

SERMON XIV.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.—ECCLES. IX. 11.

THE whole book is a search after true happiness. The particular paragraph whereof the text is a branch proveth that it cannot be obtained in this world, because of the various events of God's powerful and unsearchable providence. The discourse beginneth, chap. viii. 16, 17, 'When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business which is done upon the earth, then I beheld all the works of God, that a man cannot find out the work which is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.' God's providence in the government of the world is secret. When a wise man hath applied his mind to reconcile all the seeming incongruities of it, he cannot get a clear and satisfying account of all the proceedings thereof, but must at last acquiesce in the sovereignty and dominion of God. The footsteps of providence are not easily traced, his judgments are a great depth, Rom. xi. 33; Ps. xxxvi. 6, xcii. 5. They may be adored, but not searched into.

Now two things in our reflection upon providence perplex us:—

1. One is, that things are promiscuously dispensed to good and bad men; yea, many times the good are afflicted, and the bad are advanced. To this he speaketh in the beginning of the chapter, where he showeth that all outward things are dispensed without any great difference. Josiah died in the war, and so did Ahab. Is Abraham rich? so is Nabal. Is Solomon wise? so is Ahithophel. Is Joseph honoured by Pharaoh? so is Doeg by Saul. Had Isaac long life? Gen. xxv. 20, so had Ishmael, Gen. xxv. 17.

2. The other perplexity is, that events and successes do fall out otherwise than the preparation and ability of second causes do seem to promise. As holiness and unholiness do not make the difference, so the natural ability and inability of man, the wisdom and folly, the strength and weakness, make no difference as to their worldly condition. Men of greatest abilities are disappointed of their hopes and ends, which weak and insufficient men do many times obtain. Now this is asserted in the text: 'I returned and saw,' &c.

In which words observe the preface and observation; or—

I. The accurate inspection of the wise man: *I returned, and saw under the sun.*

II. The result of this inspection and observation, propounded negatively and positively.

First, Negatively, in five particulars.

1. *The race is not to the swift.*
2. *Nor the battle to the strong.*
3. *Nor yet bread to the wise.*
4. *Nor riches to men of understanding.*

5. *Nor favour to men of skill.*

Secondly, Positively: *but time and chance happeneth to them all.*

I. His accurate inspection: 'I returned and saw under the sun;' that is, besides all the former vanities of the present life. The same phrase is used chap. iv. 1, 'I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun.' So ver. 7 of that chapter: 'Then I returned, and saw vanity under the sun.' This phrase is used to show the great certainty and evidence of his observation; it is a thing I have narrowly observed. The instruments of knowledge are seeing, hearing, observing, and deducing inferences from thence. *Under the sun*, that is, here in this lower world; I considered all human actions, the things which are done in this life among men; he looked about and turned himself every way.

II. The observation thence resulting.

First, Negatively, propounded in five instances, which comprehend all the business of the common life: neither swiftness, nor strength, nor wisdom, &c.

1. *The race is not to the swift.* This may be understood either of the ordinary race, wherein the swift may sometimes fail, or, straining themselves beyond their strength, be mischiefed in their bodies, or maimed by some accident; and so, when he speaketh of the race, he meaneth it of the successful race, as in the next clause: *nor the battle to the strong*; he meaneth the successful battle, whereby they get the victory. Success is not always on the side of the swift and the strong. Or secondly, of any course whereby a man endeavours to outrun danger. So Asahel, who was swift of foot as a wild roe, was slain by Abner, 2 Sam. ii. 18, 23; and Jer. xlvi. 6, 'The swift shall not flee away, nor the mighty man escape;' they shall stumble and fall. The swift cannot always flee from danger: Isa. xxx. 16, 'They that pursue you shall be swift.'

