

GOD'S INQUISITION.

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NOTE.

'God's Inquisition' forms part of the 'Beams of Divine Light' (4to, 1639). The separate title-page is below.* For general title of the volume, see Vol. V. page 220. G.

GOD'S INQUISITION.

In two Sermons

By the late Reverend and Learned

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GEN. 18. 21.

I will goe downe now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.

PSAL. 14. 3.

They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doth good no not one.

[A wood-cut here of an angel, surrounded with a glory, leaning upon a cross; his right hand holding an open Bible, and his feet trampling upon the usual skeleton-representation of death.]

L O N D O N.

Printed by G. M. for Nicholas Bourne and Rapha Harford.

MDCXXXIX.

GOD'S INQUISITION.

I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.—
JER. VIII. 6, 7.

UPON the sins of people it hath been alway God's course to send his prophets to warn them beforehand, and afterwards, upon that, to observe how they profit by that warning; and thereupon he takes occasion to proceed answerably. God usually exerciseth a great deal of patience ere he strikes. He made the world in six days, but he is six thousand years in destroying it.

In this verse, after the holy prophet had menaced the judgment of God upon them, there is set down what use they made of it. Alas! 'They spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' And lest they should object, How do you know this? He saith here it is upon inquisition, 'I hearkened and heard.' So the words contain *God's inquisition or inquiry*, and then God's evidence upon that inquiry, together with a complaint. His inquiry, 'I hearkened and heard.' For we must apply these words to God. There is the same phrase, Mal. iii. 16, 'The Lord hearkened, and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him;' so here, 'I hearkened and heard.' Here is the inquiry.

Then, secondly, the evidence upon the inquiry, 'they spake not aright.' And, thirdly, the complaint upon that evidence set down.

1. First, Positively, 'They repented not of their wickedness,' which is amplified, 1. From the generality of this their impenitency, '*No man repented him;*' and 2. From the cause of it: want of consideration. They did not say, 'What have I done?' If they had called themselves to account concerning what they had done, certainly they would have repented.

2. Comparatively, 'They turned to their course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.'

3. Lastly, Superlatively, preferring the skill of the poor storks and cranes, and the turtle and swallow, before the judgment of his senseless and stupid

people : 'The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed time ; and the turtle, the crane, and the swallow ; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.' This is the sum of the words.

1. First, Of God's inquiry, 'I hearkened and heard.' Ere Sodom was destroyed, the Lord came down to see whether there was just cause or no, Gen. xviii. 21. God is most just. He will see cause for his judgments. He hath no delight in punishing. When he judgeth, it is not out of his sovereignty, but out of his justice. He doth it not as a sovereign Lord, but as a just judge. Now, a judge must do all upon inquisition and evidence ; therefore saith he, 'I hearkened and heard : ' where, by the way, the gods of the earth, to whom he hath communicated his name, should learn hence, not to be rash in their judgments, but to have sound evidence before they pass sentence. 'I hearkened and heard.' To 'hearken' is more than to hear : to apply one's self with some affection to hear a thing.

God is all ear, as he is all eye. He hath an ear everywhere. He hath an ear in our hearts. He hears what we think, what we desire. He sees all the secret corners of our hearts. Therefore, when he saith here, 'I hearkened and heard,' it is by way of condescending to our capacity.

We may learn hence, briefly, *that God hath an ear and an eye to our carriage and dispositions, to our speeches and courses.* If we had one alway at our backs that would inform such a man and such a man what we say, one that should book our words, and after lay them to our charge, it would make us careful of our words. Now, though we be never so much alone, there are two always that hear us. God hearkens and hears, and God's deputy in us, conscience, 'hearkens and hears.' God books it, and conscience books it. As God hath a book wherein he wrote us before all worlds, and the book of his providence for our bones, and all things that concern us, so he hath a book for our works and words. Mal. iii. 16, 'They that feared the Lord spake often one to another ; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it ; and a book of remembrance was written before him,' &c. So here, 'I hearkened and heard.' God and conscience note and observe everything.

This doth impose upon us the duty of careful and reverent walking with God. Would we speak carelessly or ill of any man if he heard us ? When we slight a man, we say we care not if he heard us himself. But shall we slight God so ? Shall we swear, and lie, and blaspheme, and say we care not though God hear us, that will lay everything to our charge, not only words but thoughts. 'We shall give an account for every idle word, and for every idle thought,' Mat. xii. 36, and shall we not regard it ? It is from the horrible profaneness of the poisonous, rebellious heart of man, that men do not consider these things. 'God hearkens and hears.' He is at our studies ; he is at our windows ; he hears us in our chambers, when we are in company, when we meet together, when we take liberty to censure and detract, when we swear and revile. What if men hear not ! yet conscience hears, and God hears. And when God shall lay open the book of conscience, and lay before a man all his naughty* speeches and wicked works, what will become of him then for not making use of this principle, that 'God hearkens and hears' ? God sees now with what minds and affections we come about this business, whether it be formally to put off God, to make it a cover for our sinful courses after, as if God were beholding to us for what we do now, and therefore might the better bear

