

A RESCUE FROM DEATH, WITH A RETURN
OF PRAISE.

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NOTE.

For the full title-page of the book of which 'A Rescue from Death' forms the second moiety, see Note to the Treatise composing the former, entitled 'Lydia's Conversion,' in the second division of the present volume.

G.

A RESCUE FROM DEATH, WITH A RETURN OF PRAISE.

Fools, because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted, &c.—Ps. CVII. 17, &c.

This Psalm containeth some passages concerning God's particular, sweet providence ; not only to the church, but to other men ; for he that created all things, even the meanest creature, must have a providence over all things ; his providence must extend itself as large as his creation. For what is providence but a continuance of creation : a preservation of those things in being that God hath given to have a being. The prophet here of purpose opposeth the profane conceits of them that think God sits in heaven, and lets things go on earth, as if he cared not for them. It was the fault of the best philosophers to ascribe too much to second causes. The psalmist here shews that God hath a most particular providence in everything. First, he sets it down in general, and then he brancheth it out into particulars, especially four, wherein he specifieth God's providence.

The first instance is of those that 'wander in the wilderness hungry and thirsty ;' ver. 4, 'They cry, and God regards them.'

The second is in ver. 10, 'They that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in iron, they cry, and the Lord heareth them.'

The third is in the words of the text, 'Fools for their transgressions are afflicted ; their soul abhorreth all manner of meat.' He instanceth in sickness, the most ordinary affliction, and shews that God hath a most particular providence even in that.

The fourth is in ver. 23, 'Those that go down into the sea, they see 'experiments*' of God's particular providence.

Since the fall, the life of a man is subject to a wondrous many inconveniences, which we have brought on us by our sins. Now in this variety it is a comfortable thing to know God's care of us in our wanderings and imprisonments, in our sickness, &c. But to omit the other three, and to come to that that is proper to the place, that is, the instance of God's providence in sickness.

'Fools, because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted,' &c.

* That is, 'have experience of.'—G.

In these words you have,

First, The cause of this visitation, and of all the grievance he speaks of : 'transgression and iniquity.'

And then the kind of this visitation : 'sickness.'

And the extremity, in two branches : 'Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat ;' and secondly, 'They draw near to the gates of death.'

And then the carriage of the affected* and sick parties : '*They cry unto the Lord* in their distress.'

And the remedy, of the universal and great physician : 'He saves them out of their distress.'

And the manner of this remedy : 'He sent his word and healed them ;' his operative and commanding word, so as it works with his command.

Lastly, the fee that this high commander asks for ; all the tribute or reward that he expects is praise and thanksgiving. 'Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and his wondrous works for the children of men,' &c.

So you see this Scripture contains several passages between God and man, in misery and in deliverance. In *misery* :—God afflicts man for his sin. The passage of man to God is, 'He cries to God.' God's passage back again is his 'deliverance,' and then his return back again must be 'thanksgiving.' So here is a double visitation, in justice God correcting sin ; and then a visitation in mercy, upon their crying and praying, God restores them ; and then man's duty, 'thanksgiving.' But to proceed in order.

'Fools, because of their transgressions,' &c.

Here you have first the quality of the persons set down.

'Fools.'

We must understand by 'fools,' wicked fools ; not such fools as are to be begged, as we say ; that are defective in their naturals,† but the 'wise fools' of the world. They are the chief of fools. However in the courts of men they be not found fools, yet they are fools in God's esteem, who is wisdom itself. Those that think themselves wise, that are conceitedly wise, they are these fools here.

In the phrase of Scripture and the language of the Holy Ghost, every sinner is a 'fool.' It were a disgraceful term if any man should give it ; but let no man stumble at it. It comes from the wise God that knows what wisdom is, and what is folly. If a fool shall call a man 'fool,' he doth not regard it ; but if a wise man, especially the 'God of wisdom,' call a man 'fool,' he hath reason to regard it. Who can judge better of wisdom than God, who is 'only wise' ?

Why are wicked men fools ? and God's children, so far as they yield to their lusts ?

In divers respects.

1. First, *For lack of discerning in all the carriage and passages of their lives.* You know a fool is such a one as cannot discern the difference of things, that is defective in his judgment. Discerning and judgment, that especially tries a fool, when he cannot discern between pearls and pebbles, between jewels and ordinary base things. So wicked men are defective in their judgments. They cannot discern aright between spiritual and heavenly things, and other things. All your worldly fools, he hunts after and placeth his happiness in things meaner than himself ; he takes shadows for substances.

2. A fool is led with his humour and his lust, even as the beast. So there

* Qu. 'afflicted' ?—G.

† That is, (natural) 'reason.'—G.

is no wicked man that shakes off the fear of God, 'which is true wisdom,' Prov. i. 7, but he is led with his humour, and passion, and affection to some earthly thing. Now a man can never be wise and passionate, unless in one case, when the good is so exceeding that no passion can be answerable; as in zeal in divine matters. That will excuse all exorbitant carriage otherwise. When David 'danced before the ark,' a man would think it had been a foolish matter, except it had been a divine business, 2 Sam. vi. 14. When the matter is wondrous great, that it deserves any pitch of affection, then a man may be eager and wise; but for the things of this life, for a man to disquiet himself and others, to hunt after a 'vain shadow,' as the psalmist saith, after riches and honour, and to neglect the main end of a man's life, it is extreme folly. A man that is passionate in this respect cannot be wise. All fools are passionate, and wicked men have their affections set deeply on somewhat else besides God. Because passion presents things in a false glass, as when a man sees the sun through a cloud he seems bigger. When men look on things in* the judgment of the Scripture, and the Spirit of God, and right reason, but through affection, things appear to them otherwise than they are, and themselves afterwards see themselves fools. Take a worldling on his deathbed, or in hell. He sees himself a fool then. When his drunkenness is past; when he is come to himself and is sober, he sees that he hath catched, all his lifetime, after shadows. Wicked men that are carried with their lusts to earthly things, they cannot be wise. Therefore the 'rich man' in the gospel, is called a 'fool,' Luke xii. 20; and in Jer xvii. 11, he speaks of a man that 'labours all his lifetime, and in the end is a fool.' Is not he a fool that will carry a burden, and load himself in his journey more than he needs? And is not he a spiritual fool that 'loads himself with thick clay,' as the prophet calls it, Hab. ii. 6, and makes his pilgrimage more cumbersome than he needs? Is not he a 'fool' that lays the heaviest weight on the weakest? that puts off the heaviest burden of repentance to the time of sickness, and trouble, and death, when all his troubles meet in a centre, as it were, and he hath enough to do to conflict with his sickness?

3. Again, He is a 'fool' that will play with edge tools, *that makes a sport of sin*. He is a 'fool' that provokes his betters; that shoots up arrows and casts up stones, that shall fall on his own head. He that darts out oaths and blasphemies against God, that shall return back upon his own pate, Ps. vii. 16. Many such fools there are. 'God will not hold them guiltless,' Exod. xx. 7.

4. He is a 'fool' that knows not, *or forgets his end*. Every wicked man forgets the end wherefore he lives in the world. He comes here into the world, and lives, and is turned out of the world again, and never considers the work that he hath to do here, but is carried like a 'fool,' with affections and passions to earthly things, as if he had been born only for them. A wise man hath an end prefixed in all that he doth, and he works to that end. Now there is no man but a sound sanctified Christian, that hath a right end, and that works to that end. Other men pretend they have an end, and they would serve God, &c.

They pretend heaven, but they work to the earthward; like moles, they dig in the earth. They work not to the end they pretend to fix to themselves. All men, how witty soever they are otherwise, in worldly respects, they are but 'fools.' As we say of owls, they can see, but it is by night: so wicked men are witty, but it is in works of darkness. They are wise 'in

* Qu. 'not in'?—Ed.

their own generation,' among men like themselves. But this is not the life wherein folly and wisdom can be discerned so well. It will appear at the hour of death, and the day of judgment. Then those will be found wise that are wise for eternity; that have provided how it shall go with them when all earthly things shall fail them; and those will be 'fools' that have only a particular wit for the particular passages of this life; to contrive particular ends and neglect the main. They are penny wise and pound foolish. Ahithophel, a witty wiseman, his 'counsel was an oracle, yet he was not wise to prevent his own destruction, 2 Sam. xvi. 23.

