We never leave God but with disadvantage to ourselves : Jonah ii. 8, ' They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.' Whenever you go off from God for a fleeting shadow, you loose an eternal joy. The comfort of the world

is but for a time; but our punishment is for ever. *Ea quæ ad usum diuturna esse non possunt, ad supplicium diuturna sunt.* Why should we look after those things that we cannot use for ever, and so wound and destroy our souls for ever? An immoderate seeking after temporal things will be our eternal ruin. Oh! that men would be wise, not to run so great a hazard for so small a pleasure! Riches are uncertain, but the love of them brings a sure damnation: Phil. ii. 19, 'Whose end is destruction, who mind earthly things.' Oh! say then, Shall I overturn the quietness of my life? shall I wound my conscience? shall I contract guilt and terror for the time to come, for that which will perish in the using and is uncertain in the enjoyment? Let us leave things that perish to men that perish. Shall I adventure my soul upon so vain a pursuit? Shall I lose eternal glory for a little vain-glory? Shall I make my children or kindred rich, and be poor to all eternity? Shall I bereave my soul of all my hopes, and of those eternal joys which God hath provided for them that love him, for a possession that is so uncertain and so ensnaring?

2. You should deal with your hearts by apt similitudes. The word will afford you several. Who would dwell in a ditch that may have a goodly house in a city? Who would leave treasures and feed off husks? Who would refuse a pleasant bride for a company of nasty harlots? Or who would sit on the stairs when he is called up to sit on the throne? I may enjoy God in Christ, and shall I think it my happiness to enjoy the world?

3. By comparisons. Compare the world with heaven. Here you have the fuller wealth, and but a foretaste of heaven, but the grapes of heaven are better than the vintage of the world, and these present enjoyments are sweeter and more sure than all honours and riches in the world. These things are gotten with care, kept with fear, and lost with grief. Reason thus with yourselves: What are these pleasures to the joys of the Spirit? These gratify the body, the beast, and are so disproportionable to reason itself, that when we have sucked out the quintessence of all earthly delights, they cannot yield a perfect contentment. Therefore Solomon saith, Prov. xiv. 13, 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' We see that laughter, by too much extension and dilatation of the spirits, causeth an aching in the sides; in the outward expressions of jollity God would show how painful it is; you will find carnal delights always go away, and leave some sad impressions. God's worst is better than the world's best; the groans of the Spirit are better than the joys of the world. The groans of the word never go away, but they leave a contentment and drop some sweetness; but the joys of the world never go away but clouds of sorrow are left behind. God's children rejoice in the midst of their mourning, and a glory hath risen upon their spirits even when they seem to be disconsolate in the eyes of the world.

4. By colloquies with God. Either by way of complaint that thou hast sinned and been ungrateful to God: Ps. lxxiii. 22, 'So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee.' Lord, this hath been my brutishness, to choose outward pleasure before communion with God, and to prefer the contentments of the world before the

delights of thy presence. Go and humble yourselves, and say, Lord, I have traded with vanity, and vexed myself in unprofitable pursuits; I have lived so long in the world, and have scarce minded the end wherefore I was sent into the world; as if I was put into the world only as leviathan in the sea, to take my fill of pleasure, and bathe my soul in carnal delights. Or else by way of thanksgiving, if the Lord hath taught thee better; as David, when he had chosen the Lord for his portion, Ps. xvi. 7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.' My own reason would never have taught me so much; that is a dim light; there were some obscure instincts to sway me to my happiness in general, but I might have groped about for the door of grace, but not have found it, but God gave me counsel. As Austin saith, *Errare per me potui, redire non potui*—Lord, I could go astray of myself, but I could not return of myself; so we could go astray fast enough out of the inclination of our own nature, but thou hast brought home a poor lost sheep on thine own shoulder; if I had been left to the counsels of my own heart, what would have become of me!

5. By soliloquy with your own souls. Expostulate with yourselves for your former errors and follies: Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? The end of those things is death.' Why should I melt away my spirit and emasculate my soul by stooping to such low contentments? What have I got by turning away from God, but a wound and disquiet in my conscience? Then charge your souls, issue out a practical decree, determine with yourselves, Well, now I see it is best to cleave to God, I will choose God for my chiefest good and utmost end. Oh! my soul, I see, with David, Ps. lxxiii. 28, 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God.' Therefore, farewell my pleasure, that pleased my childish age. When I was a child, I did as a child; it shall be my care now to enjoy communion with God, to be ruled by his word, to live to his glory. Those things that have intercepted the delight and contentment of my spirit, I will leave them to the men of the world.

SERMON VII.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
GEN. xxiv. 63.

SECONDLY, I am now to propose to you another object of meditation, which is the sinfulness of sin, an argument very necessary and practical. It is necessary in several respects. Partly to humble us; we have low thoughts of sin, and therefore we are but slight in the matter of humiliation. Until we understand the evil of sin sufficiently, we do not think it worthy of a tear or one hearty sigh; but when the understanding is once opened, the heart is deeply affected: Ps. vi. 6, 'I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my

couch with my tears.' We see such filthiness in sin as cannot be washed away without a deluge of sorrow. And it is necessary partly to awaken us to a greater care and conscience. Who would adventure upon a sin that doth but know and seriously consider what it is? Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' That will be the issue of such a consideration. The child will thrust his fingers into the fire that doth not know the pain of being scalded, or play with a snappish cur that hath not been bitten. Men are the more bold in adventuring upon sin because they do not know the danger. And it is necessary partly to urge us to come to Christ; none look to the brazen serpent but those that are stung, so none regard salvation but those that have been stung with some remorse in their consciences for the great evil of sin; when the poor soul feels the weight and burden of sin, then it will come to Christ. And it is necessary partly that we may more loathe ourselves when we come into the presence of God. Gracious men are most self-abhorring. Elijah covered himself with a mantle; Isaiah said, chap. vi. 5, 'Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.' Peter had such a sense of his sins that he says, Luke v. 8, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' Though there was something of excess and sin in these dispositions, that is, so far as they do exclude the encouragements of the gospel, but yet there is somewhat worthy of imitation, so far as they had a deep sense of their own unworthiness.

It is a necessary argument you see, and of much practical use, but very large, and will yield great plenty of thoughts; it will be harder to to know what we should omit in the consideration of it, than what we should pitch upon. I shall pursue it in this method—

1. I shall give you some general rules and observations concerning meditating on the sinfulness of sin.

2. What arguments you should propound to your souls to work your hearts to a sense of it.

I. For the general observations and rules concerning the sinfulness of sin.

1. None can know the utmost evil of sin perfectly but God. There is a kind of infiniteness in sin, because it is committed against an infinite object, and therefore a finite and limited understanding cannot conceive of the evil of it. The greatness of sin is known by the party offended and the party satisfying; both are infinite: 1 John iii. 20, 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.' As if he had said, Your heart doth not suggest half the evil that there is in sin, for the infinite God knows there is a great deal more evil in it than you can conceive. What is our light to the eye of God? We are the guilty parties, and so are apt to be partial in our own cause; but God is the party offended, and therefore he can best judge of the measure of the offence. Again, God's whole nature setteth him against it; we have but a drop of indignation against sin, God hath an ocean; he is most good, and therefore most hateth what is evil. The truth is, there is nothing properly an object of divine hatred but sin; it is wholly and only carried out against it, and therefore he seeth more evil in it than any creature possibly can.

2. Man's knowledge of sin is more clear at some times than at others

When conscience is opened there is not a greater load and burden. David could say, Ps. xl. 12, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me.' It is a rule in philosophy, *Elementa non gravitant in suis locis*—Elements are not heavy in their proper place. A fish in the water feeleth no weight, though it would break the back of a man if that weight of water lay upon him; so wicked men are in their element when they are in the heat of their sinful pursuit; here they sport and play, and feel not the burden of sin. Sometimes when men come to die conscience is touched, and then they cry out of the burden of sin: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin;' then their hearts are filled with a sad despair; this makes death to be dreadful and terrible to the soul, and keeps the soul in bondage: Heb. ii. 15, 'Through fear of death they were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' But certainly it shall be at the day of judgment, then we shall see the folly of it; conscience shall then be extended and enlarged, and the sinner shall remember the wickedness of his past life. You will then find the devil, that is now a tempter, will prove an accuser. Oh! what kind of apprehensions will you have when the devil shall come forth and plead, Lord, adjudge this person to me; I never died for him, I never shed my blood for him, I could promise him no heaven and glory, yet he easily hearkened to my temptations? *Tuus esse noluit per gratiam, sit meus per culpam; ostende tales tuos numerarios, O Christe.* He would not be thine for all the grace and kindness thou didst show him, and all the rewards thou didst propound and promise to him. Then all disguises will be laid aside. A little consideration and search, and prayer for conviction for the present, would help us to the same apprehensions. If conscience should be now extended as it will be then, we should soon be weary of our lives. At least, do not rest in your own valuation and account, for then the secrets of all hearts shall be opened.

3. The less sin appeareth, many times it is the greater sins are not to be measured by the smallness of the matter of them, but by the offence done to God. The first sin to a vulgar and common apprehension was but the eating of an apple; it seemed a small matter if we did not consider the offence against God. It is an aggravation mentioned by the prophet, Amos ii. 6, 'They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;' that is, upon so small an occasion, or for such a contemptible matter they would oppress the poor. The lesser the occasion and temptation is, the greater the impudence, the imprudence and the unkindness; the greater the impudence that they will dare God to his face for a trifle; the greater is the imprudence that we will hazard our souls for a mean thing; the greater is the unkindness that we will stand with God for a little. Sins that are accounted small in the matter of them have been overtaken with the sad revenges of God; he that denied a crumb could not receive a drop of water to cool his tongue. The contempt of God is the greater when we break with God for a small matter, and transgress his commandments upon every light occasion. In short, sin is in no case small, but only in regard of God's mercy and Christ's merits.