2. *Nor the battle to the strong.* Rabshakeh telleth us that 'Counsel and strength are for the war,' Isa. xxxvi. 5. But many times great strength is foiled, and a small army overcomes a greater. The strength of the mighty doth not always avail them to fight and conquer. Thus was Goliath foiled by David, 1 Sam. xvii. 50; and Gideon's three hundred overthrew the mighty host of Midian, Judges vii. 7; and we are told, Ps. xxxiii. 16, 'There is no king saved by the multitude of his host; and a mighty man is not delivered by much strength;' and 1 Sam. xiv. 6, 'There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.'

3. *Nor yet bread to the wise.* Bread is put for all means of subsistence, and many wise men have been hard put to it. Certainly wisdom doth much to get a livelihood in the world: Prov. xxi. 20, 'There is a treasure to be desired, and oil in the house of the wise.' Yet many times it falleth out that men of great wisdom scarce get a subsistence in the world. As David was put to desire supplies from Nabal, a fool. And we are told by Solomon, that 'folly is set in great dignity when the wise sit in low place,' Eccles. x. 6. Paul was 'in hungerings often and fastings often,' not voluntary but enforced, 2 Cor. xi. 27. Yea, it is said of our Lord Jesus Christ, that certain women ministered to him of their substance for his support, Luke viii. 3.

4. *Nor riches to men of understanding.* Experience often verifieth this, that the learned are very poor, when lesser wits and mean people get great substance. We read in scripture of a rich fool, Luke xii. 20, and a poor wise man, Eccles. ix. 15; and, in the general, that 'it is the blessing of the Lord maketh rich,' Prov. x. 22. He is behindhand with none of his creatures; he giveth to some wit, to others riches.

5. *Nor favour to men of skill.* To attain favour with men it availeth not to be skilful, that is, able and well experienced, unless God add the blessing thereunto. Suppose favour in the eyes of princes or the people. Alas! men of no desert are promoted, as Doeg by Saul. And the populacy are carried away with slight persons, rather than those of the greatest wisdom and parts.

Secondly, Positively: *but time and chance happeneth to them all.* Hence are two things mentioned which do much befriend worldly matters—

1. Time.

2. Chance.

1. *Time*, whereby is meant occasion and opportunity. There is a certain time which God hath allotted to every purpose and action, which if men had the wisdom to take hold of, their business would better succeed; 'but because man knoweth not his time, great is his misery upon earth,' therefore he effecteth not the things he goeth about.

2. The next word is *chance*, or occurrence; so is the word translated 1 Kings v. 4, 'The Lord hath given me rest, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent;' it is the same word. The success is such as the counsel of God hath foreordained, yet to us it chanceth¹ to be a mere chance and adventure. In short, that which God hath from all eternity ordained, shall and must come to pass at such a time as God hath ordained it should be, and likewise in such a manner, and by such ways and means, as he hath ordained it shall be done. Things casual to us are counsels to him. What was *chance* to others is *the Lord* to Job, chap. i. 21. Therefore not uncertain chance is intended, but such as is ruled and governed by God, who disposeth of all occasions and events according to his own good pleasure, either in escaping out of danger, or obtaining victory, or being supplied with necessaries, or growing rich, or received into favour; it is all as God will order it. The swift, the wise, the strong, though they are best prepared, disposed, and do most intend their business, yet the event is in God's hand, who disposeth it according to His own will.

Before we draw the doctrine from hence, we shall remove the false inferences and deductions that some make.

1. Some think these words to be spoken in the person of the epicure or atheist, whom Solomon introduceth as reasoning against divine providence; but it agreeth not with the preface, 'I returned, and saw under the sun;' which is usually prefixed before his observations about the vanity and vexation that ariseth from mere worldly things.

2. This text must be vindicated from them who set up an idol of the heathens' blind fortune, as if all things were carried by uncertain chance. No; it is occurrence (as before); and though it be chance to men, it is providence to God, the universal and first agent, who

¹ Qu. 'seemeth'?—ED.