* That is, 'wicked.'—G.

with us, though we make bold with him hereafter. He not only hears what we say, but sees our minds and purposes, nay, he 'knows our thoughts long before they are.' This is the cause why godly men have alway walked so carefully and circumspectly. They knew that God's eye and ear was over them; as Enoch and Noah, it is said in this regard that they 'walked with God,' Gen. v. 24, vi. 9; and Joseph when he was tempted, 'Shall I do this,' saith he, 'and sin against God?' Gen. xxxix. 9; and shall not God see if I do this? 'Doth not he see my ways and count all my steps,' saith Job, Job. xiv. 16. So again, What makes wicked men so loose? The prophet tells, Ps. xciv. 7, they say, 'The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.' Or as it is, Job xxii. 12, &c., 'Is not God in the height of heaven? How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he sees not; and he walketh not in the circuit of the heavens.' Tush! he regardeth not; he is immured and shut up there. But to such atheists we see what the prophet answers, Ps. lxiv. 8, &c. 'Ye brutish, foolish people, shall he that makes others hear not hear himself? 'He that planted the ear,' he that is all ear, 'shall not he hear?' As it makes good men walk holily and reverently, to consider of this, that God is present, and present as an observer and a judge, so the want of taking this to heart makes wicked and carnal persons do as they do. So much briefly for these words, 'I hearkened and heard.'

'No man spake aright.'

But what evidence doth he give upon this inquisition? 'They spake not aright,' which is amplified from the generality of this sin. 'No man spake aright.' The meaning is especially that 'they spake not aright concerning the judgments of God threatened.' When God had threatened judgments, he hearkened and heard what use they made of them, but 'they spake not aright.'

Quest. In how many respects do we not speak aright in regard of the judgments of God?

Ans. 1. First, *In regard of God*, men speak not aright when they do not see him in the judgment, but look to the creature, to the second causes; as now in the time of the plague, to look to the air and weather, and this and that, which is a good providence, and to forget him that is the chief; to kill dogs and cats, and to let sin alone; to cry out, Oh what air there is this year! and what weather it is! to talk of the second causes altogether, and to forget God: this is to talk amiss of God's judgments threatened, in regard of God.

2. Again, We talk amiss *in regard of others*, when we begin to slight them in our thoughts and speeches. Oh they were careless people; they adventured into company, and it was the carelessness of the magistrates; they were not well looked to; they were unmerciful persons, &c. Is it not God's hand? Put case there might be some oversight; art thou secure from God's arrow? He that struck them, may he not strike thee? This is to talk amiss of the judgment of God in regard of others; when we think that God hath singled them out as sinners above the rest; as the disciples thought of the Galileans, 'whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifice,' Luke xiii. 1. No, no, saith he; 'think not they were greater sinners than the rest;' do not add your bitter censure of the judgment of God on them, and make it heavier (there is a woe to such persons as add afflictions to the afflicted, Prov. xx. 22, Phil. i. 16): 'Except ye repent, ye shall all

likewise perish.' Is not the ripest corn cut first? God oftentimes takes those away that are fittest for him, and leaves others to the cruelty of men. Therefore by this rash judgment there may be great wrong to men, and to wrong men in our censures, it is to talk amiss of God's judgments in regard of others.

3. Again, We talk amiss of God's judgments in regard of ourselves.

(1.) *When we murmur and fret any way against God*, and do not submit ourselves under his mighty hand as we should.

(2.) Again, We sin against the judgments of God abroad, when we take liberty to *inquire of the judgments of God abroad, and never make use of them*; as now to be asking what number die of the plague weekly, and our hearts tremble not at it, we lift not up our hearts to God, 'God be merciful to us,' 'Lord forgive our sins,' 'What will become of us?' We had need to make our accounts even. This is to talk amiss of God's judgments. It is a vein that men have naturally, to inquire after news of all sorts, be it the sharpest and bitterest that may be; though it be the destruction, and ruin, and death of other men; whatsoever it be they desire to hear it, if news. In the mean time there is no care to make use of it, which is directly that for which these men here are said to have talked amiss, 'No man spake aright.' Why? 'No man repented him of his wickedness,' &c., as we shall see afterwards. We should talk of the judgments of God to be bettered by them. We should 'learn righteousness when the judgments of God are abroad,' Isa. xxvi. 9, and the arrows that wound others we should make warning arrows to ourselves. Now when we triflingly only inquire of these things, and are not moved ourselves, we talk amiss of God's judgments.