4. None are exempted from bewailing the evil of sin. Though the children of God shall never feel it, nor have the dregs of God's displeasure wrung out to them for it, yet they must bewail the evil that there is in sin. The death and merit of Christ doth not change the nature of sin nor put less evil into it. Why should we look upon it with a different eye after conversion than we did before? Sin is still damning in its own merit and nature, and it is still the violation of an holy righteous law, and an affront to the holy God, and an inconvenience to the precious soul. Sin is the same as it was before, though the person be not the same. Nay, the children of God are not altogether exempted from the effects of sin neither; it is a disease, though not a death; and who would not groan under the heat of a burning fever though he be assured of life? God hath still a bridle upon you to keep the soul in awe; and though the godly can never lose their right in the covenant, that doth remain, yet they may lose the fruition of it, and this is enough to make a child of God mourn. Notwithstanding all the privileges of grace, you may be branded, though not executed; and though the Lord hath made them vessels of mercy, yet he doth not use and employ them as vessels of honour, but they are set aside as useless vessels. Sin will still be inconvenient, it will bring disgrace to religion and discomfort to your souls, and furnish the triumphs of hell, and make Satan rejoice, and eclipse the light of God's countenance; and who can brook the loss of God's favour and of intimate communion with him without sadness and bemoaning his case? I may ask you that question, Job xv. 11, 'Are the consolations of God small with thee?' Do you make so little reckoning of those rich comforts of the Holy Ghost? Though you cannot be damned, for 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ,' Rom. viii. 1, yet your pilgrimage may be made very uncomfortable; and he that prizeth communion with God would not lose the comfort of it for the least moment. Besides, if there were no inconvenience, yet love is motive enough to a gracious person? Where is your love? Christians, you sin against mercy; the warm beams of mercy should melt the heart: Ezek. xxxvi. 31, 'Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for all your abominations.' As long as there is love in the heart, you can never want an argument to represent the odiousness of sin. Put the matter in a temporal case; it would be ill reasoning for an heir to say, I know my father will not disinherit me, therefore I do not care how I offend him. Where is your love to God if you do not hate sin? Ps. xcvi. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' Though your right in the covenant be safe, yet you should still have the evil of your own doings in remembrance.

5. Many speak much of the evil of sin in prayers and confessions, yet loathe it never the more, yea, the less. What should be the reason of it? All their thoughts are spent in empty declamations and forms of satire or anger, and these do not subdue affections. Or else it may be we only paint sin in our fancies, and that worketh no more than a picture or image, which doth not allure and draw love so much as a living beauty; it only pleases and tickles a little. Things foul in their nature are pleasant in their picture and description. What more

dreadful than war? and yet what more pleasant than in a strain of poetry or rhetoric, or in a lively picture to describe the fury and heat of battle? What more ugly than a toad? and yet a toad painted to the life pleaseth. So when we merely paint sin by the help of the imagination or fancy, it moves only the lighter part of the soul. It is good to be rational in our considerations, and where there is the less art, it leaveth the deeper stroke upon the heart. Imagination and fancy is a great instrument in the work of meditation, but still it must be wisely ordered and guided by reason. Sound conviction by God's blessing doth the work, or else they rest in generals; they are not serious, particular practical discourses, brought home to their own case against the sin they are struggling with. Lusts take the throne by turns, and that our thoughts may fall with the greatest sense and feeling upon our souls, it is good to bend the strength of our thoughts against our iniquity. It is good to be particular, to fetch the aggravations of sin out of thine own heart, or else men soar high, and in affected strains. To draw an arrow always to the head breaketh the bow. Sin, Christ, heaven, and hell admit of an hyperbole, but yet a man may strain too much, that a soul may be discouraged by it, and much hurt may be done. Men look upon matters of religion as abstracted ideas, and high strains, and matters of fancy. Certainly the more simple and natural your thoughts are, the more working. Forced, high-flown arguments, if they raise the affections, it is but like fire in stubble, that flashes for the present, not like a fire furnished with fit materials, that yields a constant heat. Modest arguments fitted to our present state do better. I will bring it to the matter in hand. Men usually overlash, while they should set out sin as exceeding heinous, and forget those material and natural arguments that should work the soul into a hatred of it. That saying of Anselm is justly censured by Mr Fox, *Si hic peccati pudorem, et illic inferni horrorem, &c.* If here were the filthiness of sin, and there were the horrors of hell, I had rather be in hell without sin than in heaven with it. These expressions do not come from a modest virtue, but the over-daring of fancy, and besides they leave a snare and temptation upon weak christians. God doth not put us to that trial to choose hell or sin, and, as Mr Fox urgeth, God in the gospel will bring sinners though sanctified to glory. Or else if they use solid reasons and arguments, they rest in their own discourse and reason, and then it is said, Job vi. 25, 'What doth your arguing reprove?'

II. Having premised these observations, I will give you a few arguments whereby you may come to understand a little of that evil that there is in sin. And they shall be drawn—(1.) From the nature of sin; (2.) From the effects of sin; (3.) From the circumstances and aggravations wherewith sin may be clothed.

1. From the nature of sin, and so it may be considered as to God and as to ourselves.

[1.] Consider the nature of sin as to God.

(1.) It is an aversion from God, a turning from the chiefest good to the chiefest evil. The very nature of sin is punishment enough to itself; it is misery enough to depart from God, the centre of rest, and the fountain of life and blessing. It is a dishonour to God and a dis-

advantage to ourselves. A dishonour to God to prefer carnal sweets and the satisfaction of sin before the comforts of his presence, and yet this is the root of every sin : 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.' Every natural man loves the pleasures of sin more than communion with God. You are angry at Judas for betraying Christ, and at the Jews for preferring Barabbas before Christ, a murderer before a saviour, and yet you do the same almost every day : Job xv. 1, 'Why doth thine heart carry thee away ? and what do thine eyes wink at ?' You forfeit the best things for the basest, as children part with a pearl for an apple or a nut. Nay, I may go higher ; it is a preferring the devil before God. Sins are called his lusts : John viii. 44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do ;' and duty is enforced by God's law, and will you gratify the devil and displease God ? You will find him to be an ill master at length. He that now tempts will hereafter accuse, and that for this very thing, that you were so easy to be entreated to leave God and follow him ; as Austin brings him in pleading against us to God, Though thou didst try him by thy grace, and direct him by thy law, though thy Son did die for him, yet he would not be thine, and therefore let him be mine : I never died, and shed my blood for him, I could not promise him heaven and glory ; I only brought him the bait and temptation, and he easily hearkened unto me. When the tempter shall thus become an accuser, you will know what it is to turn from God and to prefer the devil before a Saviour. Then it is a great disadvantage to yourselves ; you turn your back upon your own happiness. Sin will make you shy of God's presence, and it will make you hated of God, that he will not endure your presence ; he will have no communion with you, nor you with him. It is the comfort of God's children, whatever befalls them in the world, that they can go in secret, and their eyes can pour out tears to God ; but now God will turn away from you, God who is the centre of your rest, the God of your mercies ; and then to whom will you unbosom yourselves ? Isa. lix. 2 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.' They set you at a distance from God, and God at a distance from you. Oh ! reason thus with yourselves : Shall I commit that which will cause me not to endure God, nor God to endure me ? that I shall not care to have to do with him, nor he with me ? Sin has always been attended with a casting out from God. It cast the angels out of heaven, where God is present in a glorious manner ; it cast Adam out of paradise, where God was present by his own image ; and it cast Cain out of the church, where God was present in his ordinances and worship, and it will make God cast you out as an abominable branch. If you are not sensible of this at present, yet you will be sensible hereafter, when God shall say, 'Depart, ye cursed.'

(2.) It is enmity against God. It is not only a turning from God, but an opposition to and turning against God : Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The more the heart is set upon sin, the more it hateth God formally or virtually. The soul hates God as a lawgiver though not as a creator, because he comes in with a restraint

between us and our carnal desires: Col. i. 21, 'You were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works.' In the original it is *ἐχθροὺς τῇ διαβολῇ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς*, 'by your mind in wicked works;' because your minds were set upon wicked works, you were vexed God should restrain your desires; for we cannot endure one should restrain the exercise of our carnal affections. Now this enmity is mutual; God hates us, and we hate God. On man's part it is driven on with fury, he doth so hate God that he seeks the destruction of his being; as he that hates another seeketh the destruction of his goods, life, and honour, so he that hates God seeks to un-God him. The sinner wishes there were no such being as a God in the world: Ps. xiv. 1, 'The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.' The heart is the seat of desires; these are the fool's wishes; it is a sweet pleasing thought to him. Though he cannot get rid of these impressions of a Godhead, yet he wishes he could. A man that would live at liberty could wish there was no judge to call him to an account; he could let loose the reins of vile affections if there were no God; were it not for this restraint he could live as he list. Nay, they deny God in their lives: Titus i. 16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.' Sin in effect doth lay God aside, and, to put the greater affront upon him, it sets up something base in his stead; it sets up the belly for God: Phil. iii. 19, 'Whose god is their belly;' the choicest respects of the soul run out upon the sensual part. Or it sets up a little wealth for God. Or if sin cannot take away the being of God, yet it strikes at his honour, and would make him to be an unjust or an evil God. Sin deprives God of the honour of all his attributes; of his omniscieny, for though we are ashamed to sin before man, yet, though God seeth all things, we do not blush if we can carry on a wicked design under the veil of darkness, and dig deep to hide our counsels from the Lord. Doth such a sinner think God is all-seeing and all-knowing? Jer. ii. 26, 'A thief is ashamed, when he is found;' when the eye of man hath surprised him, but alas! we are always found of God. It robs him of his omnipotency and power, as if he were impotent and weak, as if we could make our party good with him. The apostle useth a smart question, 1 Cor. x. 22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' As if he had said, Man, consider what thou doest; by sinning thou dost enter into the lists with God, and art thou able to deal with him? It is a contest with God, as if we could arm our lusts against his mighty angels. Will you contend with him that can command legions of angels? When you go about to sin, you do as it were wage war with heaven, and enter into combat with God. That is the reason the Lord by the prophet asketh sinners, What do you think? Is there such a thought in thee as if thou wast able to deal with me? Ezek. xxii. 14, 'Can thy heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee?' Are you able to grapple with my omnipotent arm, and snatch judgment out of my hands, and oppose my mighty angels? Can thy heart endure when my almighty hand shall seize upon thee, and divine displeasure shall break out against thy soul? The angel when contending with the devil 'durst not bring a railing accusation,' Jude 9. He knew the mighty God would

avenge him, therefore he durst not be malicious; yet we dare enter the lists with heaven. Thus is sin an enmity against God; it would either have no God, or an impotent, unjust, unwise God. Nay, there is an enmity in sin against every person in the Holy Trinity. Against God the Son: When Christ came into the world, his great work was to dissolve the works of Satan: 1 John iii. 8, 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil;' that he might unravel all those webs which Satan had been weaving, and you strive as much as in you lies to set it up, and make his death of none effect. Heb. x. 29, 'Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing?' You make a low thing of it, tread it underfoot; it is an allusion to the sprinkling of the lintels of the door, but they sprinkled it on the threshold. And it puts an affront upon the Holy Ghost; it grieveth and vexeth the Spirit of God; it is a setting up lust against lust, and a direct thwarting of his motions and impulses: Gal. v. 17, 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.' You do as it were reproach him, and say he shall do no good upon your hearts, this shall not gain upon you. Moses, when he speaks of a presumptuous sinner, saith, Num. xv. 30, 'The soul that doth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord;' when you do thus deliberately sin, you do as it were reproach the Spirit of God. Likewise on God's part; he hateth us too, and though he be full of kindness, yet he cannot give sin a good look: Hab. i. 13, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.' God loveth all his creatures, and loveth to look upon them, but he hateth that which is properly man's creature, and that is sin; there is no antipathy greater than between these two natures. You may sooner reconcile fire and water, light and darkness, cold and heat, than God and sin. The enmity of all creatures is as their beings are, finite and limited; but God's being is infinite; his whole nature sets him against sin; therefore there is no comparison which serves to set out the indignation the Lord hath against sin, there is no antipathy like it.