‘worketh all things according to the counsel of his will.’ It is not chance to him, for he never misseth of his end, for his knowledge is infallible and his power insuperable.

3. From those who reject the use of means, and all operations, dispositions, and preparations of second causes, as if they moved not, and God did not act or move by them. No; this a false deduction and inference both in naturals and spirituals.

[1.] In naturals, for God worketh by means, and by means prepared: Hosea ii. 21, 22, ‘I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth,’ &c. There is a train of causes governed and influenced by God. The second causes have their operation, but they are under the government of the first, who worketh by them, and also suspendeth their operations at his pleasure. There are two extremes: one of Durandus, that God giveth second causes only power to work of themselves, and doth only continue this power to them, but not work with them. But this is false; for all things depend on God, not only for their being, but working: Acts xvii. 28, ‘In him we live, move, and have our being.’ The other is, that the creature hath no operation at all, that the first cause doth only work *ad presentiam creature*, by the presence of the second. But this is also against the wisdom of God; for if the second causes did no way concur to the producing of their effects, then they are made in vain, and used for such an end in vain.

[2.] Nor in spirituals: Phil. ii. 12, 13, ‘Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.’ God’s working is an engagement to us to wait upon him in the use of means, that we may meet with God in his way, and God may meet with us in our way. In his way; for God hath appointed certain duties to convey and apply his grace to us; we are to lie at the pool till the waters be stirred, to continue our attendance till God giveth his grace, Mark iv. 24. In our way; for God influenceth all things according to their natural inclination. God, that enlighteneth with and by the sun, burneth with and by the fire, reasoneth with and by man, acts necessarily with necessary causes, and freely with free causes. He doth not oppress the liberty of the creature, but preserveth the nature and interest of his own workmanship: Hosea xi. 4, ‘I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.’ He draweth by propounding reasons, which we consider, and so betake ourselves to a godly life. In short, we must do what we can, otherwise we are wanting to ourselves; but we must not depend upon our own counsel, wisdom, and strength, for the event is not always to the swift, strong, and wise.

The true observation contained in these words is this:—

That many endeavours of the creature are often frustrated of their end when there is greatest probability of success.

Here Solomon representeth men:—

1. Under several accomplishments of *swift, wise, strong*.
2. As addressing themselves to some effect to obtain success.
3. As in the issue disappointed. None of these accomplishments alone do give the event intended and hoped for, nor doth it depend absolutely and infallibly upon them.
4. That all things intended, desired, expected by us, depend upon

time and chance, namely, as they depend upon God's providence, as and when God will order and determine the time and opportunity, the success and event.

Therefore from the whole it appears, that instruments most fitted and furnished, and most diligent in their way, are frustrated of the event which they so earnestly intended and hoped for.

REASONS.

I. The best instruments fail out of their ignorance, oblivion, and inadvertency, from which man cannot altogether free himself in this life, not only in matters spiritual, but secular, whether economical in the disposing of ourselves and relations, or family interests and concerns. Wise men have their errors: James iii. 2, 'In many things we offend all of us.' This ignorance showeth itself sometimes in a mistake of instruments whose hearts we know not; or if we know them for the present, we are not sure of futurity, how they may change or be alienated and drawn off from us. Sometimes about time and opportunity, for the beginning, setting on foot, or carrying on any good works: 'Man knoweth not his time.' Sometimes in the manner of doing there is some error; for some things we know speculatively we do not know practically, and what we know in the general is to be done we do not always know in particular cases, but are blinded by our affections; what we know habitually we do not know actually, we do not consider of it for the time. In short, no man knoweth all the secrets and circuits of human affairs. God only is omnipotent and omniscient, hath all creatures in his power, and can foresee all events. But it is much for us to understand our duty, we cannot know events, for things are carried strangely beyond men's expectation, and their likeliest projects crossed.

II. Because if we have sufficient knowledge, yet God can easily put some impediment from within or without to hinder the use of our wisdom, power, and knowledge.