5. He is a madman, a 'fool,' *that hurts and wounds himself*. None else will do so. Wicked carnal men, they wound, and hurt, and stab their own consciences. Oh, if any man should do them but the thousandth part of the harm that they do themselves every day, they would not endure it. They gall and load their consciences with many sins, and they do it to themselves. Therefore it is a deserved title that is given them. God meets with the pride of men in this term of folly. For a wicked man, above all things, is careful to avoid this imputation of 'fool.' Account him what you will, so you account him a shrewd man withal, that can overreach others, that he is crafty and wise, he glories in the reputation of wisdom, though God account him a fool, and he shall be found so afterward; and to abate the pride of men, he brings a disgraceful term over their wit and learning, and calls them fools.

Use 1. This should *abuse any man that is not a right and sound Christian*, that the 'God of wisdom,' and the Scripture—that is, God's word—esteems of all wicked men, be what they will, to be 'fools,' and that in their own judgments, if they be not atheists, if they will grant the principles they pretend to believe.

Let this, therefore, be an aggravation in your thoughts when you are tempted to commit any sin. Oh, besides that it is a transgression and rebellion against God's commandment, it is 'folly in Israel,' and this will be 'bitterness in the end.'

Use 2. Is he not a 'fool' that will do that in an instant, *that he may repent many years after*? Is he not a foolish man, in matter of diet, that will take that that he shall complain of a long time after? None will be so foolish in outward things. So when we are tempted to sin, think, Is it not folly to do this, when the time will come that I shall wish it undone again, with the loss of a world if I had it to give?

Use 3. And beg of God the *wisdom of the Holy Ghost*, to judge aright of things, the 'eye-salve of the Spirit of God, to discern of things that differ,' Rev. iii. 18; to judge spiritual riches to be best, and spiritual nobility and excellency to be best; and to judge of sinful courses to be base, however otherwise painful.* Let us labour for grace. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' Prov. i. 7. Those that do not fear the Lord, they have no wisdom.

Use 4. And pass not† *for the vain censures of wicked men*. Thou art hindered from the practice of religious duties, and from a conscionable‡ course of life. Why? Perhaps thou shalt be accounted a fool. By whom? By those that are fools indeed, in the judgment of him who is wisdom indeed, God himself. Who would care to be accounted a fool of a fool? We see the Scripture judgeth wicked men here to be 'fools.'

We must not extend it only to wicked men, but even likewise God's children, when they yield to their corruptions and passions, they are foolish

* Qu. 'gainful'?—ED.

‡ That is, 'conscientious.'—G.

† That is, 'heed not.'—G.

for the time : in Ps. xxxviii. 5, ' My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness ; ' and in Ps. lxxiii. 22, ' So foolish was I and ignorant, ' &c.

Therefore, when any base thought of God's providence comes in our mind, or any temptation to sin, let us think it ' folly ; ' and when we are overtaken with any sin, let us befool ourselves, and judge it, as God doth, to be foolishness. This is the ground and foundation of repentance. So much for the quality of the persons here described, ' fools.'

I come to the cause.

' Because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities.'

Transgression especially hath reference to rebellion against God and his ordinances in the first table. *Iniquity* hath reference to the breach of the second table, against men ; and both these have their rise from folly. For want of wisdom causeth rebellion against God, and iniquity against men. All breaches of God's will come from spiritual folly.

Why doth he begin with transgressions against the first table, and then iniquities, the breach of the second ?

Because all breaches of the second table issue from the breach of the first. A man is never unjust to his neighbours, that doth not rebel against God's will in the first table ; and the foundation of obedience and duty to man, it riseth from man's obedience to God. Therefore the second table is like the first : that is, our love to our neighbour is like to our love of God ; not only like it, but it springs from it. For all comes from the love of God. Therefore the first command of the first table runs through all the commandments. ' Thou shalt honour God ; ' and honour man, *because* we honour God. A man never denies obedience to his superior, to the magistrate, &c., but he denies it to God first ; a man never wrongs man, but he disobeys God first. Therefore, the apostles lay the duties of the second table in the Scriptures upon the first. St Paul always begins his epistles with the duties to God and religion, and when he hath discharged that, he comes to parents, and masters, and children, and servants, and such particular duties ; because the spring of our duty to man is our duty to God, and the first justice is the justice of religion to God. When we are not just to give God his due, thereupon come all breaches in our civil conversation and commerce with men. For want of the fear of God, men do this : as Joseph said, ' How shall I do this, and offend God ? ' Gen. xxxix. 9 ; and Abraham, he had a conceit they would abuse his wife, ' Surely the fear of God is not here,' Gen. xx. 13. Therefore he thought they would not be afraid to do anything. He that fears not God, if opportunity serve, he will not be afraid to violate the second table. He that fears God, he will reason, ' How shall I do this,' to wrong another in his name and reputation, or in his estate, and sin against God ? For I cannot sin against man, but I must first sin against God. That is the reason he sets it down thus, *transgressions and iniquities*.

See an unhappy succession of sin, that where there is transgression there will be iniquity ; when a man yields to lust once, presently he breaks upon God's due, and then upon man's. One sin draws on another. As we see David giving way to one sin, it brought another ; so the giving way to transgression, neglecting the word of God and duties of religion, presently another follows, neglect of duty to men.

Use. Take heed of the beginnings of sin. There are degrees in Satan's school from ill to worse, till we come to worst of all ; and there is no staying. It is like the descent down a steep hill. Let us stop in the beginning

by any means. As we would avoid iniquity, let us take heed of transgression.

‘Are afflicted.’

He means, especially, that affliction of sickness, as appears by the words following.

Doct. Sin is the cause of all sickness.

‘Fools, for their transgressions and iniquities, are afflicted.’ For God’s quarrel is especially against the soul, and to the body because of the soul. I will not dwell on this point, having spoken of it at large on another text, 1 Cor. xi. 31.*

Use 1. The use that I will make of it now, shall be, first of all, if sin be the cause of all sickness, *let us justify God and condemn ourselves*: complain of ourselves, and not of God. ‘Wherefore doth the living man complain,’ Lam. iii. 39, and murmur and fret? Man suffereth for his sin. Justify God, and judge ourselves. ‘I will bear the wrath of the Lord, because I have sinned against him,’ Micah vii. 9. Judge ourselves, and we shall not be judged,’ 1 Cor. xi. 31.

2. Then again, is sin the cause of sickness? *It should teach us patience.* ‘I held my tongue, because thou, Lord, didst it,’ Ps. xxxix. 2. Shall not a man be patient in that he hath procured by his own evil and sin?