(3.) Sin is a transgression of the law. Do but consider what a disgrace sin puts upon the law that forbiddeth it; it doth in effect condemn the law, as if it were not good and useful and righteous, as if it were an idle restraint. There is a notable expression, James iv. 11, 'He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law;' that is, he puts this affront upon the law, as if it were injurious, as if God were not righteous in making such a law against passion and evil-speaking. Therefore Nathan comes to rouse up David's conscience, and tells him his sin: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' In every sin there are some implicit thoughts by which the law is disvalued and disapproved; we secretly tax it of envy, folly, and rigour, as if God had dealt harshly with his creatures; they look upon it as a weak and simple law: Ezek. xviii. 26, 'Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal.' The devil, when he inspired the first sin, would suggest to our first parents as if

God had envied the perfection of man by prescribing a law to him : Gen. iii. 5, ' God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.'

[2.] Consider the nature of sin with respect to yourselves, and so the evil of it appears in these respects.

(1.) It is a degradation of your natures, and sets you beneath the rank of men, and equals you with beasts : Ps. xlix. 12, ' Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not ; he is like the beasts that perish.' In the original it is, he abideth not for a night. Adam sinned the very same day that he was created. So Ps. xxxii. 9, ' Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, that have no understanding ;' implying that inconsiderate and rash men, that never consider their ways, are like the horse and mule, which are void of understanding, and are guided only by their own instinct. To what use do men put their reason that do not reflect upon their consciences ? It would be an odd sight to see a man with the head of a mule or the feet of a horse, yet there is a greater affinity between the body of a beast and the body of a man than between a beast and a man's soul ; the former are in the same degree of being, as material substances.

(2.) It is the defilement of your natures. The scripture, when it speaks of sin, sets it out by ' filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness,' James i. 21 ; an allusion to the brook Kedron, where the garbages of the sacrifices were wont to be cast. So it is called a blot. These notions are to heighten our souls into a detestation of it. *Omne malum naturam, aut timore, aut pudore perfudit.* There is such a filthiness in sin, that it is ashamed of itself, and therefore it always seeketh for a disguise. There needeth no argument against it, but to be seen in its proper colours ; it either seeketh a show of virtue, or a veil of darkness. Pray why doth the adulterer seek for the twilight (Prov. vii. 9, ' In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night') but that he is ashamed of sin ? Sin is so monstrous and deformed that it seeks to hide itself from those that love it most, from the conscience of the party that committeth it, or from the sight of others. Nay, there is such a turpitude in it that some sins beget shame in their very name and mention. The apostle speaks of a sin that ' is not so much as named among the gentiles,' 1 Cor. v. 1 ; and Eph. v. 3, ' But fornication, and all uncleanness, and covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.' Socrates hid his face whenever he spake against wantonness.

(3.) It is the bondage of your natures. Oh ! what worser captivity can there be than this, for reason to be put out of its empire, and that you should be under the command of vile affections, a slave to pride, and a drudge to your lusts and carnal pleasures ? Sin is a bondage here and hereafter ; here it binds you with the cords of vanity, and hereafter with the chains of darkness. This is the preposterous judgment of men, that they look upon the service of God as their greatest bondage : Ps. ii. 3, ' Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us ;' but then it is otherwise, there is no greater freedom than to be employed in the service of God, and to be free for the actions of a holy life : Ps. cxix. 45, ' I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.' The bonds of duty are not gyves, but ornaments ;

and there is no greater bondage than to be a slave to sin : 2 Peter ii. 19, ' While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption ; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage.' What a bondage is this, to be a vassal of hell, to be at the command of our lusts, a slave to pride and uncleanness, and we know not how to help it !

SERMON VIII.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
 GEN. xxiv. 63.

2. ANOTHER argument to prove the evil of sin is taken from the effects of sin. We being in a lower sphere of understanding, know causes by their effects : Jer. ii. 19, ' Know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God ; ' when they had seen the sad effects of it, their cities wasted and destroyed. And where shall we not find the sad effects of sin ? Survey the story of sin since it came into the world.

The first news we hear of sin is in the fall of the angels, and what a dreadful instance is that ? The angels, that were the most noble part of the universe, the courtiers of heaven, and as soon as they had sinned, in a moment from angels they were made devils, and cast down into the pit of darkness, for one aspiring thought against God's imperial majesty. If we should see ten thousand princes executed in one day, we would wonder at the cause of it, and yet this is but a short resemblance of this case. Think of those princes of the creation, those morning-stars, those sons of God ; now if one sin cast down these angels, what will become of us who have millions of sins ? If God be so angry with the nobles, how may the scullions tremble ? If God will cast angels out of heaven for one sin of thought, what will become of us poor dwellers in clay, who are but a little enlivened dust, that may be soon crumbled into nothing ? Yet Christ was not made an angel for angels, as he was made a man for me. If you should hear of a drop of gall that should embitter a whole ocean of sweetness, you would wonder at the pestilential influence of it ; here one sin of thought embittered the whole ocean of the angelical sweetness.

The next news we hear of sin is in the fall of man. Who would taste of that poison that poisoned all mankind at once ? Adam did but taste of the forbidden fruit, and all his posterity were poisoned ; in the morning he was God's favourite, and in the evening the devil's slave ; he slept not one night in innocency. Nay, this is not all, you shall see the venom of sin went further ; it did not only ruin all mankind, but it gave a crack to the whole creation. All the creatures groan under sin : Rom. viii. 20, 21, ' For the creature is made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.' When

God looked upon the creatures that he had made, he saw all was good, but when Solomon looketh upon God's works, he seeth nothing but vanity ; what is the reason of this ? Sin intervened, so that the creatures are not only the monuments of God's power, but of man's rebellion.

The next dreadful instance of sin is in the old world, and there all mankind except eight persons were swept away at once.

The next news of sin is in the instance of Sodom, and there sin was of such an evil influence that it made God to rain hell out of heaven ; as one expresses it, *Gehennam misit e cœlo* : Gen. xix. 24, 'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven ;' *dominus a domino*, the Lord Christ from the Lord Jehovah. Jesus Christ himself will become the executioner upon such a wicked people.

Go from Sodom to Sion, and further trace the story of sin. Who can read the Lamentations without lamentation, or run over the story of Jerusalem's sorrows with dry eyes ? There was not such a people under heaven both for mercies and judgments, the dearly beloved of his soul given up to a sad ruin ! Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ?' What is the reason of all this but sin ?

Will you go further, and see the effects of sin upon the Son of God himself, who was the Son of his love, 'the man God's fellow,' as he is called, Zech. xiii. 7 ; his associate ; they solaced themselves mutually in each other : Prov. viii. 30, 'There was I by him, as one brought up with him ; I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.' See what sin did to him that was but imputed to him. Look into the garden, see him in his agonies ; go to Golgotha, see Christ hanging on the cross, if you would know sin. Gold and silver would not ransom us, nothing would serve but the blood of Christ. Oh ! come and wonder. The boundless sea of the Godhead was stopped by the bank of sin. For a candle to be put out is no such matter, but for the sun to be quenched and darkened, this is dreadful. So for a poor creature to be forsaken is nothing, but when the Son of God shall complain that he cannot actually enjoy the comfort of the Godhead, when the Sun of righteousness shall complain of an eclipse, and of a suspension of consolation, this is dreadful. Though the human nature recoiled out of a just abhorrency of the sufferings he was to endure, and he came to his Father, Mat. xxvi. 39, 'O my Father ! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ;' and again, ver. 42 ; and again, ver. 44, saying the same words ; yet divine justice would not bate him one farthing. What then would have become of us if Jesus Christ had not caught the blow ?

Then survey common experience. If all the charnels in the world were emptied upon one heap, and all the bones of all that ever died were laid together, you might say, All these were slain by sin. Whenever you see sin, you may entertain it as Elisha did Hazael, Thou art the murderer. All diseases, pestilences, wars, famines, tumults, earthquakes, these are but the births of sin ; it hath laid houses desolate, wasted kingdoms, destroyed cities. Sin may say, Zeph. iii. 6, 7, 'I have cut off the nations ; their towers are desolate : I have made their streets waste, that none passeth by ; their cities are destroyed so that there is no man, there is none inhabitant : I said, Surely thou wilt fear me ;' that which we feel we may fear.

But we may come nearer home. Do but consider the effects of it within yourselves in the terrors of conscience. What a sorry creature is man when God arms his own thoughts against him, and sets home one sin upon his conscience! He longs for death rather than life. Heman, who was a child of God, complains, Ps. lxxxviii. 16, 17, 'Thy fierce wrath goeth over me, thy terrors have cut me off; they came round about me daily like water, they compassed me about together.' What a sad thing is this, that a man should be *magor missabib*, fear round about, that his own thoughts should be his hell, and wherever he goes, he carries his hell with him! When he lies down in his bed, hell lies down with him; when he walks out into the field or garden, hell walks with him; when he goes about his business, hell goes with him. Sin is its own executioner; however it smiles in the first address, yet afterwards it scourgeth the soul with horror and despair.

Consider the horrors in death. There is a natural abhorrency from death as an evil to our life and being, but that which increaseth horror is sin: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin.' Oh! what agonies will it raise in our souls when we come to die if we die in our sins! Though we were immortal, yet sin is so great an evil that it were not to be committed; but when we are to die, and give an account, how doth it fill the soul with horror and diffidence and shame and anger! Some wicked men indeed die stupid and careless, at least doubtful; and some may be foolhardy; like a man that fetcheth a leap in the dark over a bottomless gulf he doth not know where his feet may light. A wicked man is like a tree that grows on the bank of a river; he is on the borders of hell, and when he dies, he falls into it. When they come to die, sin will be accusing, conscience witnessing, the law condemning, Satan insulting; heaven will be shut up against them, and hell enlarging her mouth. Oh! how will the body curse the soul for an ill guide, and the soul curse the body as a wicked instrument! It is a sad parting when these two loving friends, body and soul, part with curses, and can never expect to meet again but in torment. A godly man, when he dies, takes a fair leave of his body, and says, Farewell, flesh! He goes down to the grave with the covenant of grace in his hand, My flesh shall rest in hope; but a wicked man dreadeth it, that ever his body and soul must be united again; they part with an expectation never to meet but in flames.