1. Within. He can blast our excellencies in an instant, or obstruct the use of it for the time. As though he did not destroy the property of the fire, yet he suspended the burning, when the three children were in the furnace. So of a sudden can he blast our strength: Ps. xvi. 5, 6, 'The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; none of the men of might have found their hands; at thy rebuke the chariot and horses are cast into a dead sleep.' Whatsoever strength, courage, wit, or any other point of perfection any man hath, God, who gave it, can take it away when he pleaseth, or suspend the use of it. All this God can do with a rebuke, with a word of his mouth. Now, as the strong cannot find their hands, so the wise cannot find their hearts: Job v. 14, 'They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night.' Who were these? The wise and the crafty, whom he speaketh of in the foregoing verses. In the clearest cases they are to seek, and so their well-contrived plots come to nothing. There is a blast and plague upon their judgments, so that they do involve and confound themselves; and what by self-conceit and froward self-will, they drive on their designs so precipitantly and furiously that they must needs miscarry. They do not seem to

have the judgment of ordinary men. Thus though men be endowed with good gifts and qualities, both of wisdom and strength, God can easily take away their power and will to use them.

2. From without. By casting in some casual event, which we foresaw not, and could not think of. Man cannot foresee all the wheels which move in a business; if he did, he is not able to turn them; so that, besides taking away his wisdom, courage, and strength, when the work is to be done, God puts some impediment in his way which was unexpected. There are certain sudden accidents which none can foresee and prevent, any of them able to turn the enterprise another way. The most casual fortuitous things are ordered by God, for the great ends of his providence. As for instance, Haman travailed with a design to cut off all the people of the Jews, but his chief spite was against Mordecai. Now by chance the king could not sleep that night, and calleth for the book of memorials, Esth. vi. 1, and found the discovery of a treason by Mordecai there recorded, which spoiled all the deep plots of Haman against the Jews. Ahab intended to avenge himself upon Micaiah, and to escape in the battle, changed his robes and royal apparel, and counselled Jehoshaphat to put on his: 'and a man drew a bow at a venture,' 1 Kings xxii. 34. God directed the arrow to the heart of the king of Israel. Jehoshaphat escapeth, and he is slain. So that notable instance, the sunshine upon the water, 2 Kings iii. 22-24. When the Moabites came to distress Jehoshaphat, when they cried 'Moab to the spoil,' it was indeed 'Moab to a sore destruction.'

Now these, and many such like instances, teach us that the most casual and fortuitous things do certainly and infallibly fall out by God's providence and heavenly government. And again, that there is some occurrence which providence casteth in by the way to disappoint the most likely means; and whatever gifts and qualities men are endowed withal, yet events are not in their power, but depend on the free concurrence of God. I speak nothing now of the influence of angels upon human affairs, whom God maketh use of in the government of the world.

III. The most able instruments do often provoke God to disappoint them, whilst their abilities of counsel and strength are a means of hardening their hearts in carnal confidence, and often engage in business that proves mischievous to them; I say, in the most lawful businesses they provoke God to disappoint them, because they undertake them without God; but too too often being unrenewed and un sanctified, their wit and power is used against God.

1. It is a great crime to go about any business without God: Prov. iii. 5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' When our wisdom and strength is set up as an idol or image of jealousy, God is obliged to blast it. Therefore they that make their bosom their oracle, their wit their counsellor, they seldom carve out to themselves a good portion. In all serious business we must ask his leave, counsel, blessing.

2. But many times men of great abilities, being un sanctified, employ them against God. They are ordinarily the devil's greatest agents and factors for his kingdom. In seducing our first parents he

made use of the serpent, which was 'more subtle than any beast of the field,' Gen. iii. 1. Now these make God their opposite party that engage in any such enterprise upon the confidence of their wisdom and strength, and then they are 'snared by the work of their own hands,' Ps. ix. 16. God delighteth to be seen to put rubs and stumbling-blocks in their way, that they may fall by some miserable disappointment, and their craft and power may turn to their own ruin.