3. And *search ourselves*; for usually it is for some particular sin, which conscience will tell a man of; and sometimes the kind of the punishment will tell a man. For sins of the body, God punisheth in the body. He pays men home in their own coin. ‘What measure a man measureth to others shall be measured to him again,’ Mat. vii. 2. If a man have been cruel to others, God will stir up those that shall be so to him; therefore we should labour to part with our particular transgressions and iniquities. It is a general truth for all ills whatsoever, as well as this of sickness. Therefore we should first of all go to God by confession of sin. It is a preposterous course that the athetical careless world takes; where the physician ends, there the divine begins; when they know not what to do. If diseases come from sin, then make use of the divine first, to certify the conscience, and to acquaint a man with his own mercy. First, to search them, and let them see the guilt of their sins, and then to speak comfort to them, and to set accounts straight between God and them, as in Ps. xxxii. 4—an excellent place—David ‘roared; his moisture was turned into the drought of summer.’ What course doth he take? He doth not run to the physician presently, but goes to God. ‘Then said I.’ It was an inward resolution and speech of the mind. Then I concluded with myself, ‘I will confess my sin to God, and thou forgavest my iniquities and sins,’ Ps. xxxii. 5. So body and soul were healed at once. Divinity herein transcends all other arts; not only corrupt nature and corrupt courses, but all other. For the physician he looks to the cause of the sickness out of a man or in a man; out of a man, and then especially in contagious sickness, he looks to the influence of the heavens. In such a year, such conjunctions and such eclipses have been; he looks to the infection of the air, to subordinate causes, to contagious company, and to diet, &c. (a). And then in a man, to the distemper of the humours and of the spirits. When the instrument of nature is out of tune, it is the cause of sickness. But the divine, and every Christian,—that should be a divine in this respect,—goes higher, and sees all the discord between God and us. There is not

* Cf. Sibbes’s ‘Glance of Heaven,’ in Vol. IV.—G.

that sweet harmony there ; and so all the jars in second causes come from God as the cause inflicting : from sin, as the cause demeriting. The divine considers those two alway. The physician looks to the inward distemper and the outward contagion ; and this is well, and may be done without sin. But men must join this too, to look into conscience, and look up to God, together with looking for help to the physician, because we have especially to deal with God.

I would this were considered, that we might carry ourselves more Christian-like under any affliction whatsoever. What is the reason that people murmur, and struggle, and strive, 'as a bull in a net,' as the prophet speaks, Isa. li. 20, when God hampers them in some judgment ? They look to the second causes, and never look to clear the conscience of sin, nor never look to God, when indeed the ground of all is God offended by sin.

'Fools for their transgressions are afflicted.'

We by our sins put a rod into God's hand—'a rod for the fool's back,' as Solomon saith, Prov. xxvi. 3; and when we will be fools, we must needs endure the scourge and rod in one kind or other. Those that will sin must look for a rod. It is the best reward of wicked and vain fools, that 'make a jest of sin,' Prov. xiv. 9—as the wise man saith, 'They cast firebrands, and say, Am I not in jest?' Prov. xxvi. 18—that rail and scorn at good things; that swear and carry themselves in a loose, ridiculous, scandalous fashion, as if God did not eye their carriage; and yet 'Am I not in jest?' Well, it is no jesting matter. Sin is like a secret poison; perhaps it doth not work presently. As there are some kind of subtle poisons made in these days,—wherein the devil hath whetted men's wits,—that will work perhaps a year after, so sin, if it be once committed, perhaps it doth not kill presently, but 'there is death in the pot,' 2 Kings iv. 40. Thou art a child of death as soon as ever thou hast committed sin; as Salvian saith well, 'Thou perishest before thou perish' (*b*). The sentence is upon thee. Thou art a dead man. God, to wait for thy repentance, prolongs thy days; but as soon as thou hast sinned without repentance, thou art a 'child of death.' And as poison, that works secretly a while, yet in time it appears; so at last 'the fruit of sin will be death.' Sin and death came in together. Take heed of all sin; it is no dallying matter.

'Their soul abhors all manner of meat.'

This is one branch of the extremity of the sickness, the loathing of meat; for God hath put a correspondency between food that is necessary for man and man's relish. For man being in this world to be supported, the natural moisture being to be supplied and repaired by nourishment, as it is spent by the natural heat which feeds upon it; therefore God hath put a sweetness into meat, that man might delight to do that which is necessary; for who would care for meat if it were not necessary? Therefore, being necessary, God hath put delightful tastes in meats, to draw men to the use of them, to preserve their being for the serving of him. Now when these things savour not, when the relish of a man is distempered that he cannot judge aright of meats, when the palate is vitiated, there must needs follow sickness. For a man cannot do that that should maintain his strength; he cannot feed on the creature; therefore the psalmist setting down the extremity of sickness, he saith, 'Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat.' This the great physician of heaven and earth sets down as a

symptom of a sick state, when one cannot relish and digest meat. Experience seals this truth, and proves it to be true.

You see, then, the happiness of epicures, how unstable and vain it is, whose chief good is in the creature! God by sickness can make them disrelish all 'manner of meat;' and where is the *summum bonum* then of all your belly-gods, your sensual persons?

Again, In that he saith, 'Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat,' it should teach us to bless God not only for meat, but for stomachs to eat. It is a blessing common, and therefore forgotten. It is a double blessing when God provides daily for our outward man, and then gives a stomach to relish his goodness in the creature. Sometimes a poor man wants meat, and hath a stomach; sometimes a rich man wants a stomach, when he hath meat. They that have both have cause to bless God, because it is a judgment when God takes away the appetite, that men 'abhor and loathe all manner of meat.'

Therefore, if we would maintain thankfulness to God, labour to thank God for common blessings. What if God should take away a man's stomach? We see his state here: he is 'at the gates of death.' Therefore thank God that he maintains us with comforts in our pilgrimage; and withal, that he gives us strength to take the comfort of the creature.

We see here again one rule how to converse with them that are sick. Blessed is he that understands the estate of the afflicted and sick, not to take it ill to see them yaward. It comes not from the mind, but from the distemper of the body. As we bear with children, so we must bear with men in those distempers, if they have food and yet loathe it. You see how it is with men in that case, 'their soul abhorreth all manner of meat.' It should teach us to sympathise with those that are sick, if we see them in these distempers.

The next branch of the extremity is,

'They draw near the gates of death.'

Death is a great commander, a great tyrant; and hath gates to sit in, as judges and magistrates used to 'sit in the gates.*' There are things implied in this phrase.

1. First, 'They draw near to the gates of death;' that is, they were 'near to death,' as he that draws near the gates of a city is near the city, because the gates enter into the city.

2. Secondly, Gates are applied to death *for authority*. They were almost in death's jurisdiction. Death is a great tyrant. He rules over all the men in the world, over kings and potentates, and over mean men; and the greatest men fear death most. He is 'the king of fears,' as Job calls him, Job xviii. 14; ay, and the fear of kings. Yet death that is thus feared in this life by wicked men, at the day of judgment, of all things in the world they shall desire death most; according to that in the Apocalypse, 'they shall desire death, and it shall not come to them,' Rev. ix. 6. They shall subsist to eternal misery. That that men are most afraid of in this life, that they shall wish most to come to them in the world to come—Oh that I might die! what a pitiful state are wicked men in!—Therefore it is called the 'gate of death.' It rules and overrules all mankind. Therefore it is said 'to reign,' Rom. v. 21. Death and sin came in together. Sin was the gate that let in death, and ever since death reigned, and will, till Christ perfectly triumph over it, who is the King of that

* Cf. Gen. xix. 1; 2 Sam. iii. 27; Job xxxi. 21; Ps. lxxix. 12.—G.

lord and commander, and hath 'the key of hell and death,' Rev. i. 18. To wicked men, I say, he is a tyrant, and hath a gate; and when they go through the 'gate of death,' they go to a worse, to a lower place, to hell. It is the trap-door to hell.

3. Thirdly, By the 'gate of death' is meant not only the authority, but *the power of death*; as in the gospel, 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,' Mat. xvi. 18: that is, the power and strength of hell. So here it implies the strength of death, which is very great, for it subdues all. It is the executioner of God's justice.

Use. If death hath such a jurisdiction, and power, and strength, let us labour to disarm it beforehand. It is in our power to make death stingless, and toothless, and harmless; nay, we may make it advantageous, for the 'gate of death' may become the gate of happiness. Let us labour to have our part and portion in Christ, who hath the 'key of hell and death,' who hath overcome and conquered this tyrant: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' 'Thanks be unto God, who hath given us victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord,' 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57, that now we need not fear death; that though death have a gate, yet it is a gate to let us into heaven, as it is a door to let the wicked into hell. So much for that.

In the next place, we come to their carriage in their extremity.

'They cried to God in their trouble.'

This is the carriage of man in extreme ills, if he have any fear of God in him, to pray; and then prayers are cries. They are darted out of the heart, as it were, to heaven. It is said, 'Christ made strong cries,' Heb. v. 7. In extremity, prayers are 'cries.' Hence I observe briefly these things.