But all this is nothing to the everlasting estate that follows after it. Consider either the loss or the pain; both will represent the evil of sin. Consider the loss; by sinning thou lovest God and heaven and glory for a trifle; for a little dreggy pleasure thou thrustest away eternal joys. Thou dost as it were say, I care not for heaven, so I may have carnal satisfaction; as of Esau it is said, Gen. xxv. 34, 'Thus Esau despised his birthright;' it is not worth a mess of pottage. With what sad reflections wilt thou declaim against sin when thou shalt see the holy ones of God stand at the right hand of Christ, and thou art haled to thy own place! How will thy heart turn upon thee for thy own folly then! As one dreamed that his heart was boiling for his sins in a kettle of scalding lead, and it cried out to him, 'Εγὼ σοὶ τούτου αἰτία, It is I that have been the cause of this. Were it not for sin I might have had a place in Abraham's bosom, but now I am going to everlasting torment; then you will know what sin is. Every sinner is

as a mad gamester ; he ventures a kingdom, the largest and fairest that ever was, at every throw, and he is sure to lose it too. Then consider the pains of hell ; they will set out the greatness of sin ; and consider them either in regard of God's ordination or appointment, or in regard of your own feeling. (1.) In regard of God's ordination and appointment. That the good God, who is meekness and sweetness and bowels itself, should adjudge his creature to eternal torments ; certainly there is some cause. We pity a dog if he should be cast into a furnace for half an hour ; yet those tender bowels of mercy shrink not up at the sight of sinners, though man be the work of his own hands ; and though the creature screech and howl under these pains, yet he will not lessen and take them away. Surely there is some great evil in sin that hath tied up the hands of mercy. (2.) Consider it in regard of yourselves and your own feeling. Oh ! for a short temporal pleasure thou runnest the hazard of eternal pains. We that cannot endure the scratch of a pin or the aching of a tooth, how shall we endure the torment of so many thousand years, and yet still to look for more ? Heb. x. 31, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' Mark the attribute, 'the living God,' who lives for ever to see the vengeance accomplished. As long as God is God, hell will be hell ; there can never be any hope that God's being can be destroyed, or that there will be a cessation of those torments and pains. God ever liveth to reward the godly and to punish the wicked.

3. The third sort of arguments are from the aggravations of sin, that may enhance it, and show the greatness of it to your thoughts.

[1.] It is natural to us. It is necessary to reflect upon this circumstance, because it is the hardest matter in our humiliation to be sufficiently affected with our birth-sin. Evils that come by accident are objects of pity, but evils of nature are objects of hatred. We pity a dog that is poisoned, but we hate a toad that is poisonous by nature. Oh ! how may the Lord hate us that have evil in our nature ! It is not accidental to us. It is the great fondness of men to make that an excuse which is in itself the greatest aggravation. Some will say when they are reprov'd for sin, I cannot do otherwise ; it is my nature. This will be the cause of thy ruin without an interest in Christ. The waters that come out of a pure fountain may be soiled and dirtied, but they will be clear again ; but a puddle that runneth out of a dunghill will be always nasty and filthy. Our sins are not by accident, but by nature ; they are not like the muddying of a clear fountain, but like the unsavoury liquor that comes out of a dunghill. Original sin (however you think of it) is the sin of sins ; we are born with such a sin, and it is worse than any other sin. Actual sins are but as a transient act, whereby there is a violence offered to one of God's commandments, but this is a constant, rooted, abiding contrariety to God's own nature. Actual sins are a blow and away, but this is a remaining enmity. Actual sins are like a fit of anger and displeasure, soon up and soon down, but this is a rooted hatred. This is the cause of all other sins, the bitter root that diffuseth a poison into all the branches. All other sins that a man commits are but original sin acted and exercised. Look, as in the art of numbering, the greatest number that can be numbered is but one multiplied, so the whole fry

of actual transgressions is but original sin multiplied, this spawn diffused and spread abroad; all those traitorous actions that we are guilty of in the course of our lives are all summed up in this sinning sin.

[2.] Our sins are many. We sin in praying, in eating, in plunging, in trading; and any one of these is enough to undo a world. The angels became devils for one sin, for one sin of thought, a proud thought against God's empire and greatness, and for this they were thrown into places of darkness. What ruin then will a great many sins procure to thy soul! If single sins seem light in themselves, yet what are they all together? There is nothing lighter than one sand, and yet nothing heavier than sand in a great quantity. A gnat, a fly, a locust are poor inconsiderable creatures, yet when they come in multitudes they are called God's great army, and destroy whole countries: Joel ii. 11, 'The Lord shall utter his voice before his army, for his camp is very great.' If every pore in the body were but pricked with a pin, the veins would soon be emptied of blood. One sin was deadly, but what are they altogether, when from top to toe there is nothing but sores and putrefaction? Herod was eaten up with lice, a small inconsiderable kind of vermin, yet the abundance of them destroyed him; so though sins seem small in themselves, yet when they come in clusters, how soon will they devour and eat out the life and comfort of the soul! Ps. xl. 12, 'Innumerable evils have encompassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me.' And if David may say so, may not we much more? Nothing can be little that is committed against the great God. But suppose them small, yet they are a company. Oh! this will make your hearts fail. The little finger of sin is weighty, but when all the loins of it are laid upon the soul, how great will the burden be! Look upon all the troubles of the servants of God, and you will find they were first occasioned by a small sin, as Mr Peacock's by eating too freely at a meal; but when innumerable evils shall compass you about, that wherever you look there is sin—if you look on duty there is sin, if you look on your calling there is sin, if you look on your recreations there is sin, if you look on the hours of your repast there is sin—oh! this will make your hearts fail indeed.

[3.] If they have been such as have been committed against knowledge. There is more of the nature of sin in such acts, for the nature of sin is *ἀνομία*, a transgression of the law. Now the more we know the law the greater is the transgression; according to the sense we have of the law so the offence is elevated and raised. He that hath knowledge is *magis particeps legis*, the law is a piece of himself; it is impressed upon his conscience, and he offereth violence to the principles of his own bosom. This is the reason why the children of God use this aggravation; as David: Ps. li. 6, 'In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' God had taught David wisdom and some spiritual skill, and yet he sinned against him. So Christ: John xv. 22, 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin;' that is, none in comparison. According to the proportion of light, so the rate of sin riseth; the more you know of the law, the more you sin against the law. It is sad to put the finger in nature's eye, but it is

worse to sin against the light of the word, that will make sin rise high indeed. Then there is more of enmity and malice in it. When a man will break through the convictions and restraints of conscience, it is a sign a man does love sin, and sins for its own sake ; which is sensibly and clearly discerned in apostates, who are carried on with most wilful malice and rage against the truth which once they professed. *Apostatæ sunt maximi osiores sui ordinis.* Hosea v. 2, 'The revolvers are profound to make slaughter.' Forward professors, when they revolt, turn violent persecutors. They set themselves against the light. Alexander was once a disciple, yet he 'made shipwreck of the faith,' 1 Tim. i. 19, 20 ; and he is the man that must set on the multitude against Paul : Acts xix. 33, 'And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward.' The same man is intended, for by the epistles to Timothy we learn that he dwelt at Ephesus, where Timothy was when those epistles were directed to him. Now the Jews set him up as the fittest accuser of Paul ; he knew his doctrine, and he must appear to turn all the blame of the uproar on the christians. Once more we read of this Alexander as a desperate adversary to the truth : 2 Tim. iv. 21, 'Alexander the coppersmith did me much hurt.' Certainly their rage and malice is the greater because of the abundance of light which they have forsaken. No vinegar is so tart as that which is made of the sweetest wine ; so when knowledge is once corrupted, it fills the heart with most rage : Prov. xxviii. 4, 'They that forsake the law praise the wicked.' They not only commit sin, but like it in others ; they are the most violent and forward men to defend wicked ways and unjust courses. Sins against knowledge have the greatest marks of the divine vengeance and displeasure. When men abuse knowledge, God giveth them up to sottishness, madness, hardness of heart, or despair. To sottishness : Rom. i. 21-23, 'Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful ; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened : professing themselves wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things' Heathens, that had some common knowledge of the divine nature, when they sinned against their light, God darkened their hearts and made them more foolish. The heathens that were most civil and had most light were given up to the most beastly errors about the nature of God. The Romans worshipped fevers, passions, and paltry gods ; the Egyptians, thunder and the sun. Or else the Lord gives them up to madness. The most moral heathens were the sorest persecutors, as Severus, Antoninus ; they abused their light, and therefore God gave them up to fury and madness against his ways. Or else they are given up to hardness of heart. Iron oft heated and oft quenched groweth harder. God justly punisheth contempt of light with obduracy ; when a man hath had frequent convictions, and still he queneth them, he grows the harder. Or else the Lord gives them up to a sad despair. God opens their consciences, and makes them to see how they have gone against their own light. Much knowledge not digested is like meat in the stomach, that, being not concocted, breedeth the colic ; it breedeth sad gripes in the conscience.

[4.] If they are committed against love. It is sad to sin against God's laws, it is more to sin against God's love. Suppose it be but against common love, against God that giveth us food and raiment, rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. The apostle calls this a 'despising the goodness of God,' Rom. ii. 4, either by employing it to vile uses, or else by a careless slighting and not taking notice of it. You that slight the kindness of God do as it were say, God shall not gain me to his ways for all this. Every sin is not committed against knowledge, but every sin is against love and bowels. Christ may say to every sinner, as he said to the Jews, John x. 32, 'Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me?' Thus the Lord may plead, I have given you protection and provision, and food and raiment, for which of these do you violate my law and put such an affront upon me? It is I that have been so liberal to you, in giving you the fruits of the earth, the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air; it is I that have caused your sheep to bring forth thousands, and your fields to yield meat; and will you return upon me with my own weapons? Malefactors are punished in the same things in which they offend, and you seek to do me despite by my own blessings, as if I did you wrong when I did you good. But much more if you sin against special love. You that are Christ's favourites, every sin of yours is as a stab at the heart of mercy; as when the multitude forsook him, says Christ to his disciples, John vi. 61, 'Will ye also go away?' That went to his heart. God reckoneth upon you that he shall have much service and obedience from you, and disappointment is the worst kind of vexation: Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord;' Isa. lxiii. 8, 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' That which in others is but single fornication in you is adultery; others sin against common mercies, but you against the bowels of Christ; they are not thankful for a piece of bread, nor you for the bread of life. As Absalom said to Hushai, 2 Sam. xvi. 17, 'Is this thy kindness to thy friend?' so is this the fruit of all those tender loves and mercies which God hath meted out to you? It is unnatural, as if a hen should bring forth the egg of a crow.