IV. To say and do, or to make a thing to be, is the act and name of Jehovah, which glory he will not communicate to any other: Lam. iii. 37, 'Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?' that is, who is able to bring about what he speaketh and purposeth, unless God permit and give way thereunto? Therefore, whatever preparation of means or likelihoods there are, we must not be too confident of future events. We cannot bring them to pass by our own power, and God doth not always work by likely means; he hides events from men: Isa. xlvi. 7, 'Lest thou shouldst say, I knew them.' Now the event could not be hidden if the Lord went on in a constant course, giving the race to the swift, &c. God carrieth on his providence so as to leave no footsteps behind him. He goeth not one way so often as to make a path of it, that men may see the plain tendency thereof.

The uses follow.

It teaches us:—

I. The nothingness of the creature, and the all-sufficiency of God. That is a great lesson indeed, and mightily useful to us throughout the whole spiritual life.

First, It is a notion which the scripture much delighteth in, to represent God as all and the creature as nothing. At first, when Moses inquired God's distinctive name, God giveth him no other but I AM: Exod. iii. 14, 'And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM; and I AM hath sent me unto you.' What thing is there under the cope of heaven that cannot say 'I am that I am'? The least worm hath its own being; but this, as God's distinctive name, implieth that he encloseth all being within himself. Secondly, The creature is nothing: Isa. xl. 17, 'All nations before him are nothing; they are accounted less than nothing, and vanity;' Dan. iv. 35, 'The inhabitants of the world are reputed before him as nothing.' All created beings must vanish out of our sight when we think of God.

But how are the creatures nothing, which faith teaches us? and how something, which sense teacheth us? Something they are unquestionably in respect of that derived and dependent being which they have from God. We must not establish the Pyrrhonian conceit that the whole world is but a fantasy, indeed nothing, and our life but a dream, or sceptically to look upon the being and modes of all things as uncertain. No; nor to imagine that sense is so far fallible that a man of sound sense and understanding may not be sure of the objects conveniently presented to his sense. Certainly the sceptics need to be scourged as fools till they feel themselves something. But yet it is of high importance in the work of godliness to see the creature nothing. It is so:—

1. By way of comparison with God.
2. By way of exclusion of God.
3. By way of opposition to God.

1. By way of comparison with God. So God's name only is *I AM*, and then there is none besides him. If the creatures be compared among themselves, some are good, strong, wise, others not; but they are all nothing in comparison of God. Though there be a difference between the stars in the night, some are brighter and some are darker, some of the first magnitude, second, third, &c., yet in the daytime they are all alike inconspicuous, all are darkened by the sun's glory. When we compare the creatures one with another, we shall find different degrees of perfection and excellency; but by the glorious brightness of the Father of lights all these inferior lights are obscured and their differences unobserved. God saith somewhere, 'I am, and there is none else; I am alone. I lift my hand to heaven, and swear, I live for ever.' It is counted an usurpation of divine honour for the creature to say *I am*: Isa. xlvii. 8, 'Babylon said in her heart, *I am*.' So Nineveh: Zeph. ii. 15, 'This is the rejoicing city, that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, *I am*, and there is none besides me;' Isa. xlvii. 10, 'Thy wisdom and understanding hath perverted thee, and thou hast said in thy heart *I am*, and there is none besides me.' For us to reckon upon our wisdom, strength, or goodness, is a derogation from God. God in scripture is represented as only wise, only strong, and only good, Job ix. 19, 1 Tim. i. 17, Mat. xix. 17. The creature hath but the shadow of these things. As it is but a borrowed kind of speech to call a picture or a statue a man—this is Cæsar, this is Alexander—because of the likeness and representation, so the creatures are but a resemblance when we call them wise, strong, good. To this head may be referred those expressions, 'the true light,' John i. 9, 'the true vine,' John xv. 1. These terms originally agree to God, and but in a borrowed sense to the creature.