Doct. That God suffers men to fall into extreme ills, even to the gates of death; that there is but a step between them and death.

Why?

Reason 1. To wean them perfectly from the world. To make them more thankful when they recover; for what is the reason that men are so slight in thanksgiving? Usually the reason is, they did not conceive that they were in such extreme danger as they were.

2. Likewise he suffers men to fall into extreme sickness that he may have all the glory, for it was his doing. There was no second cause to help here, for their soul 'abhorred all manner of meat, and they were even at the gates of death.' Now, when all second causes fail, then God is exalted. Therefore he suffers men to fall into extremity. The greater the malady, the more is the glory of the physician.

The second thing is this, as God brings his children into extremity, so *God's children in extremity they cry to him.*

Extremity of afflictions doth force prayers: 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' When all second causes fail, then we go to God. Nature therefore is against atheism. As one observes, that naturally men run to God in extremity (c)—'Lord, succour me'—so, especially in the church, in extremity, God's people cry to God; and as afflictions, so particularly this of sickness of body drives men to God. God should not hear of us many times, unless he should come near us by afflictions, and deep afflictions. 'Out of the deep have I cried,' Ps. cxxx. 1. God brings us to the deep, and then we cry. Our nature is so naught,* that God should not hear of

* That is, 'naughty' = wicked.—G.

us, as I said, unless he send some messenger after us, some affliction to bring us home, as Absalom dealt by Joab when he 'fired his corn.' In the gospel, Christ had never heard of many people, had it not been for some infirmity. But blessed are those sicknesses and infirmities that occasion us to go to God, that makes us cry to God. It was the speech of a heathen, 'We are best when we are weakest' (*d*). Why? As he saith very well, 'Who is ambitious, voluptuous, or covetous for the world when he is sick, when he sees the vanity of these things?'

This should make us submit more meekly unto God, when we are under his hand, when we are his prisoners by sickness, when he casts us on our sick beds, because God is working our good, he is drawing us nearer to him.

'Then they cried to him.'

So we see, then, that *prayer it is a remedy in a remediless estate*, when there is no other remedy; and this is one difference between a child of God and another. In extremity, a carnal man that hath not grace, he hath not a spirit of prayer to go to God; but a child of God he cries to God. He had acquaintance with God in the time of health. Therefore he goes boldly to God as a father in the time of extremity. God's children can answer God's dealing; for as he brings his children to extremity, when there is no second cause to help, so they answer him by faith. In extremity, when there is nothing to trust unto, they trust him; when there is no physic in the world that can charm the disease, they have a spirit of faith to answer God's dealing in the greatest misery, as Job saith, 'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him,' Job xiii. 15.

For God is not tied to second causes, and therefore if he have 'delight in us,' and if he have any service for us to do, he can recover us from the 'gates of death,' nay, from death itself; as we see Christ in the gospel raised from the dead—and at the resurrection he will raise us from death—much more can he raise us from the 'gates of death,' when we are 'near death.'

Therefore, considering that prayer is a remedy in all maladies, in a remediless estate, let us labour to have a spirit of prayer, and to be in such a state as we may pray.

What state is that?

1. First, *Take heed of being in league with any sin*. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer,' Ps. lxi. 18; nay, he will not hear others' prayers for us. Oh what a pitiful state is it when God will not hear us nor others for us. 'Pray not for this people,' saith God to Jeremiah, 'and if Noah, Daniel, and Job stood before me, they should but deliver their own souls,' Ezek. xiv. 14. If a man be in a peremptory course of sin, and will not be reclaimed, but is like the 'deaf adder, that will not be charmed,' Ps. lviii. 4, God will not hear prayers for him. Will God hear a rebel when he comes to him for mercy, and is in a course opposite to God's will? As if a traitor should come to sue for pardon with a dagger in his hand, which were to increase the treason; so when a man comes to God and cries to him, and yet purposeth to live in sin, and his conscience tells him that he offers violence to God by his sins, and lives in rebellious courses, God will not hear his prayers.

2. Again, If we would be in such a state as God may accept us when we come to him, *let us hear God when he cries to us*. He cries to us in the ministry of the word: 'Wisdom hath lift up her voice,' Prov. i. 20; and this is God's course. He will hear us when we hear him. 'He that turns

his ear from hearing of the law, his prayer shall be abominable,' Prov. xxviii. 9. Those that do not attend upon God's ordinances, that will have a kind of devotion private to themselves, and avoid the public ordinance, that fear perhaps they shall hear somewhat that would awaken their conscience, and they would not 'be tormented before their time,' Mat. viii. 29, let them consider—it is a terrible speech of Solomon—'He that turns his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be abominable.' Let us take heed. It is a fearful thing to be in such an estate, that neither our own prayers nor others, shall be regarded for us; and let any man judge, if we will not hear God speak to us, is it fit that he should hear us speaking to him?

And before I leave the point, let me press it a little further. At this time we have cause to bless God for the deliverance of the city.* Oh, but let all that have the spirit of prayer, that have any familiarity with God, improve all their interest in heaven at this time. Do we not conceive what danger we are in? what enemies we have provoked? What if we be free from the sickness, are we not in danger of worse matters than the sickness? 'Is it not worse to fall into the hands of our enemies?' 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. Have we not great, provoked, cruel, idolatrous enemies? Therefore let us jointly now, all cry to God, and importune him, that he would be good to the State; that as he hath given us a pledge of his favour in delivering us from the plague, so he would not be weary of doing good unto us, but that he would still make it a token of further favours and deliverances hereafter; that as he delivered us in former times, in '88,† and magnified his mercy to us, so now he would not expose us to the cruelty of idolatrous enemies, 'whose mercies are cruel,' Prov. xii. 10. Let us stir up ourselves. Security and carelessness alway foreruns one destruction or other.

Prayer will do a great deal more good now, than when trouble hath overtaken us; for now it is a sign it comes from a religious seeking of God, then it comes from self-love. There is a great deal of difference when a malefactor seeks to the judge before the time of the assizes, and when he seeks to him at the present time; for then it is merely out of self-respect, and not respect to him. If we seek to God now, he will single and mark out those that mourn for the sins of the time, and pour out their spirits to him in prayer, that he would still dwell and continue the means of salvation amongst us; when God, I say, 'comes to gather his jewels,' Mal. iii. 17, he will single and call out them as peculiar to himself.

Therefore let us in all our prayers put in the church. Things do more than speak. They cry to us to cry to God earnestly. Put case we be not in trouble ourselves, our prayers will be the more acceptable. Before trouble come, it is the only way to prevent it, as it is the only way to rescue us when we are in trouble.

I come now to the remedy.

'He saved them out of their distress.'

God is a physician, good at all manner of sicknesses. It is no matter what the disease be, if God be the physician. Though they be as these 'at the gates of death,' he can fetch them back. Herein God differs from all other physicians.

First of all, he is a general physician. He can heal a land, a whole kingdom, of sickness, of pestilence, and as it is in 2 Chron. vii. 14.

* The plague of 1625-6.—G.

† That is, 1588, from the Armada.—G.

Then he is a physician of body and soul, of both parts. And then he is not tied to means.

Other physicians can cure, but they must have means. Other physicians cannot cure all manner of diseases, nor in all places, but God can cure all. 'He saved them out of their distress.'

Other physicians cannot be always present, but God is so to every one of his patients. He is a compassionate, tender, present physician.

Use. Which should encourage us in any extremity, especially in sickness of body, *to have recourse to God*, and never to despair though we be brought never so low. He that can raise the dead bodies can raise us out of any sickness. Therefore let us use the means; and when there is no means, trust God, for he can work beyond means and without means.

'They cried to the Lord, and he saved them out of their distress.' It was the fruit of their prayers.