[5.] If it be against vows and covenants, against frequent and reiterated promises and purposes. By such sinning you break double chains—God's and your own. It is not a simple sin, but treachery; Judah hath dealt treacherously: Jer. iii. 7, 'Her treacherous sister Judah saw it.' You commit a sin under the show of friendship. Obedience is due, though it were never promised, but it is a help to our weakness that we vow. It is God's condescension to make a covenant; his laws bind, though we do not seal and subscribe to them; they bind as a law though not as a covenant; but vows and promises make the covenant more explicit. A lawful thing vowed and dedicated to God could not be alienated without sin. Ananias was smitten dead for receding from his purpose: Acts v. 4, 'Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.' But much more in vows in things necessary that are not in your power. When you have promised obedience, you

have promised a thing necessary. God might require duty from you, and punish you for the violation of his law, whether you vowed or no. It was never left to your pleasure to deal falsely in your covenant with men; it is the sin the Lord doth always avenge. Such solemn obligations should be sacred and inviolable; what then is it to break vows with God after we have solemnly renewed our covenant with him?

[6.] If it be against former experiences, and that either of the sweetness of grace or the evil of sin. (1.) Of the sweetness of grace: The Lord takes it ill that you should sin against him after 'you have tasted his good word,' Heb. vi. 5. It is a mighty affront to Jesus Christ to go off from him after we have had experience of the sweetness of his ways. The apostle calls this a 'denying the Lord that bought them,' 2 Peter. ii. 1; that this, *in foro ecclesie*, in the court of the church, and with respect to the outward covenant that is between the Lord and every church member. An apostate doth as it were proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ is no good master; that, after he hath made trial of both, the devil is a better master than Christ, for he seemeth to have known both masters. So we find the Lord contests with his people about their provocations: Jer. ii. 5, 'What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanities, and are become vain?' You have gone far from me, and departed from my ways; what is the matter? Did I ever do you hurt? have I ever been a land of darkness to you, or a hard master? So Micah vi. 3, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' When we go off from God, we do as it were proclaim that we have found just discouragement in the ways of Christ, as a man that goeth off from you sheweth his expectation is deceived in you. (2.) If you have done it after experience of the evil of sin. When a man hath found the bitterness of sin, suppose it be of drunkenness or anger, when it hath weakened his body and broken his peace, and yet he runs into it again, it is a sad aggravation; as that king that would adventure another captain and his fifty when one captain and his fifty were consumed with fire from heaven, 2 Kings i. 10, 11. When we will be tampering with the carnal sweets again which have cost us so much trouble, when we have found the hand of God meet us in a carnal way, yet we will venture again, and enter into the lists with him, and set ourselves against him, it is as the breaking of a bone in the same place: James iv. 2, 'Ye lust, and have not, yet kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not.' This is a plain contest with God. when, after ye have been broken in pieces, you will again gather and associate yourselves, as it is Isa. viii. 9, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and you shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces.' Thus the children of Israel argued with the Reubenites and Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh: Josh. xxii. 17, 18, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day (though there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord), but that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord?'

[7.] If sin has been committed against a special relation, as suppose

that of a magistrate or a minister, this doubles the offence. Your sins are imitated; you should be fountains of religion and justice, and you poison the fountains. You are as the first sheet that is printed off, and all others are stamped after your copy. It was a sad title that was given to Jeroboam, that 'he made Israel to sin;' so when you do not show forth a special strictness of religion according to your place, it is a great aggravation.

SERMON IX.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
 GEN. XXIV. 63.

THIRDLY, The matter I am now to propose to you is the excellent contrivance of the gospel as a subject for your meditation; an argument that challengeth all our reverence and thoughts and wonder, a mystery of mysteries, the fairest draught and picture that ever came out of the workhouse of God: 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.' This is a depth that cannot easily be fathomed; here are miracles enfolded in miracles, and mysteries within mysteries; God would astonish mankind, and save it at the same time. Christ is called the wisdom of God: 1 Cor. i. 24, 'Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God;' not only as the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in him, and through him conveyed to the creatures, but because herein is God's wisdom most discovered by disposing and putting our salvation into the hands of Christ; not only as a fountain of wisdom, but as a map of wisdom, as discovering the excellent contrivance of God, and the curious variety that is in his counsels. God showeth wisdom in all things: Ps. civ. 24, 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.' Every creature is disposed into apt cells and storehouses, and contributes to the glory of their creator. But here God would discover the curiosity of his wisdom. The world is his work, but the gospel is his plot. And therefore in your solemn and most deliberate thoughts you should take a view of it. It is the great duty of saints: Eph. iii. 18, 19, 'That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.' This should be your continual task and search. There are two great mysteries in the world—Christ and antichrist, the mystery of the gospel and the mystery of iniquity. It is the great advantage of christians to discern the mystery of iniquity, and to meditate upon the mystery of godliness; to observe antichrist's cunning, and to consider the contrivance of the gospel. Oh! then exercise your thoughts herein, and study the excellency of God's design; bring hallowed and reverend thoughts, that by a deliberate gaze you may raise your souls into an holy wonder and admiration.

1. I shall lay down some preparative considerations.

2. I shall come to the work itself.

I. To prepare you to consecrate your thoughts for the entertainment of so great a mystery, consider these things—

1. When you have done your utmost, your thoughts will still fall short: Isa. xl. 28, 'There is no searching of his understanding.' There is an excess in every attribute above all human thought and conceit, and though we follow on after God, yet we cannot find him out to perfection. Now among all his attributes none is more hidden from us than his wisdom, as children that are only busied in puppets and baubles cannot imagine what it is to govern a commonwealth. Power is obvious, but our foolish spirits cannot trace the wisdom of providence, much more his wisdom discovered in the gospel. One of the names of Christ is Wonderful, Isa. ix. 6. It is a point that we should always be studying, and yet we can never come to the bottom of it, and therefore what is wanting in thoughts must be supplied by wonder. When we have done all, we must cry out, Rom. xi. 23, '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!' As if he had said, I have done as much as I can, I have discovered as much as I am able; but I must leave off disputing, and fall now to wondering. The light of the scripture doth not discover him fully: 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part.' Full knowledge is our portion in heaven; these are but partial discoveries we have even in the word of God. However this is no excuse for negligence and barrenness. Not for negligence, for we must 'follow on to know the Lord,' Hosea vi. 3. It is the fault of christians that they keep always to their milk and first childish thoughts and apprehensions; we should rise higher in our considerations and admirations of the love and wisdom of God. It is notable that Moses his first request to God was, 'What is thy name?' Exod. iii. 13. and then, 'I beseech thee show me thy glory,' Exod. xxxiii. 18. We must follow on from considering God's name to clearer sights of his glory. Not for barrenness; empty thoughts void of argument and discourse beget a confused stupor, not a wonder; the thoughts are only stayed, not raised.

2. Not only men, but angels themselves are at a loss in this great mystery; they study it as well as we, and cannot come to the bottom of it: 1 Peter i. 12, 'Which things the angels desire to look into.' The word *παράκλιναι* signifies to bow down and bend the body; it is an allusion to the cherubim, that were pictured over the ark stooping, and as it were bending their bodies, as prying into the mysteries of the ark. The mysteries of the gospel are so sublime that the angels which do continually behold the face of God cannot perfectly comprehend them; they are learning and improving their knowledge by learning and improving the dispensations of God to the church: Eph. iii. 10, 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God;' that they may know the curious contrivances of God's wisdom by observing the revelations that are made, and the dispensations God hath used towards his church. And possibly this may be the meaning of the apostle in that expression, 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'Seen of angels;' that

is, with reverence, admiration, and wonder, to see Christ stoop so low, to be clothed with flesh, to condescend to a nature so much beneath their own. This is the work of angels, either they desire to know more of Christ, or they delight themselves in beholding of that they know. Oh! we should never be weary of searching into these holy mysteries, and acting our thoughts upon them.

3. They wonder most at the contrivance of the gospel that have most interest in it; to others it is but a cold story or naked plot. Concernment sharpeneth invention and affection, a man doth then more seriously consider of it; their eyes are open, and they have more of sense and feeling. And that is the reason why the enjoyments of the saints have notes of wonder annexed to the expressions of them; as Phil. iv. 7, 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' &c. 1 Peter i. 8, 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory;' they that have a taste of it know what it is to enjoy a calm and serene conscience through the application of the promises of the gospel. They can best wonder at the contrivance of the gospel, who are 'called out of darkness into his marvellous light,' 1 Peter ii. 9. They wonder in their thoughts that God and Christ should design their heaven, be plotting and contriving their salvation before all worlds, how they may be vessels filled up with glory. O marvellous light! wonderful, unutterable joy! These are the apprehensions of God's children; others may look upon the gospel as a probable truth, but they have found it a comfortable truth, therefore their hearts are raised in wonder.

II. I come to the work itself. You may manage it three ways—(1.) By observations; (2.) By arguments; (3.) By comparisons.

1. By observations. Observe what is beautiful and excellent in the gospel.

[1.] God did not contrive to save the fallen angels: Heb. ii. 16, 'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.' He was not made an angel for angels, as he was made a man for men. O Lord! thou sawest angels sinning, but not returning; in them thou didst discover the severity of thy justice, but in us the riches of thy mercy. God would not so much as treat with fallen angels, but plotted a way to recover man. In the election of angels mercy is not so much glorified as in the election and calling of men; there was grace showed in the election of angels, but not mercy; none of the fallen angels were saved, but fallen man is called to grace in Christ. Certainly whatever the causes were, there was much of wisdom and mercy in it. Whether it be for this cause, that when Adam sinned the whole human nature fell, but the whole angelical nature did not fall, but only a part of it; the kind itself needed not to be repaired, but all the mass of mankind was poisoned; or whether this be the cause, merely the will of God, certainly there is much of mercy in it. Love after a breach is more glorious; it is more to be reconciled than to be confirmed. *Pœnitens*, the penitent, have more cause to glorify God than *innocens*, the innocent; those that are received to mercy than those that are confirmed by grace. Or else was this the cause? Because the angels sinned out of their own motion. Angels had no other temptation but their own ambition and aspiring thought, but man sinned by the devil's suggestion. Certainly it is more to be a

tempter than a sinner, and he that sinneth himself doth not offend God himself so much as he that made Israel to sin. However it be, we have cause to bless God that he hath revealed his justice against them and his mercy to us.

[2.] Observe God's wisdom fetched a large compass and circuit; and those things which we count the ruin of man were through the wisdom of providence his preservation. The fall of angels, the fall of man, those crooked things which seemed to be the destruction of the creature, through the overruling of God made for the manifestation of his glory. Gregory called the sin of Adam *felix scelus*, because it occasioned the coming of Christ. Providence hath many creeks and turnings, but all concur to the beauty of the whole frame. The apostle calls it *πολυποίκιλος σοφία*, 'the manifold wisdom of God,' Eph. iii. 10. Therefore we are not to judge by present sense. God's mending is better than his making; he would have all fall to pieces to discover more of his mercy. Man must commit a shameful act, and Christ must suffer a shameful death, and all this to advance his own glory. As a vessel that is cracked and soldered is the stronger there, or a leg that has been broken, and set again by a skilful hand, is the stronger; so the Lord would first have man to fall and ruin himself, that he might be the better established by his own grace.