Use. Let us labour to talk of the judgments of God, when they are abroad, as we should. In regard of God, to raise our hearts above all second causes, to see him in it. It is the hand of God, as the Scripture calls the plague, whatsoever the second causes are, whether it be the air, and the devil mingling himself oftentimes to corrupt the air, all is by God's permission and providence. We should look to the first wheel that leads the rest and sets them going. We should see God in all, and therefore speak reverently of him. And in regard of our brethren, to speak charitably of them, and think, it is the goodness of God that he hath not stricken us as he hath them. And when we speak of ourselves, when the judgments of God are on us, let us humble ourselves and justify God. We may complain, but it must be of ourselves and of our sins, that have brought judgments upon us, of our want of making use of the judgment of God upon others or upon ourselves. Lesser judgments would not serve turn; therefore God is fain to follow us with greater. Let us alway justify God and complain of ourselves, and then in regard of ourselves we 'speak aright' of the judgments of God. Let us never speak of the judgments of God but with affections fit for judgments, with awful affections. 'Shall the lion roar, and shall not the beasts of the forest tremble?' Hos. xi. 10. Shall we hear God roar in his judgments, 'and hear the trumpet blown,' and not be affected? We see here how God complains, that when 'he hearkened and heard, they spake not aright.' Let us therefore make conscience of all our words. We shall, if not now, yet at the day of judgment, 'give account for every idle word,' Mat. xii. 36, for every cruel word, as it is in the prophecy of Enoch, cited in the Epistle of Jude. But especially let us take heed of our words when we speak of God's judgments; for it is the not speaking aright of them that is here especially meant. 'I hearkened and heard, but

they spake not aright.' So much for the evidence. Come we now to the next clause, God's complaint upon this evidence.

'No man repented him of his wickedness.'

They did not repent of their wickedness, and the fault was general: 'No man repented.' The first yields this instruction,

Doct. That it is a state much offending God, not to repent when his judgments are threatened.

God will not suffer it long unpunished, to be impenitent when his judgments are abroad and threatened, much more when they have already seized* upon our brethren. For that is the end of all his judgments, to draw us near to him, to draw us out of the world, and out of our sinful courses. When therefore we answer not, God must take another course. What is the plague and other judgments but so many messengers sent to every one of us to knock? And our answer must be, 'Lord, I will repent of my evil ways,' 'I will turn from my evil courses and turn to thee.' If we give this answer, God will take away his judgments, or sanctify them, and that is better; but when there is no answer, the messenger will not be gone; God will add plagues upon plagues till we give our answer, till we repent and turn from our wicked ways.

Now that we may do this, we must be convinced thoroughly that the courses we live in are unprofitable, dangerous, hateful courses, and that the contrary state is better. For repentance is an after-wit,† and man being a reasonable creature, will turn‡ from his way except he see great reason why. Therefore there must be sound conviction that 'it is a bitter thing to offend God,' Jer. ii. 19. We must indeed be convinced by the Spirit of God; and the Spirit of God usually takes the benefit of affliction, affliction together with instruction. Instruction without affliction will do little good. Stripes and the word must go together, else we will not give God the hearing as we should. Therefore that we may be soundly convinced of our sins, we should desire God, especially in the hour of affliction, to help our souls by his Spirit, that we may be convinced that our courses are naught, that they are courses dishonourable to God and dangerous to ourselves; that sin defiles our souls; that it hinders our communion with God, which is the sweetest thing in the world; that sin puts a sting into all our troubles; that sin makes us afraid of that that should be comfortable to us, of death and judgment, and God's presence; that sin grieves the good Spirit of God, that would take up his lodging in us; that it queneth the motions of the Spirit, that are sent as sweet messengers to us, to allure and comfort us; that sin grieves the good Spirit of God in others; that it grieves the good angels that are about us; that it gratifies none but the devil, the enemy of our salvation; that it defiles and stains our souls, wherein the image of God should shine; that it doth us more harm than all the things in the world besides—indeed, nothing hurts us but sin, because nothing but sin separates us from God; that it shuts heaven and opens hell, and so makes us afraid of death, lest death should open the gate to let us into hell; in a word, that it hinders all good, and is the cause of all ill. Let us consider of this, and work it on our hearts.

And consider withal our former courses, rip up our lives from our childhood, consider the sins of our youth, together with our present sins, that so we may the better stir up and awaken our consciences. Let us consider

* Spelled 'ceazed.'—G.

‡ Qu. 'will not turn'?—ED.

† That is, 'after-thought.'—G.

whether we are now in a state wherein we could be content that God should send his judgments upon us. Consider how we have been scandalous* to others, how we have drawn others to sin, that the guilt of other men's sins will lie upon us. It may be we have repented, but have they? Consider the repetition of our sins, if we have not committed them again and again, and other circumstances that may aggravate them. Let us labour to work these things on our hearts, and desire the Spirit of God to convince our souls of the foulness and dangerousness of sin. When we sin against conscience, what do we but set the devil in the place of God? We make ourselves wiser than God. 'We leave God's ways, as if we could find better and more profitable and more gainful courses than his. Sound conviction of this will move us to repentance.