2. By way of exclusion of God. As the sunbeam is nothing when the sun withdraweth, or the sound is nothing when the musician taketh away his mouth and breath from the pipe and instrument: Ps. civ. 29, 30, 'Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, and they are created; thou takest away thy breath, and they die.' The creature in comparison with God is in reckoning nothing; but in exclusion of God it is in reality nothing; because all their life, wisdom, strength, and the acting of it is but borrowed and derived from God, and held only at God's pleasure. Naturally and spiritually it is true. If any of us say, *I am*, we must add with Paul, 'By the grace of God I am that I am,' 1 Cor. xv. 10. And again, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ,' Gal. ii. 20. If God withdraw his providential influence and supportation, we vanish into nothing: Job vii. 8, 'Thine eyes are upon me, and I am not;' meaning that God, fastening his eye upon him in anger, would look him into nothing.

3. In way of opposition to God, either to his cause and interest in the world: Isa. xli. 11, 'Behold, all that are incensed against thee shall be as nothing.' The creature beareth a big bulk in the eye of sense, seemeth not only as something, but as all things; and as long as a man looketh to what is visible, we have no hope and comfort to

fasten upon. But what are the swift, the wise, the strong to God, or against his providence, when God is angry for sin, and we use ordinary means to avoid the danger, and do not reconcile ourselves to him, and take up the controversy between him and us? Alas! human endeavours can avail nothing against his wrath. Those probable means, which have prevailed at other times, will prove a mere nothing; be we never so strong and wise, and use never so many politic means to avert the judgment: Amos vi. 13, 'Ye rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to ourselves horns by our own strength?' They gloried in this, that their strength was renewed and increased, and so hoped to elude the threatened judgment, and to drive away any enemy that might invade them. 'They glory in a thing of nought,' saith the prophet. Alas! what are armies, troops, confederacies, councils? Things of nought, when God will blow upon them; all things on this side of God are of nought, and vain to be gloried in, when our sins are come to a height, and judgments are threatened and near.

Secondly, I will prove to you, that the true apprehension of this is mightily useful to us throughout the whole spiritual life; for no one thing keepeth the creature upright so much as to see all in God, and nothing in the creature. This establisheth our dependence on God's promises in the most difficult cases; as Rom. iv. 17, 18, What made Abraham to 'believe in hope against hope,' and give God so much credit and glory as he did? By his faith 'he believed in him that quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that are not as though they were.' Again, there is nothing that doth so encourage us in the difficult services which God calleth us unto, as to remember God is all, and the creature is nothing. As when the apostles went to preach the gospel first at Jerusalem, in the very face of opposition, whose interest led them to oppose it. When among the Gentiles, possessed of a religion entailed upon them by the tradition of many ages, and for which they were zealous, the devil stirring up the hatred of many furious spirits against them. The doctrine was novel, and did not court the senses, but persuaded men to row against the stream of flesh and blood, slighted by the people, disputed against by their wise men, persecuted by the powers that then were, had no temporal interest to back it; and this to be promoted in the face of the learned world, by a few poor fishermen, when all civil disciplines were then in their ἀκμή and height. What encouraged them to this? The apostle telleth you, 1 Cor. i. 26-28, That though they had 'not many mighty, not many noble,' to own them; yet 'God had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are.' In short, that though magistracy and populacy were against them, the creature is as nothing, God all in all. Again, to depend on God's providence in the midst of losses, wants, straits: 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things.' Again, if we have a due sense of God's being, the tempting baits of the world would scarce be seen; the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world would be forgotten, as if they were not: Prov. xxiii. 5, 'Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not?' It is as if it were not, if God will blast them, if God will not work by them. Again, to look for a

blessing upon all the means: 1 Cor. iii. 7, 'For neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.' The best and wisest ministers can do nothing, either to plant or water, to convert or build up, unless God give the blessing, and set in with their labours. Again, to keep us humble in the highest enjoyments: 2 Cor. xi. 5, 'In nothing I come behind the chiefest apostles, though I am nothing;' all is but a borrowed excellency. Thus you see it hath an influence upon our uprightness and sincere dealing, from first to last, to look off from the creature to God alone.