[3.] Observe again, that God should pitch upon this way of sending his Son. God was not limited or bound up; he could have done it by an angel, or of his own will have released the creature of his offence; but 'it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell,' Col. i. 19; it was God's will that salvation should be brought about this way. In the whole business of salvation God would proceed by choice, not necessity. I confess, supposing the determination of the divine decrees, no creature was qualified to do us good; the angels do but their work, they could not so fitly supererogate for us; but if God would send his own Son, he might have come as a king in glory and triumph, and wrestled with Satan, and rescued all the elect out of his hands. But the Lord would not now discover power, but love; he had discovered power in creation: Rom. i. 20, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead;' but in redemption he discovered his wisdom; every attribute of God was to be discovered in its season. Again, the Lord would meet with the sin of men and angels. The angels had lost their holiness out of a desire of greatness, they would be over all, and under none; and man was sick of the same disease, and did desire to be rather great than good. Adam would be as God; Adam fell by pride, and to counterwork this, Christ was to restore mankind by humility. When he cometh to save mankind, he lays aside his majesty, and puts on a humble garb; he would not save mankind by power, but by suffering; the Lord's design was by the quality of the remedy to show the nature of the disease.

[4.] Observe, man or angel could not have found out such an excellent plot or design as this is. It could not have come into our heads or hearts, and therefore it came merely from the breast of God; it was devised by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Rom. xi. 34, 'Who hath

known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? What creature did prescribe to God, or direct him to such a way? The apostle sheweth it could not enter into the creature's thoughts: 1 Cor. ii. 9, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.' You will find by the context he speaks of the doctrine and contrivance of Christ crucified; neither sense, nor fancy, nor reason could suggest such a thing to the creature. There are some seeds of the law in nature, but not the least seeds of the gospel. We see in other nations they cannot so much as think of a way of a recovery: Isa. lvi. 19, 'He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor, therefore his arm brought salvation unto him;' it is chiefly understood of the everlasting salvation by Christ. If the Lord had tarried till man had devised a way for his own comfort, we had been miserable to all eternity.

[5.] Observe, God discovered this design before it was accomplished in the fulness of time: Isa. xlii. 9, 'Before they spring forth I tell you of them.' This love was too big to be contained in his heart, but he must open his mind. The prophecies and promises of the Old Testament were the eruptions and overflows of God's love; his heart was so full of love, that it could not be contained within the bounds of secrecy. He openeth his heart, and gives vent to his love in the midst of anger. As soon as man had displeased him, God drops out the promise that the seed of the woman should break the serpent's head.

[6.] Observe again, God discovered this by degrees, first in types, then in truths; first in promises, then in performances. God spake to his people formerly not so much by words as by things. We teach children to fight with puppets, and in the oriental nations it is their genius to be taken with allegories and figures. God would prepare the world by degrees, as the day groweth till it cometh to high noon; to us he hath opened all his good treasure. And further, it was for our instruction, that wickedness should be perfectly discovered. And besides the former ages needed restraints more than comforts. Every age had sufficient revelation for what God required of them.

2. Follow this meditation by arguments. There could not have been a better way to save the creature, whether we respect God's glory or the creature's comfort and profit.

[1.] If we consider God's glory.

(1.) It was the best way to commend his love: Rom. v. 8, 'But God commended his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' Herein was the commendation of the divine love, that God would give up the Son of his own love and bosom to die for us that were sinners. As the apostle saith, Heb. vi. 13, 'When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.' So when the Lord could give us no greater gifts, he gave us his Son. David seems to be amazed with wonder when he considers the power of God in making such creatures as the moon and stars, much more when he considers the love of God in framing of man: Ps. viii. 3, 4, 'When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou

visitest him?' But here the Son of God himself is become man for us. Oh! that Jesus Christ should stoop so low! that he that fills all things should be shut up in the narrow straits of the virgin's womb! that Christ should disrobe himself of all his glory, and submit to the greatest abasement! John iii. 16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

(2.) Hereby his justice is discovered. One attribute is not to be exercised to the wrong and prejudice of another. Now in this excellent contrivance God did glorify his mercy so as his justice was no loser, that being sufficiently satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore justice, which in itself is our dread, is in Christ the ground of our comfort and support, and that attribute which would discourage sinners doth now invite and draw unto Christ: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' So Rom. iii. 25, 26, 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time, I say, his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.' God would dispense acts of grace with the greatest advantage to his justice. This is the beauty of his design, he would be just in justification, and those acts which to us are acts of mere grace, are now made acts of righteousness.

(3.) Hereby the authority of the law is still preserved. God in innocency had written a law in man's heart, and he was to preserve the honour of it. Man transgressed this law. Now by appointing Jesus Christ to die for us, the dignity of the law is kept up. Impunity maketh sin to be lightly esteemed; when laws are relaxed there must be some commutation or recompense, or else their authority is not preserved: Mat. v. 18, 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The omission of punishment would detract from it, therefore Christ must be made under the law: Gal. iv. 4, 5, 'But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.' Christ endured the severity of it.

(4.) Hereby God's essence is discovered, even the whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The doctrine of the Trinity was but darkly revealed in the Old Testament till Christ came in the flesh. One of the main designs of our redemption was to discover God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. There is a God that must be satisfied, there is a God that must satisfy, and there is a God that must seal up all this to the soul. At Christ's baptism, when he was solemnly inaugurated into the mediatorship, there was a discovery of the Trinity, the Father in a voice, the Son in person, and the Holy Ghost in the shape of a dove.

[2.] If we consider the creature's comfort, it was the best way to establish that.

(1.) Here is excellent provision made against the infiniteness that is in sin by the infiniteness of Christ's sufferings; for though sin be but a temporary act, yet it is infinite because of the object, being committed

against an infinite majesty ; so Christ's sufferings were but a temporary act, yet they were infinite, he being a person that was both God and man. Therefore as sins receive a value from the person against whom they are committed, so Christ's sufferings receive a value from the person by whom they are performed. The apostle puts a 'how much more' upon the blood of Christ : Heb. ix. 14, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God ?' His Godhead did put a value and merit upon his blood to expiate the guilt of sin, and therefore the blood of Christ is called the blood of God : Acts xx. 28, 'Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.' So that if sin did abound, grace had superabounded ; if sin be put into one scale, put the blood of Christ into the other. The great purpose and design of God was to give us triumph over the clamours of our own conscience. Sin is expiated and done away by the blood of the Son of God.

(2.) There is an excellent provision made for all that the creature stands in need of. There are three things which trouble the creature, and they are only accomplished and made good in this great contrivance of God—the bringing of God and man together, the bringing of justice and mercy together, and the bringing of comfort and duty together. How God and man are brought together, who were separate by sin : 1 Peter iii. 18, 'Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' To unite man fallen to God, there is mortal and immortal, greatness and baseness, finiteness and infiniteness brought together. There is God and man in one person, that there might be a commerce between us and God ; our nature, as it were, grafted and planted into the person of Christ, that our persons might have social communion with God. Then justice and mercy are brought together. The great inquiry of nature is, how to have a satisfaction for justice, that mercy might have a free course ? What shall we do to recompense justice ? Creatures would sacrifice themselves, and all they have : Micah vi. 6, 7, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before his face with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousand of rams, or with ten thousand of rivers of oil ? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ?' But it is not our first-born, but God's first-born. So also comfort and duty are sweetly united together, the Lord having provided a merit against our defects, and a spirit against our weaknesses ; the Lord is at peace with us, and we are enabled comfortably to serve God.

[3.] If we consider the profit of the creature.

(1.) This way serves to represent sin. You have nowhere such a sight of sin as upon Mount Calvary, when you see the Son of God stretched out upon the cross, and crying out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?' When the punishment of our sins was laid upon Christ, God sheweth how displeasing sin was to him.

(2.) To wean us from vanity. We make great matters of trifles, and are apt to idolise every petty and vain thing in the world ; therefore in Christ the Lord would show us the highest self-denial when he

took the human nature on him, and endured the wrath of the Father. The whole world wondered after the beast, and the disciples wondered at the goodly stones of the temple, Mat. xxiv. 1. Oh! what will you do at the Son of God, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily? This should beget a special veneration and reverence towards God.

(3.) To overcome us by love. There is a great engagement laid upon a sinner hereby. When the king of Moab was pressed hard by Israel, 'he took his eldest son, that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt-sacrifice upon the wall,' 2 Kings iii. 27, according to their superstition, who were wont in extreme dangers and desperate cases to sacrifice their children, whereupon they raised the siege, and went home. God hath taken his own Son, and sacrificed him, that we might leave off fighting against heaven. God would overcome sin by the highest act of goodness and kindness imaginable, hereby he would shame and overcome the heart of a poor sinner.

(4.) That we might have a high and glorious pattern of obedience. We are referred to angels, and to Christ himself, who would leave us a more glorious example.

3. Magnify this great contrivance of your salvation by comparisons. Compare it with creation, with other deliverances, and with the works of nature.

[1.] Compare it with creation. The Lord discovered much of his glory in making the world out of nothing, but he discovered more of his glory when Jesus Christ was born of his own creature, a vine out of the berry or grape. This was his masterpiece and grand design, in which he purposed to gain to himself most honour and glory. The world was made with a word, but redeemed with a serious plot and contrivance. The world was made for man and woman, but Christ was made out of a woman. In the creation God made us like himself, but here the Lord made himself like us. In the creation all things were made out of nothing, here order came out of confusion. In the creation man was made out of the earth, but here God was made man. In the creation God went the high way to do us good, in redemption he came the lower way; Jesus Christ abased himself for our sakes.

[2.] Compare it with other deliverances. It was a great thing to be delivered out of Egypt and Babylon, but it is far greater to be delivered out of hell, and from damnation and wrath to come. Read the story of the children of Israel's deliverances, Ps. cvii. They were delivered from the oppression of Pharaoh, but we from Satan. God gave them food, and satisfied the longing soul, and filled the hungry; but Jesus Christ incarnate is made bread and food to the soul. They had deliverance from diseases, but we from sin, the sickness and disease of the soul, and from the vanity of our own spirits. Then he goes on to the wonders in the deep, but we may see the depth of mercy swallowing up the depth of sin, and the glorious love of God breaking out in such a wonderful deliverance by Jesus Christ, that we may well cry out with them, ver. 31, 'Oh! that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.'

[3.] Compare it with the miracles of nature. There are strange things among the creatures, yet there may be some footsteps of reason seen; but it cannot enter into the heart of man to conceive of this

glorious salvation brought about by the Son of God. Therefore bless God for the revelation, and complain of thyself for not thinking of these things with serious admiration, scarce vouchsafing to look into these things, but are more pleased with every bauble and vain contrivance than the great and serious plot of the gospel.