Doct. *There was never any prayer from the beginning of the world made to God successfully.*

What, should I speak of prayer! Our very breathings are known to God, when we cannot speak, our sighs; as it is Ps. xxxviii. 9, 'My groans and sighs are not hid from thee.' God hath a 'bottle for our tears,' Ps. lvi. 8, and preserves our sighs and groans. There is nothing that is spiritual in us but God regards, as in Rom. viii. 26, 'We know not what to ask, but the Spirit of God stirreth up in us sighs and groans that cannot be expressed.' And God hears the voice of the sighs of his own Spirit.

Let us also be exhorted from this issue to 'cry unto the Lord;' for there was never any man did sow prayers in the breast and bosom of God, but he received the fruit of it. He is a God 'hearing prayer.' He will not lose his attribute. Nay, further, mark, the instances in this psalm are not made only of men in the church, but likewise of men out of the church, of men that have not the true religion. They pray to God, as creatures to the Creator; and though God have not their souls, yet he will not be beholding to any man for duties. If Ahab do but hypocritically fast, Ahab shall have outward deliverance for his outward humiliation; and these men mentioned in the text, if they call to God but as creatures, and not to idols, God will regard them in outward things, and deliver them. God will not be in any man's debt for any service to him, though it be outward.

And do we think that he that regards 'dogs' out of the church, will neglect his children in the church? He that regards heathen men when they pray to him in their extremity, and delivers them to shew his overflowing bounty and goodness, will he not regard his own children, that have the spirit of adoption, of supplication, and prayer; that put up their suits and supplications in the mediation and sweet name of Christ? Will he not regard the name and intercession of his Son and of his Spirit, the Holy Ghost, stirring up prayers in them, and the state of his children, being his by adoption, since he regards the very heathen?

Nay, more than so, 'God hears the very young ravens,' Job xxxviii. 41, and spreads a table for every living thing; and will not suffer them to die for hunger, but provides for them, because they are his creatures. And will he not for his children, those that he hath taken to be so near him, to be heirs of heaven and happiness? Let us, I say, be encouraged to cry unto the Lord upon all occasions. If God be so good as to deliver sinful men,—that have nothing in them but the principles of nature,—when they fly to God in prayer, as the author and preserver of nature, much more

will he hear his own children. 'He will give his Spirit to them that ask him' Luke xi. 13.

Obj. But here may an objection be made, I have cried long ! I am hoarse with crying ! I have waited a long time ! I have been a long time sick, or annoyed with some particular trouble !, and God seems, as it were, to stop his ears, to harden his heart against me, to shut up his bowels of compassion and pity, therefore I were as good give over as continue still crying and not be heard.

Ans. I answer, there is no one duty almost, more pressed in Scripture than 'waiting and watching to prayer.' Wait still. Hath not God waited thy leisure long enough, and wilt not thou wait on him ?

A patient, when he feels his body distempered by physic, Oh, he cries out, partly for the physic, and partly for the sickness, that trouble him both together, and make civil war in his body, yet notwithstanding the physician wisely lets it work. He shall have no cordial, nor nothing to hinder it ; he lets it go on till the physic have wrought well, and carried away the malignant matter, that he may be the better for it, and [in] that, he is a loving and tender physician. Yet so God, when we are in trouble, it is as physic. We cry, but God he turns the glass* as the physicians do. Nay, this time shall be expired. It shall work so long. Till thy pride be taken away, thou shalt be humbled thoroughly ; till thou be weaned from thy former wicked pleasures ; till thou be prepared to receive further blessings. Therefore they cry and cry, and God defers to hear the 'voice of his children.' In the mean time he loves to hear the 'cry of his children,' and their prayer is as 'sweet incense ;' yet he defers still. But all is for the patient's good. Be not weary of waiting. It is a great mercy that he makes thee able to continue crying, that thou hast the Spirit of prayer ; that thou canst pour out thy soul to God. It is a great mercy, and so account of it.

Perhaps thou hast not cast out thy Jonah, thy Achan ; that there is some particular sin unrepented of ; and thou criest and criest, but thy sin cries louder. Thy pride or thy oppression cries, thy wicked course cries. Thou criest unto God, and there is another thing cries in thee, that cries vengeance as thou doest for mercy. Therefore search out thy Achan ; cast out thy beloved sin ; see 'if thou regard iniquity in thy heart,' if thou regard any pleasing, or profitable, or gainful sin ; and never think that God will hear thee till that be out, for it will outery thy prayers.

The next thing is the manner of God's cure.

'He sent his word and healed them.'

What word ?

His secret command, his will.

Let such a thing be, as in the creation, 'Let there be light,' &c. Besides his word written, there is his word creating, and preserving things created ; and so here, restoring them that were sick, 'He sent his word and healed them ;' and so at the resurrection, his word, his voice shall raise our bodies again. It is a strange manner of cure for God to cure by his word, by his command. It shews that God hath an universal command of all things in the world, in heaven and earth, over devils, and over sicknesses ; as it is said in the gospel, 'He rebuked the sicknesses,' Mat. xvii. 18. He can rebuke the agues, the plague, and the pestilence, and they shall be gone by his word, as the centurion said, 'I am a man that have servants under me : and I say to one, Come, and he cometh ; and to another, Go, and he

* That is, 'hour or time-glass.'—G.

goeth,' Mat. viii. 8, *seq.*; so thou hast all things under thee, thou art God; and if thou say to a disease, 'Come, it cometh;' and if thou say, 'Go, it goeth.' God 'sent his word of command and healed them.' It is but 'a word of God' to heal, but 'a word of God' to strike. He is the 'Lord of hosts.' 'If he do but hiss,' as the prophet saith, 'for the fly of Egypt,' Isa. vii. 18, if he do but call for an enemy, they come at his word; as we see in Pharaoh's plagues, the flies and frogs, all things, obey his word.

There is a secret obedience in all things to God, when his will is that they shall do this or that. Why doth the sea keep his bounds, whenas the nature and position of the sea is to be above the earth? It is the command of God, that hath said, Let it be there, and 'hither shall thy proud waves go, and no further,' Job xxxviii. 11. I might give many instances how God doth all by his word. The devils are at his word; the whales; the sea, when Christ rebukes it, obeys.

Use. It should teach us not to displease this God, that can strike us in the midst of our sins even with a word. Let us fear this God. Put case we had no enemy in the world: God can arm a man's humours against him. He can raise the spirit and soul against itself, and make it fight against itself by desperate thoughts. He needed not foreign forces for Ahithophel and Saul, he could arm their own souls against themselves. And when he will take down the greatest giant in the world, he needs not foreign forces. It is but working of a disease, but giving way to a humour, but inflaming the spirits, and the soul 'shall abhor all manner of meat.'

Again, He gives a command, a rebuke, *and they are gone presently.* Therefore let us not offend this great God, that is commander of heaven and earth; let us labour to please him, and it is no matter who else we displease. For he hath all things at his command, even the 'hearts of kings as the rivers of water,' Prov. xxi. 1. When Esau sought for Jacob to hurt him, there was a secret command God set upon him to love him. Therefore we should fear him, and all other things shall fear us. We need fear nothing, so we have a care to fear God, further than in God and for God. But not so to fear them, as to do evil for them and offend the great God, that can with a word command sickness to come, or bid it begone.

Again, In that God, when all second causes fail, can 'heal by his word,' therefore *let us never be discouraged from praying.* Though we see a hurly-burly and tumult in the church, though we see all Europe in combustion, and the church driven into a narrow corner, let us not give over prayer. For Christ, that with a word commanded 'the waves to be still,' and 'the devils to be gone,' and *they* presently obeyed him, he can still the waves of the church; he can put a 'hook into the nostrils' of his enemies, and draw them which way he please; he can still all with 'his word.' Therefore, howsoever things seem to run contrary and opposite to our desires, yet let us not give over. He that sees no ground of hope in carnal fleshly reason, let him despair of nothing. Despair shuts the gate and door of mercy and hope, as it were. You see here, when all means fail, when they were 'at the very gates' and entry of death, God fetcheth them back again. How? With physic? No. He is not tied to physic. There is difference between God and between nature and art. Nature and art can do nothing without means; but the God of nature and art can do it with his word. How made he this heaven and earth, this glorious fabric? With his word, 'Let there be light, and there was light,' &c., Gen. i. 3. And how shall he restore all again? With his mighty commanding word. How doth he preserve things? By his word. How are things multi-

plied? By his word, 'Increase and multiply,' a word of blessing. He doth all things with his word.