Thirdly, I shall show you that this is the intent of this lesson which is given us in this place. For wherefore is the race denied to the swift, and the battle to the strong, and riches to men of understanding, but to show us that the creature doth not do all, yea, that it is nothing if you exclude God? Why doth the Holy Ghost direct us to this meditation, but to carry up our thoughts to the overruling power of the highest cause and agent, disposing of time and chance, that second causes may be seen to depend upon him both in being and operation? and that we should not abuse our talents, by confiding in them without God, or turning and using them against God, either to oppose his interest, or defeat his judgments? So that I might rest here. But the meanest capacities will require more explicit application.

II. To teach us in this lottery of human affairs to look after surer comforts. This is the whole drift of this book; for Solomon, in his critical search and observation of all things done under the sun, aimeth at this, to direct our hearts to blessings which are more stable and sure. God would leave these things at uncertainty, that our hearts might not too much be set upon them, that we might not pursue after favour, riches, and credit, as the best things. If all things here did run in one certain tenor, men, that are mightily wrought upon by sense, would look no higher; but there is a nobler pursuit, a better happiness to be found elsewhere. The race is not always to the swift; but in the spiritual race, we 'run not as uncertain,' 1 Cor. ix. 26. There the crown is sure, if we keep running and faint not; here the battle is not always to the strong, and 'he that putteth on his harness must not boast as he that putteth it off.' But if you 'fight the good fight of faith,' 'the God of peace will tread Satan under your feet shortly,' Rom. xvi. 20. Here bread is not to the wise; many persons of understanding labour and toil all their days for the meat that perishes, and at length can hardly get it. But if you 'labour for the meat that perisheth not, the Son of man will give it you,' John vi. 27. In spiritual and heavenly things, choose and have, seek and have, labour and have; but it is not so in worldly things; there many times we have but our pains for our travail. Again, nor riches to men of understanding. Fools go away with the world, and we need not envy them if we be wise to salvation: 'Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; so is he that heapeth up riches to himself, and is not rich towards God,' Luke xii. 20, 21. Earthly things cannot make a man truly rich; the true riches are the heavenly treasure, the graces of the spirit, to be 'rich in faith,' James ii. 5; 'Fruitful in good works,' 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. He that valueth an estate more by the possession than by the use, is a spiritual fool, and will at length be thrown into hell for his perverse choice. No

matter if you want the riches of this world, so you be rich towards God. Christ gave his Spirit to the best disciples, but his purse to Judas, who was a thief and a robber. Once more, nor favour to men of skill. The favour of men, princes or people, is a very uncertain thing, and the best experienced in affairs do not always light on it; but if we have the favour of God, this breedeth solid joy, Ps. iv. 7. Gladness is sent into the heart when God smileth, though the world frowneth. These spiritual and eternal blessings are dispensed by a sure covenant, the others are promiscuously given by an uncertain providence.

III. What need there is God should be seen and sought unto in all our designs and resolutions about the disposal of ourselves and ours.

1. What will the use of means and second causes do without God? When we have prepared best, and consulted best, the intentions we travail with may miscarry, for the event is wholly in God's hands: Prov. xvi. 1, 'The preparations of the heart are from man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.' Man propoundeth, intendeth, purposeth; but the success cometh from God.

2. When we have done our duty, and used such good means as God affordeth, then we may quietly refer the success to God, in whose hands are all the ways of the children of men, and upon whose good pleasure the issues of all things depend, Prov. xvi. 13.