SERMON X.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide.—
GEN. xxiv. 63.

FOURTHLY, The object which I shall now propose is providence, a large field, and full of useful matter. It is a draught which God hath been plotting from all eternity, and accomplishing these thousands of years. Take it altogether, and it is a continued contexture or concatenation of decrees, actions, and events, from the creation to the day of judgment. It is our duty to understand it for the present, and it will be our happiness to understand it perfectly hereafter: Ps. cvii. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' It is an excellent piece of wisdom to be able to link events together that we may see the wisdom and love of God in the usual occurrences that happen out. We being of short narrow thoughts, fail most herein. Power is such an attribute as is visible and obvious to a common and careless eye; the heathens knew it: Rom. i. 20, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.' But to find out the beauty and wisdom of God's work, there needs the light of faith and some acquaintance with God himself; therefore it is said, Job xi. 5, 6, 'O that God would speak, &c., and show me the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is.' Power is obvious to sense and reason, but wisdom is scarce discernible to faith. There is an outside and an inside in all divine dispensations; the outside is full of beauty, but that is but dark to the inside, to the secrets of wisdom. God's works are full of mysteries as well as his word, and we cannot understand them unless God himself be our teacher; we are blind and see not, and then we murmur. But the full knowledge of the mysteries of providence is reserved for our portion in heaven, when we shall know as we are known: 1 Cor. xiii. 12, 'Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known.' We shall view all the passages of providence by which we have been brought to glory, and see the beautiful order and links of them. Now 'we have known God, or rather are known of God,' Gal. iv. 9. God knoweth what is the meaning of such a providence, what is in the womb of such a dispensation. Here there is a handwriting upon the wall, but we, as Belshazzar, cannot read it. As when we see a woman with child, we cannot tell what it will prove; but when we are on the top of the mount, we shall look back, and see

how many are the crooked lanes we have passed, the uphill and downhill we have trod, and God knew us all along, and did not only lead us in, but lead us out; then we shall know the multitude of his thoughts, and what the great number of them is. I confess by narrow observation we may discern a little for the present; as David: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' When he looked back, how God had carried him through many difficulties, and brought him to rule his people, and watched over him with a careful eye of providence, and ordered every event for his comfort. Some general view and knowledge we may have for the present.

Now, to direct your meditations upon the providence of God—(1.) I will show what it is; (2.) That it is; (3.) I will give you some observations; (4.) I will press you to treat with your own hearts about the use and comfort of it.

I. To open the nature of it, what it is. Consider—(1.) The grounds of providence; (2.) The acts of providence.

1. The grounds of providence; it is founded in God's nature and attributes, three especially—omniscience, wisdom, and power.

[1.] God's omniscience, or knowledge of all affairs in the world. God, like the sun, is all light and all eye: Prov. xv. 3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good;' in the congregation, in the closet, in the shop, the eyes of the Lord are everywhere, and do not only behold the evil and the good person, but the evil and the good action. But chiefly God's eyes are upon his children; they fall under his special care: 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.' God minds their whole condition, takes notice of their wants and dangers and troubles, and will show himself strong in their supply and deliverance. He doth not only know their persons, but their way: Ps. i. 6, 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.' God takes notice of every particular step he takes and every case he is in; by one intuition all things are present to God. Therefore when Christ would comfort his disciples, and fence them against worldly care, he saith, Mat. vi. 32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.' God takes an exact and particular account of all your wants and necessities. So the psalmist: Ps. lvi. 8, 'Thou tellest my wanderings; put thou my tears into thy bottle; are they not in thy book?' There is not a tear you shed but it is treasured up in God's bottle; not a weary step you take for his name's sake but it is recorded in God's book. He speaks of those weary steps he took through the two forests of Ziph and Hateph. But if this be not full enough to commend the particularity of God's care, he goes higher: Isa. xlix. 16, 'Behold, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.' When we are apt to forget, we fix a memorial on our hands; and if we forget a thing recorded in our book, we shall not forget what is imprinted on our hands.

[2.] God's wisdom. He knoweth their wants and ordereth their deliverance. There is something of counsel in all that the Lord doeth: Eph. i. 11, 'Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.'

Therefore his will is called his counsel : Acts iv. 28, ' For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' There is not only a mighty hand seen in all the dispensations of God, but a wise counsel. So these two attributes are coupled : Job ix. 21, ' He is wise in heart and mighty in strength.' We are rash and precipitate, carried on with more resolution than reason ; our desires beget an heat that oversetteth us ; but whatever God doth it is with exact judgment. If we have eyes to see it, we should see that all the circumstances of providence are disposed with much art.

[3.] God's power to execute and administer that which his wisdom hath devised. God's counsels and purposes are always followed with a shall be, or shall not be, he hath infinite power to accomplish them. His power is as it were the midwife to his blessed decrees ; he conceiveth all things in the womb of his will, and then he educeth and bringeth them forth by his mighty power : Ps. xxxiii. 9, ' He spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast.' ' Let it be ' was sufficient to make the world, and ' I will ' is enough to preserve it. God pleadeth this as the privilege of the Godhead : Isa. xlv. 7, ' Who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me ? ' that is, that can by calling ordain or create. Therefore Christ, when he would discover the power of his godhead, cured by a word of omnipotency : Mat. viii. 3, ' I will ; be thou clean.' Now this power of God is discovered in providence three ways—by his ability and sufficiency to work without means, by unlikely means, or by contrary means.

(1.) By working without means. God is not bound to the road of nature, or tied to the course of second causes ; he can create where he doth not find ; therefore when God is represented as an object of trust to his people this expression is used : 1 Peter iv. 19, ' Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator ; ' as one that is able to create where nothing is found. So God promiseth, Hosea i. 7, ' I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.' These were the only means they could pitch upon to re-establish themselves, but, saith the Lord, I have a purpose to save them, but it shall not be by these. God would do it by an invisible sway and turn of things, that they should enjoy the mercy but not see the means. So Isa. xlviii. 7, ' They are created now, and not from the beginning ; even before the day when thou heardest them not, lest thou shouldst say, Behold, I know them.' Sometimes God by an immediate sovereignty will help us : Mat. iv. 4, ' Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Sometimes God will not reach out a supply by the ordinary means, but by the powerful word of his providence or commanded blessing.

(2.) By working with unlikely means. There is nothing so evil or so inconsiderable but God can work by it. In the story of Joseph (which is one of the fairest draughts of providence), a lie cast him into prison, and a dream fetched him out ; so evil a thing as a lie, and so inconsiderable a thing as a dream. So the Lord makes use of the neglect and errors of men. Possidonium hath two remarkable stories

in the life of Austin; one was that in travel he lost his way and found his life, for he escaped an ambush of the Donatists. At another time, being to preach, he forgot both his text and matter, and fell upon that which through the blessing of God converted Firmius. Omnipotency needeth no outward advantage. So in public deliverances, God's instruments are usually despicable. A straw is as good as a spear in the hands of omnipotence. Most of the judges that rescued Israel were taken from the plough and sheepfold. So for judgments; God by weak means punishes sinners. Egypt was plagued with flies and lice; they were strong to execute God's word.

(3.) By working with contrary means. Christ used clay and spittle, that one would think should put out the eyes, to restore sight to the blind man. Joseph was first made a slave and then a favourite; his brethren first sell him and then worship him; he is cast into the dungeon to be preferred to court. There are strange contrivances and contrarieties in providence; the way seemeth contrary to the aim, and the means disproportionable to the end. When we see great confusions in the world, we wonder how this should tend to God's glory and the church's good, and are apt to say, as Joshua, chap. vii. 9, 'What wilt thou do unto thy great name?' and as the prophet, Amos. vii. 2, 'By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?' We wonder how God means to save when Babylon destroyeth, and how confusion and mischief can end in order and beauty. But God knows the sufficiency of his own power, and is able to bring about these things, to bring light out of darkness, and one contrary out of another.

2. The acts of providence; they are three—conservation, gubernation, and ordination.

[1.] Conservation, conserving and keeping all creatures in their being. Therefore the apostle saith, Heb. i. 3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' Isa. xxii. 23, 24, 'I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place, and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house, and they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house.' If God should take away the shoulder of his providence, all things would return to their first nothing, and vanish and disappear; as a seal upon the waters, the impression is defaced as soon as the seal is gone. Providence is a continual creation; everything that is kept in working and being is, as it were, newly born, newly brought forth, newly produced. Nay, Chrysostom saith it is *μειζόν τι*, something greater than creation. As it is more to support a burden long in the air than to raise it up from the earth, so it is more to keep all things from returning to nothing than to educe and bring them out of nothing. That is the reason why the Holy Ghost speaks in the present tense: Ps. civ. 2, 'Who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain;' and Isa. xl. 22, 'It is he that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.' It is not in the future tense, because God is always a stretching them out. So our Saviour: John v. 17, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Though there be a cessation of work in regard of new kinds, yet there is a continuation of work in regard of their preservation and God's providential influence. The power which raised from nothing must still preserve from nothing: Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him, are all

things.' This Solomon intends when he saith, Prov. xx. 12, 'The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.' He doth not mean spiritually, but naturally; he doth not only give the faculty, but the exercise; as he gives the eye, so the seeing, and as he gives the ear, so the hearing: this could not be done without new acts of providence, assistance, and supportation from God. Therefore we read Hagar did not see the well of water till the Lord opened her eyes: Gen. xxi. 19, 'And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.' So the disciples: Luke xxiv. 31, 'And their eyes were opened, and they saw him.' When the Lord suspended his influence, the fire could not burn the three children. God did not destroy the property of the fire, but only suspended the efficacy of it. No creature can put forth itself in a way of operation without a new providential assistance from God.

[2.] Gubernation, or governing all things according to his will and pleasure. All things keep their course, for God sitteth at the helm and steereth all: Dan. iv. 35, 'He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?' God doth all according to his pleasure; he is not confined by any external law, nor straitened by the course of nature, but acts with a great deal of sovereignty and freedom, and sometimes inverts the order of second causes. God's will is sometimes called *θῆλημα*, sometimes *ἐὐδοκία*; his pleasure is all. There are indeed some standing ordinances of nature, as the ordinances of sun and moon and the covenant of day and night: Jer. xxxi. 35, 'Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of moon and stars for a light by night;' and Gen. viii. 22, 'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.' God can alter the course of these, as in Joshua's time and at Christ's death; there were three days' darkness in Egypt: Mat. v. 45, 'He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.' There is nothing so casual but it is governed by God, and falls under the ordination of his wise counsel. It is said, 1 Kings xxii. 34, 'And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness.' It was a mere chance as to him, but God directed it into the sides of the king. So Exod. xxi. 13, 'If a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand;' compared with Dent. xix. 5, 'As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour that he die.' God slew him. There is nothing so casual but it is directed by the wise ordination of God: Prov. xvi. 33, 'The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.' There seems to be nothing so trivial and casual as the casting the lot into the lap, yet it is overruled by him; he doth not only permit, but govern. God governs all his creatures; in such a throng of stars there is no interfering. We wonder at strange events when the great sway is discovered. The sea is higher than the earth, yet it doth not transgress its bounds and limits. We live and breathe as the Israelites did in the midst of the Red Sea; this is a daily miracle.