So he can confound his enemies with a word. Nay, Christ in his greatest abasement, when they came with staves and arms to take him, 'Whom seek ye?' saith he. That word 'struck down all the officers of the Scribes and Pharisees; they fell flat on the ground,' John xviii. 4, *seq.* Could he in his humiliation, before his great abasement on the cross, strike down his enemies with his word? What shall he do at the day of judgment, when all flesh shall appear before him? And what can he do now at the right hand of God in heaven? Let us never despair, what state soever we be in, in our own persons, or in respect of the church or commonwealth. Let us yet pray, yet solicit God, and wrestle with him; for we see here, when they were at the 'gates of death,' he fetcheth them again with 'his word.' He can fetch things again when they are at destruction, as it were. When man's wit is at a loss, that he knoweth not what course to take, God with a word can turn all things again.

'Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.'

You see that God, the great physician, he is good at all diseases. He is never set at anything, for he can create helps and remedies, of nothing. If there be none in nature, he can create peace to the soul. In the midst of trouble of conscience, God can make things out of nothing, nay, out of contraries. You see here what this great physician hath done. He fetched them 'from the gates of death, when their soul abhorred all manner of meat;' and what doth he require for all this great cure? Surely the text tells us he looks for nothing but praise.

'Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness,' &c.

In which words you have these circumstances considerable, together with the substance of the duty:

First, The persons who must praise God: 'Oh that men would praise the Lord.'

And then the duty they are to perform: 'to praise God,' to 'sacrifice to God,' to 'declare his works'—one main duty expressed by three terms.

The third is for what they should praise him: 'for his goodness.' It is the spring of all, for all particular actions do come from his nature. His nature is goodness itself, and indeed all other attributes are founded on goodness. Why is he gracious, and merciful, and long-suffering? Because he is good. This is the primitive attribute.

And then another thing for which we must praise him: 'for his wondrous works for the children of men.'

Fourthly, The manner how this should be done: 'with rejoicing and singing,' as the word signifies (*e*), 'declare his works with rejoicing.' For as all holy actions must be done joyfully and cheerfully, so especially praise: 'God loveth a cheerful giver,' 2 Cor. ix 7, much more a cheerful thanksgiver, for cheerfulness is the very nature of thanksgiving. It is a dead sacrifice, of thanksgiving, it is a dead sacrifice else. These are the many things considerable in these words,

First of all, of the persons.

'Oh that men would praise the Lord.'

The blessed psalmist, whosoever he were, directed by the Spirit of God,

he would have all men to praise God; not only those that participate and have interest in the favour, but the beholders also of the goodness of God to others. For here he that was not interested in these favours for his own particular, yet he praiseth God for the blessings to others; and he wisheth that God might have praise from them.

For we are all of one society, of one family, we are all brethren; therefore we must praise God for his blessings and benefits on others: and not only for ourselves, but we must wish that all would do so; and specially we must 'praise God' for ourselves, when we have part of the benefit. For shall others 'praise God' for us, and shall not we for ourselves? Shall the churches of God abroad 'praise God' for his great deliverance of this city—as there is no church in the world that hears of it but is thankful for it—and shall not we for ourselves? Shall the angels in heaven 'praise God,' and sing for the redemption of the church by the blood of Christ, 'Glory to God on high, peace on earth, good will to men?' Luke ii. 13, 14; and shall not we, that have interest in the work of redemption? for Christ is not a mediator of redemption to angels. He hath relation to them in another respect. Yet they out of love to God and the church, and a desire to glorify God, they 'praise God' for this; and shall not we much more for ourselves? We must praise God ourselves, and desire that all would do so, as he saith here, 'Oh that men would praise the Lord,' &c.; and in some other psalms he stirs up all the creatures, 'hail, and snow, and wind,' and all to praise God.

How can these 'praise God'?

They do it by our mouths, by giving us occasion to praise him. And they 'praise him' in themselves; for as the creature groaneth, Rom. viii. 23, that none knows but God and itself; they groan for the corruption and abuse that they are subject unto, and God knows those groans. So the creature hath a kind of voice likewise in praising of God. They declare in their nature the goodness of God, and minister occasion to us to praise God. Therefore the psalmist being desirous that God might be praised for his 'goodness and mercy,' he stirs up every creature, Ps. ciii. 20, *seq.*, even the very angels, insinuating that it is a work fit for angels.

The children of God have such a love and zeal to the glory of God, that they are not content only to praise God themselves, but they stir up all. They need not to wish angels to do it, but only to shew their desire. Oh the blessed disposition of those that love God in Christ!

What shall we think then of those wretched persons that grieve that the 'word of God should run and have free passage, and be glorious,' 2 Thes. iii. 1, and that there should be a free use of the sacraments and the blessed means of salvation? They envy the glory of God, and the salvation of people's souls. What shall we say to those that desire to hear God dishonoured, that perhaps swear and blaspheme, themselves, or if they do not, yet they are not touched in their hearts for the dishonour of God by others? This is far from the disposition of a Christian. He desires that all creatures may trumpet out the praise of God, from the highest angel to the lowest creature, from the sun and stars to the meanest shrub; only devilish-spirited carnal men take delight to blaspheme God, that can strike them with his word and send them to their own place, to hell, without repentance, and can hear him dishonoured without any touch of spirit. A child of God desires God to be glorified from his very heart-root, and is grieved when God is dishonoured any kind of way. So much briefly for the first.

Now what is the duty this holy man wishes ?

‘That men would praise God. And sacrifice the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and declare his works.’

Out of the largeness of his heart he expresseth the same thing in many words, therefore I shall not need to make any scruple in particularising of them, because there is not so much heed to be given in the expressions of a large heart as to be punctual in everything.

First, He begins with praise.

‘Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord,’ &c.

It is a duty, as I said before, fit for angels. Fit! Nay, it is performed by them. For it is all the work they do. It is the only work that was religious, that Adam did in paradise, and that we shall do in heaven with God. Therefore we are never more in heaven than when we take all occasions of blessing and ‘praising God.’ We are never in a more happy estate.

It is a duty therefore we should aim at, and the rather, because it is the fruit and end of all other duties whatsoever. What is the end of all the good we do, but to shew our thankfulness to God? The end of our fruitfulness in our place? That others may take occasion to glorify God. What is the end of our hearing? To get knowledge and grace, that we may be the better able to praise God in our mouths and in our lives. What is the end of receiving the sacrament? Nay, what is the duty itself? A thanksgiving. What is the end of prayer? To beg graces and strength that so we may carry ourselves in our places as is fit; that so we may not want those things without which we cannot so well glorify God. So the end of all is to glorify God.

It is the end that God intended in all. He framed all things to his own praise in the creation. Why hath God given man reason here upon the stage of the world? To behold the creatures, Rom. i. 19, 20, that seeing in the creature ‘the wisdom of God in ordering things,’ ‘the goodness of God’ in the use of things, and the ‘power of God’ in the greatness of things, the huge, vast heaven and earth, he might take occasion to glorify and magnify this God, to think highly of him, to exalt him in our thoughts; that his creatures, heaven and earth, be so beautiful and excellent, what excellency is in God himself!

And as the end of creation, so in redemption, all is for his glory and praise. In Eph. i. 6, how sweetly doth Saint Paul set forth the end of it: ‘To the glory of his rich mercy and grace.’ To be merciful to sinners; to give his own Son; for God to become man, not for man in that estate as Adam was in innocency, but for sinners; for God to triumph over sin by his infinite mercy: here is the glory of his grace shining in the gospel. All is for the glory and praise of God there.