IV. The wisest and best of men must not expect always to be happy, but must prepare themselves for sinister chances; for the words are brought in upon this occasion of rejoicing in our comforts. In an uncertain world we must always reserve a liberty of full and free submission to God's providence, if the event should not answer expectation; for 'the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.' We must not be too confident of future worldly events, for in these things God, by whose providence all things are governed, would leave us to uncertainty. Alas! many times we mistake and miss of fit opportunities, and then the best preparations and sufficiencies will be lost. 'My times are in thy hand,' saith David, Ps. xxxi. 15. And sometimes God interposeth, and will be glorified by us in an afflicted condition. Therefore you must reserve a liberty to God, to order and govern you according to his own pleasure, as to success in your callings, comfort in your relations, favour with men in your employments. God may make every relation a door to let in affliction. You should often consider the sovereignty of God, the uncertainty of your own lives, the mutability of all worldly things. You speak arrogantly when you presume of success, and take more upon you than you are able to perform: 1 Sam. ii. 3, 'Talk no more exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth;' that is, presumptuous conceits of absolute success. And the apostle James, chap. iv. 13, 14, &c., 'Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Your life is a vapour; and ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. Now ye rejoice in your boastings, all such rejoicing is evil.' There are certain times when God is resolved to proceed with his people in a judiciary way, and then all means we can use will not keep off the stroke: Amos ii. 14-16, 'Therefore the flight shall

perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, nor the mighty deliver himself; neither shall he stand that handleth the bow, nor he that is swift of foot deliver himself, nor he that rideth the horse. He that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away in that day, saith the Lord.' No means, though never so probable, will avail us in a time of judgments; neither speed of horse or foot, neither strength of body, nor courage of mind, nor provision of armour, nor skill to use it; but the judgments shall reach all they aim at. Then it is plainly fulfilled, that 'the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,' &c.

V. Take heed of carnal confidence, or depending upon the sufficiency of any means, though never so likely to produce their effect. Partly because God delighteth to cross men in their carnal confidences, he blasteth those sufficiencies which we depend upon and rejoice in apart from himself, to maintain his own right. Success is his: 'The battle is the Lord's,' 1 Sam. xvii. 47. He blasts men in the things they boast of. Asahel's swiftness was his ruin; so was Ahithophel's policy and Absalom's hair. God saith to Babylon, thy understanding hath undone thee. Men often by their wit bring themselves into mischief, yea, into hell.

VI. To keep humble men of the best abilities and sufficiencies for any work.

1. Before the event; for many times they meet with more disappointments than those that want them, and their best designs miscarry when meaner persons are carried through their difficulties with less ado.

2. After the event we must look above second causes, not attribute anything to our own strength or gifts, but to God's assistance and blessing on our labours. 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man glory in his might,' &c., Jer. ix. 23. So Deut. viii. 17, 18, 'Say not in thy heart, My power, and the might of my hand, hath gotten me this wealth. Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.' Let us not 'sacrifice to our own net.' 'The battle is not to the strong, nor bread to the wise.' It is God's, and he will not be robbed of his glory. And as we should carry it humbly towards God, so also to men, not despising them of mean gifts. Many times God giveth them more success in the ministry, in ordinary callings, in favour and preferments in the world, or esteem in the eyes of the people. It is God only makes the difference, and what thou hast above others thou hast it from God, and for God; not to lift up thyself, but to exalt God; therefore give thanks, and do not contemn others.

VII. To prevent the discouragement of those that want gifts, or parts, or means. Suppose their adversaries be mighty: 'It is nothing with God to help with many, or them that have no power,' 2 Chron. xiv. 11. The less in the creature the more in God: 2 Cor. xii. 9, 'His power is perfected in our weakness.' God many times passeth over the strong, wise, and understanding, and gets himself most glory in protecting the weak, and providing for them.

The issue of all is this: Let us bear all things befalling us from the wise hand and providence of the Lord, and encourage ourselves in his all-sufficiency in all straits and difficulties.