[3.] Ordination. All things are overruled by God's great sway; it is not as the creature will, but as God will; and many times the creatures are serviceable to the designs of God contrary to their intentions: Isa. x. 6, 7, 'I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.' The king of Assyria was moved with a principle of ambition, rage, and cruelty, but the Lord sent him on his work. So Augustus his covetousness in taxing the whole world God orders it for the occasioning Christ's birth at Bethlehem, Luke ii. The actings of the creature are disposed and carried on besides the purpose of the creature to another end. He discovers his wisdom by man's folly, and his righteousness by man's sin. Look, as in a ship some sleep, and some walk contrary to the ship's motion, so in the world some men are negligent, others keep bustling and stirring and seek to resist the designs of God, but the ship goes on: Acts iv. 28, 'For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' The devil thought to ruin all mankind by seducing of Adam, yet that made way for Christ. Herein is the great beauty and order of providence seen, that God can make hindrances to be helps, and while men seek to cross his will most, they do but accomplish and fulfil it.

II. That there is such a thing as providence. Heathens granted it, though they had but a dim sight of it; and therefore Tully saith, *Di magna curant, parva negligunt*—The gods take care of great things, but neglect little things. We count them atheists that deny a providence, as well as they that denied a God.

That there is a providence may be proved from the being of God: there is a God, therefore there is a providence. His wisdom and his goodness enforceth it; he is so wisely good: Ps. cxix. 68, 'Thou art good, and thou doest good.' The divine wisdom ordereth all things for an end, and the divine power governs all things in order to that end. We read it in the order of the world and the sense of our own conscience; if there were no providence, the devils would soon overturn all things, honesty would be folly, a title without substance, labour without reward: 1 Cor. xv. 19, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.' The godly would have no relief; they would not call God to witness, nor acquaint him with their sorrows, which is their great solace: Job xvi. 20, 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.' God's works discover it. Who feedeth the beasts? Job xii. 7-9, 'But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?' His judgments show it: Ps. lviii. 10, 11, 'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked: so that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.' Some men's sins are open beforehand, and God keeps a petty sessions before the general assize cometh.

The great objection that is against providence is because all things come alike to all; but that which seemeth the blemish of providence is the beauty of it. The prosperity of wicked men complieth with God's ends; that there is such a checker-work of providence is for the exercise of the godly, as the stones that are for a temple are hewed and squared; and hereby wicked men are left without excuse; they have prudence, but not grace; and they cannot complain, having common mercies.

III. I will give you some observations.

1. Providence reacheth to the least and most inconsiderable things, as the flight of a sparrow, the falling of a hair: Mat. x. 29, 30, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father; but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.' God takes particular account of every concernment and circumstance of your lives: Ps. cxlvii. 4, 'He telleth the number of the stars.' It is much that God should be at leisure to tell the stars; much more that he should take particular notice of the hairs of your head.

2. Though providence extends to all things, yet it is chiefly exercised about the most noble creatures, men and angels. The psalmist saith, Ps. xxxvi. 6, 'Lord, thou preservest man and beast;' but chiefly man. For mark it, these are not only governed by God, but by themselves. Other things, that are void of understanding, are only guided by an external principle without the knowledge of an end, as arrows shot out of a bow; but rational creatures have a principle of their own, viz., prudence, which is a shadow of divine providence. In these providence is most discovered. Man's will is rebellious; it is harder to rule a skittish horse than it is to roll a stone. God challengeth this as his own prerogative: Jer. x. 23, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' He can bridle, rule and restrain the hearts of men, and turn them as he pleaseth: Prov. xxi. 1, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will.' The hearts of kings, those that seem to be most led by will and passion, God can turn them, and rule them at his pleasure.

3. Though the providence of God chiefly concerns man, yet the chiefest care of providence is about the good of the elect: Mat. vi. 26, 'Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they?' 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'We trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' He is a saviour in this sense in regard of providential administration, but all dispensations towards his people are more exact, and have more of care; God particularly looks after them: Amos ix. 9, 'For lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.' Mark, above all nations God would have a care of Israel; whatever becomes of the chaff, God watcheth over the corn. The elect are the darlings of providence; the world is continued for their sakes, that all the elect may be gathered in: Isa. xliii. 3, 4, 'I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou

wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee ; therefore I will give men for thee, and people for thy life.' All the rest of the world are but as dust and refuse, which God will give up to his justice. If justice must have an object whereon to exercise itself, I will give up Seba and Ethiopia and Egypt to justice ; a thousand of them shall perish rather than my people. So ver. 14, 'For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles.' God will stain the glory of all the world for the elect's sake. If God throw them into the furnace, he sitteth by the furnace, prying and looking after his metal : Mal. iii. 3, 'And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering of righteousness.' The fire shall not be too hot, that nothing be lost.

4. Providence must not be considered by pieces, but all together. You must consider the way of God with the aim of God, and the means with the end. You must not measure things by present feeling : Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to those that love God, to those that are the called according to his purpose.' A single part of providence taken out of the frame is odd and unseemly. Providence is a draught of many pieces ; there is the manifold wisdom of God in it. All the links of the chain of providence are not of one size. If you would think aright of providence, you must take in your own case and God's aim. (1.) Consider your own case ; not what is absolutely good, but what is respectively good for you. Gold absolutely is better than a draught of water, but not to Sampson, who was ready to die for thirst. Cutting a vein is in itself ill, but good in a fever ; so such or such a providence, though not good in itself, may be better for you. (2.) You must take in God's aim with your own case ; the single links of providence are not all of a sort ; like Nebuchadnezzar's image, partly gold, partly iron, partly brass, and partly clay. To an observant eye there is a wonderful beauty in the providences of God. There is no beauty in the parts of a building till they be set together ; no more is there in the several pieces of providence till you consider them together and compare one with the other. The first dashes of a picture are uncomely, therefore do not look on God's work by halves, but all together.

5. God doth manage and govern all things without labour and difficulty. It is much for us to spread a small net ; the care of a family and the care of a congregation is too great for our shoulders, but the Lord governs all the world without difficulty and pain ; he is not burdened with the multitude of cares ; it costs him no more to govern angels than to govern ants, to govern palaces than cottages. Look, as the sun doth as easily shine upon a thousand places at one time as upon one field, so the Lord doth as easily manage the affairs of the whole world as of any one place in the world ; his care is without trouble, his work is without pains. Lucian scoffs at God's running here and there. No ; all things are represented to him in one view.

6. God's providence is conversant about sin, yet without sin. God doth *συνεργεῖν*, work with us, but he doth not *συναμαρτάνειν*, come into the fellowship of our sin or guilt. As the sunbeams may shine upon a dunghill, and in a filthy place the warm sun draweth forth

stinking vapours, but the sun is not stained hereby. The apostle saith, Acts xvii 28, 'For in him we live and move.' We are moved by him; but as the lameness of the horse is no blemish to the rider, so neither is the defect of the creature to be imputed to the providence that doth support it.

7. Providence doth not take away either the industry or the liberty of the creature: Acts xxvii. 22, compared with ver. 31; it is said, ver. 22, 'There shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship;' and yet, ver. 31, 'Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved.' We must plough though the clouds drop fatness; still there is a place for human industry, and human counsel and deliberation: Ezek. xxi. 21, 'For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways to use divination,' &c. There were two ways; one way led to his country, the other way led directly to Jerusalem. God had determined which way he should go, yet freely out of his own spirit he is moved to take the way he went; still there was place for human counsel and human deliberation.

8. Observe the providences of God to yourselves, in the womb and from the womb: Ps. cxxxix. 12, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' Gen. xxxii. 10, 'With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.' Broad rivers come from a small fountain: Job viii. 7, 'Though thy beginnings were small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.'

9. The great aim of providence is God's glory and the salvation of the elect. God's glory: Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever, Amen;' Ps. cxix. 91, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinance, for all are thy servants.' The salvation of the elect: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.' The world would soon shatter to pieces, but that God had some elect to gather out of it.

IV. When you have meditated, and taken some view of providence, treat with your own hearts about the use and comfort of it; either about the providences of God in general, or to yourselves in particular.

1. About the providences of God in general. Consider of the care which God hath over all creatures. Urge the providences of God against your fears. Is it fear of man's policy? Oh! consider divine providence is above human prudence: Job v. 13, 'He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.' Suppose they be able to contrive mischief, yet God can hinder the execution of it, that they cannot find their hands for their enterprise. Or do you fear the cunning of Satan? Consider providence is chiefly exercised for this end, to defeat the power of Satan. There is a providence over the swine, much more over the flock of Christ; and as Tertullian saith, He that has told the bristles of swine hath much more numbered the hairs of the saints. Urge your hearts with the providence of God to encourage your trust in God for outward provision. When you are humbled with straits, and pinched for maintenance of your families, consider there is a providence. The world is God's great common, and he doth not overstock his own common. All things wait upon God; how do the beasts live but upon providence? Ps. civ. 27,

‘These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.’ Who is it that feeds the ravens? Ps. cxlvii. 9, ‘He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry;’ and Ps. cxlv. 16, ‘Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.’ Compare it with ver. 19, ‘He shall fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.’ Urge your hearts herewith to patience under miseries. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without a providence, therefore certainly your crosses fall under the wise dispensation of God: Ps. xxxix. 6, ‘Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain.’ Again, urge your hearts to thankfulness for mercies; look upon the first cause, and acknowledge the providence of God in all that you enjoy.

2. Consider the providences of God to yourselves in particular, for thou art a little world. Consider how the providence of God watched over thee in the womb; when he took thee out from thence, how he provided two bottles to sustain thee; how he hath borne thee up from the womb hitherto; especially how he took care of thee when thou hast been in distress. Oh! it is sweet when we can say, as David, Ps. xxxiv. 6, ‘This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.’ I have been in these and these distresses, yet the Lord hath heard and delivered me. Especially if he hath blessed thee from small beginnings, and increased thy substance, urge thy heart to trust in him for the future: 1 Peter v. 7, ‘Casting all thy care upon him, for he careth for thee.’

Fifthly, The next object of meditation is the excellency and happiness of our estate in heaven. (See this subject treated on in a sermon on Titus ii. 13, ‘Looking for that blessed hope.’)