And for particular deliverances, in Ps. l. 15, ‘Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.’ His deliverances of us in the passages of our life is, that we may glorify him, by taking notice in imminent dangers of some of his attributes, when there is no means of deliverance, of his power and goodness, &c. In Rev. iv. 10, the elders are brought in praising God for the work of creation; and then in the fifth, ver. 12, for ‘redemption,’ ‘Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us.’ So indeed the work of creation, redemption, and the particular passages of God’s providence, and protection, and preservation, they are matter of praise in heaven and earth among God’s people.

Now to name a few helps and means to perform this duty the better.

If we would stir up ourselves to praise God, *let us consider our own unworthiness*. As in prayer there must be a humble heart—for a man will not seek abroad if he have somewhat at home: poverty of spirit and humility of heart makes a man pray—so it is the humble soul that ‘praiseth God,’ that sees no desert in itself. This is one way to help us to ‘praise God,’ to see nothing in ourselves why God should so regard us, as ‘to give us our lives for a prey,’ Jer. xxi. 9, to set his love on us, and to follow us with good; nay, we have deserved the contrary, that God should leave us and expose us to misery, rather than to watch over us by his providence. What is in us? ‘It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves,’ Ps. c. 3; and he made us again when we were sinners, when we were worse than nought. Therefore, to humble us, we must consider our own unworthiness. He that knows himself unworthy of any favour, he will be thankful even for the least, as we see in Jacob, ‘I am less than the least of all thy favours,’ Gen. xxxii. 10. Therefore he was thankful for the least. So we see here in the text. These men are stirred up to ‘praise God.’ They saw no other help, no worthiness in themselves. They were at the gates of death, in a desperate estate; ‘Oh that such men would praise God.’ Indeed, such men are fittest to ‘praise God,’ that can ascribe help to nothing but to God, to no second causes.

Therefore, in the next place, as a branch of the former, if we would praise God, *dwell not on the second causes*. If God use second causes in any favour he bestows on us, either in keeping us from any ill, or bestowing any good, consider it as a means that God might dispense with; that he might use if he would, or not use. See God in the second causes; rise from them to him. Art thou healed by physic? Use physic as a means, but see God in it. But if God hath cured thee without physic, without ordinary means, then see him more immediately doing good to thee without the help of second causes. That is one way to help us to praise God, to see him in every favour and deliverance. For what could second causes do, if he should not give a blessing? Especially praise him when he hath immediately* done it, as he can. Did not he make light before there was a sun? He is not tied to give light by the sun; and he made waters before he made the clouds. He is not tied to the clouds. Therefore especially ‘praise God’ when we have deliverance we know not how, without means, immediately from the goodness and strength of God.

Again, If we would ‘praise God’ for any favour, *consider the necessity and use of the favour we pray for*, as these men here; they were at death’s door, and ‘loathed all manner of meat.’ Alas! they had died if God had not helped them. If thou wouldst bless God, consider what a miserable state thou shouldst be in if thou hadst not that favour to praise God for. If thou be to bless God for thy senses, put case thou shouldst want thy sight, what a miserable case thou shouldst be in! So for any of the senses that a man wants, whereby he should glorify God, and take the comfort of the creature, put case a man should want his taste, as these men here—‘their soul abhorred all manner of meat’—alas! what a miserable case is it to want a relish and taste of the comfort that God hath put into the creatures; put case we should want the meanest benefit we enjoy, how uncomfortable would our lives be!

This spark of reason that God hath given us, that we have understanding

* That is, ‘without means.’—G.

to conceive things, which is the engine whereby we do all things as men, and are capable of the grace of God, what a miserable thing were it if God should take away our wits, or suspend the use of them ?

But especially in matters of grace, if God had not sent Christ to redeem the world, what a cursed condition had we lain in, next to devils ?

Again, If we would praise God, *let us every day keep a diary of his favours and blessings*: what good he doth us privately, what positive blessings he bestows upon us, and what dangers he frees us from, and continues and renews his mercy every day ; and publicly what benefit we have by the state we live in. Oh what a happy state is it that we live in peace, that we enjoy such laws, ' that every man may sit under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree,' Micah iv. 4, and enjoy the comforts of life, when all the world about us are and have been in combustion ! We should keep a register of God's blessings. Oh that we could learn to have such exact lives ! It would breed a world of comfort, and we should have a less account to make when we die.

Every day labour to be humbled for our sins, specially such as break the peace of our consciences, and never give our bodies rest till our hearts have rest in the favour of God ; and together with matter of humiliation, daily observe how God bestows new favours, or else continues the old ; that notwithstanding our provocation and forgetfulness of him, he strives with us by his goodness. This is a blessed duty that we should labour to perform.

And then when we have done this, let us rouse up all that we are, and all that we have within us, to praise God. Ps. ciii. 1, ' My soul, praise the Lord, and all that is within me praise his holy name.' What have we within us to praise God ? Let us praise God with our understanding, to conceive and have a right judgment of God's favours, of the worthiness of them and our own unworthiness, and then a sanctified memory. ' Forget not all his benefits,' Ps. ciii. 2. Forgetfulness is the grave of God's blessings. It buries all. And then there is in us the affection of joy and love to God to taste him largely, and then all within us will be large in the praising of God. And our tongue likewise, though that be not within us, it is called our ' glory,' Ps. xvi. 9 and Ps. lvii. 8 ; let us make it our glory in this, to trumpet out God's praise upon all occasions. All that is within us, and all that we are, or have, or can do, let it be all to the glory and ' praise of God.'

To draw to a conclusion, with some general application of all that hath been spoken, and then in particular to the present occasion.

You know how God hath dealt of late with this city,* and with ourselves indeed ; for we are all of one body politic, and however God visited them, yet it was our sins also that provoked him. We brought sticks to the common fire. A physician lets the arm bleed, but the whole body is distempered. God let the city bleed, but the whole kingdom was in a distemper. So that it was for our sins as well as theirs. We all brought, I say, something to the common flame, and God afflicted us even in them. God hath now stayed the sickness almost as miraculously as he sent it. It was a wonder that so many should be swept away in so short a time. It is almost as great a wonder that God should stay it so soon. And what may we impute it unto ? Surely as it is in the text. ' They cried unto the Lord.' God put it into the hearts of the governors of the State to appoint humiliation and ' crying to God,' and therefore since God hath

* In margin here, ' In the great visitation, 1625.'—G.

been so merciful upon our humiliation, it is religiously and worthily done of the State, that there should be a time to 'bless God.'

Again, God did it with a word, with a command. It was both in the inflicting and delivery, as it were, without means; for what could the physician do in staying the plague? Alas, all the skill in the world is at a loss in these kinds of sicknesses! It comes with God's command. It is God's arrow more especially than other sicknesses. God sent it by his command, first to humble us for our sin; and now he hath stayed it with a word of command, that from above five thousand a week it is come to three persons. 'God hath sent his word and healed us.'

It was a pitiful state we were in before; for indeed it was not only a sickness upon the city, but a civil sickness. The whole state was dis-tempered; for as there is sickness in the body when there is obstruction, when there is not a passage for the spirits and the blood from the liver, and from the heart, and from the head, these obstructions cause weakness, and faintings, and consumption. So was there not an obstruction in the State of late? Were not the veins of the kingdom stopped? Was not civil commerce stayed? The affliction of this great city, it was as the affliction of the head, or of the heart, or of the liver. If the main vital part be sick, the whole is sick; so the whole kingdom, not only by way of sympathy, but it was civilly sick, in regard that all trading and intercourse was stopped; it was a heavy visitation. And we have much cause to bless God that now the 'ways of this Sion' of ours 'mourn not;' that there is free commerce and intercourse as before; that we can meet thus peaceably and quietly at God's ordinances, and about our ordinary callings. Those that have an apprehension of the thing, cannot choose but break out in thanksgiving to God in divers respects.

1. First of all, have not we matter to praise God that he *would correct us at all*? He might have suffered us to have gone on and been 'damned with the wicked world;' as it is 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'We are therefore chastened of the Lord, that we should not be damned with the world.' It is his mercy that he would take us into his hands as children, that he would visit us at all.

2. Another ground of thanksgiving is this, that since he would correct us, he *would use this kind of correction*, that he would take us into his own hands. Might he not have suffered a furious, bloody, dark-spirited, devilish-spirited enemy to have invaded us? to have fallen into the hard hands of men acted with devilish malice? David thought this a favour, even that God would single him out to punish him with the plague of pestilence, that he might not 'fall before his enemies,' 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. The mercies of God are wondrous great when we 'fall into his hands.' He is a 'merciful God.' He hath tender bowels full of pity and compassion. But the very mercies of wicked idolaters 'are cruel.' There was a mercy, therefore, in that, that God would take us into his own hands.

3. In the third place, We see when he had taken us into his own hands, how he hath *stopped the raging of the pestilence*, and hath inhibited the destroying angel even in a wondrous manner; that the plague, when it was so raging, that it should come to decrease upon a sudden. God was wondrous in this work. Is not here matter of praise?

4. Then again, It is a mercy to us all here that he should 'give us our lives for a prey;' as God saith in Jeremiah to Baruch, 'Wheresoever thou goest, thou shalt have thy life for a prey,' Jer. xxi. 9. Might not God's arrow have followed us wheresoever we went?

Whither can a man go from this arrow, but that God being everywhere, might smite him with the pestilence? Now, in that he hath watched over us, and kept us from this noisome contagious sickness, and hath brought us altogether here quietly and freely, that so there may be intercourse between man and man in trading and other calling, this is the fourth ground of 'praising of God.'

5. And that *it did not rage in other parts*. In former time God scattered the pestilence more over the kingdom. It is a great matter to bless God for. I beseech you, let us say with the same spirit as this holy man here, 'Oh that men, therefore, would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for the wonders that he doth for the children of men!'—for his goodness, that he would rather correct us here than damn us; for his goodness, that he would not give us up to our enemies; for his goodness, that he stayed the infection so suddenly, and that he stayed the spreading of it further; for his goodness unto us in particular, that he hath kept us all safe.

What shall we do now but consecrate and dedicate these lives of ours; for he gives us our lives more than once, at the beginning. There is never a one here but can say by experience, God hath given me my life at such a time and such a time. Let us give these lives again to God, labour to reform our former courses, and enter into a new covenant with God. This is one part of thanksgiving, to renew our covenant with God, to please him better; and indeed, in every thanksgiving that should be one ingredient. Now, Lord, I intend and resolve to please thee better. Whatsoever my faults have formerly been, I resolve by thy grace and assistance to break them off. Without this, all the other is but a dead performance.

Now, briefly, by way of analogy and proportion, to raise some meditations from that that hath been delivered concerning the body, to the soul; for God is the physician both to soul and body.

If God with his word can heal our bodies, as the psalmist saith here, much more can he with his word heal our soul. There are many that their bodies are well, thanks be to God, but how is it with their souls? Here you have some symptoms to know their spiritual state; and oh that people were apprehensive of it! Have you not many that their 'soul loatheth all manner of meat,' and they 'draw near the gates of death?' Their souls are in a desperate state. They are deeply sick. How shall we know it? Their soul 'abhorreth all manner of wholesome meat.' How many are there that relish poets and history, any trifle that doth but feed their vain fancy, and yet cannot relish the blessed truth and ordinances of God? Where is spiritual life when this spiritual sense is gone, when men cannot relish holy things? If they relish the ordinance of God, it is not the spiritual part of it, so far as the Spirit toucheth the conscience, but something that, it may be, is suitable to their conceit, expressions, or phrases, or the like. But it is a symptom and sign of a fearful declining state when men do not relish the spiritual ordinances of God, which should be, as it were, 'their appointed food;' when they do not 'delight to acquaint themselves with God,' in hearing of the word, and reading, and the like. Let such, therefore, as delight not in spiritual things, know that their souls lie gasping; they are at the 'gates' of spiritual death. All is not well. There is some fearful obstruction upon the soul that takes away the appetite. The soul runs into the world over much. They cloy themselves with the world. When men cannot relish heavenly things, they are ate up with the delight and joy of other things, pleasures, and profits.

Let them search the cause, and labour for purging, sharp, things that may procure an appetite.

Let them judge themselves, and see what is the matter, that they do not delight more in heavenly things; let them purge themselves by confession to God, and consideration of their sins, and labour to recover their appetite. For it is almost a desperate estate, 'they are at the gates of death.'

Especially now when we come to the communion. What do we here, if we cannot relish the food of our souls? Let us examine if we desire to taste the love of God, and to be acquainted with God here. If not, what shall we do in these spiritual distempers?

Desire of God, cry to God, that he would forgive our sins and heal our souls by his Holy Spirit, that he would make us more spiritual, to relish heavenly things better than we have done before, that as the things that are heavenly are better in their kind than other things are, so they may be better to our taste.

A man may know the judgment of his state when he answereth not the difference of things. What the difference is between the food of life and ordinary food; what the difference is between the comforts of the Holy Ghost and other comforts; between the riches and pelf of the world and the riches of the Spirit; the graces of God, that will cause a man to live and die with comfort; the true riches, that make the soul rich to eternity: there is no comparison. Beg of God this spiritual relish to discern 'of things that differ,' Heb. v. 14, that we may recover our appetite. God by his word and Spirit can do it, not only the word written, but the inward spiritual word written in our hearts. Desire God to join his Spirit with his word and sacraments, and that will recover our taste and make us spiritual. that we shall relish him that is both the feast-maker and the feast itself. He is both the meat and the provider of the banquet.

For whence is it that all other things are sweet to us? deliverance from trouble and sickness? Because it is a pledge of our spiritual deliverance in Christ. The deliverance from hell and damnation, what comfort can a man have that knows not his state in grace, in the enjoying of his health, when he shall think he is but as a 'sheep kept for the slaughter?' He knows not whether he be in the favour of God or no.

Therefore let us come and renew our faith in the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Christ, of whom we are made partakers in the sacrament. For if we believe our deliverance from hell and damnation by the body of Christ broken and his blood shed, then everything will be sweet. When we know God loves us to life everlasting, then everything in the way to life everlasting, even daily bread, will be sweet, because the same love that gives heaven gives daily food, and the same love that redeems us from hell redeems us from sickness. Therefore let us labour to strengthen our faith in the main, that we may be thankful for the less. And as we enter into new covenant with God, so labour to keep it; in Lev. xxvi. 14, *seq.*, everything avengeth the breaking of God's covenant. When we make covenant to serve him better for the time to come, and yet break it, God is forced to send his messenger. He sends sickness to avenge his covenant. Considering that he hath lately so avenged it, let it make us so much the more circumspect in our carriage. So much for this time and text.

Imprimatur.

Thomas Wykes.

NOTES.

(a) P. 140.—‘In such a year, such conjunctions and such eclipses,’ &c. One of various allusions to astrology, a faith in which Sibbes shared with the most illustrious of his contemporaries, *e. g.*, Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, &c.

(b) P. 141.—‘As Salvian saith well, “Thou perishest before thou perish.”’ Cf. note *d*, Vol. V. page 34.

(c) P. 143.—‘As one observes, that naturally men run to God in extremity.’ Many curious and striking illustrations of this will be found in the old Puritan ‘Commentaries’ on the Book of Jonah, chap. i. verses 5, 6, and parallel passages. It is an observation common to Cicero, and all writers on ‘Natural Religion.’

(d) P. 144.—‘It was the speech of a heathen,’ &c. A variation of the proverb, ‘Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.’

(e) P. 149.—“‘With rejoicing and singing,” as the word signifies.’ Cf. Dr Joseph Addison Alexander *in loc.*, who, with Sibbes, supplies ‘joyful’ before ‘singing.’
G.