And let us be stirred up to repent presently. Doth not God now warn you? Is it not dangerous living one hour in a state that we would not die in? May not God justly strike us on the sudden? Do but purpose to live in sin one quarter of an hour; may we not be taken away in that quarter? Is not repentance the gift of God, and are not gifts given according to the good pleasure of the giver? Wait therefore for the gales of grace, and take them when they are offered. Grace is not like the tide, that ebbs and flows, that we know when it will come again when we see it go. No. God gives the gales of grace according to his good pleasure; therefore take the advantage of the present motions of the blessed Spirit.

The longer we live in any sin unrepented of, the more our hearts will be hardened; the more Satan takes advantage against us, the more hardly he is driven out of his old possession, the more just it may be with God to give us up from one sin to another. The understanding will be more dark upon every repetition of sin, and conscience will be more dulled and deadened. Those that are young, therefore, let them take the advantage of the youth, and strength, and freshness of their years to serve God. That which is blasted in the bud, what fruit may we look for from it afterwards? Alas! when we see the younger sort given to blaspheme and swear, to looseness and licentiousness, what old age may we look for there? Again, what welcome shall we expect, when we have sacrificed the best of our strength and the marrow of our years to our lusts, to bring our old age to God? Can this be any other than self-love? Such late repentance is seldom sound. It comes, I say, from self-love, and not from any change of heart. As in the humility of wretched persons, a little before the judge comes, though they have carried themselves as rebels before, yet then they will humble themselves, not out of any hatred to their courses, but out of fear of the judge. So it may be now thou art arraigned by God's judgments; thou forsakest thy sinful courses, not out of the hatred of thy sins—for if thou couldst thou wouldst sin eternally, and that is the reason sinners are punished eternally, because they would sin everlastingly—but thou seest thou art in danger to be pulled away by God's judgments. It is not out of love to grace, it is not from any change of nature that thou desirest to be a new creature, that thou admirest grace to be the best state, but it is to avoid danger; not that thou carest for the face of God, to be reconciled to him, but to avoid the present judgment.

And what a staggering will this be to conscience, when a man shall defer his repentance till God's judgments seize upon him! We see it is false for the most part, because such persons that are then humbled, when they recover they are as bad or worse than ever they were. Therefore an

* That is, 'stumblingblocks.'—G.

ancient saith well, 'He that is good only under the cross is never good' (a). It comes not from any change that God works, but merely from self-love. Therefore presently let us repent of those ways that God convinceth our conscience to be evil ways; God may strike us suddenly. Those that forget God, and care not for him now, it may be just with God to make them forget themselves, to strike them with frenzy, to take away the use of their memories then; and when sickness comes we shall have enough to do to conflict with sickness, we shall have enough to do to answer the doubts of conscience. Oh, it would upbraid them! We shall think it a hard matter then to have favour from God, whose worship we have despised, the motions of whose Spirit we have neglected and resisted. Conscience, after long hardening in sin, will hardly admit of comfort. It is a harder matter than it is taken for. Therefore, even to-day, presently, you that are young, now in the days of your youth, now in the spring of your years, repent you of your sins before old age comes, which indeed, as Solomon describes it, 'is an ill time' to repent in, Eccles. xii. 1. Alas! then a man can hardly perform civil duties; as we see in Barzillai, he complains that in his old age he could not take the comfort of the creatures, 2 Sam. xix. 32, *seq.* Therefore put not off this duty till then. And all, both young and old, now when the judgments of God are abroad in the world, take the advantage!; return to God, renew your covenants, make your peace now. Now this danger doth warm our hearts a little, let us strike the iron now while it is hot; let us take the advantage of the Spirit now awakening us with this danger. Our hearts are so false and so dull, we have need to take all advantages of withdrawing ourselves from our sinful courses.

And to encourage us to do it, let us consider, if we do this, and do it in time, we shall have the sweetness of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

You will say, We shall lose the sweetness of sin; ay, but

1. *You shall have a most sweet communion with God.* One day of a repentant sinner, that is reconciled to God, is more comfortable than a thousand years of another man that is in continual fear of death and judgment. Oh, the sweet life of a Christian that hath made his peace with God! He is fit for all conditions: for life, for death, for everything. Now by this we shall have this grace and favour of God. The Lord will say unto us by his Spirit, 'I am your salvation,' Ps. xxxv. 3. And besides, you shall have his grace renewing and altering and changing you, framing you to a better course of life. And he will be so far from misliking any for their former sins, that he will give them cause to love him the more, as we see Luke vii. 47, 'She loved much, because she had much forgiven her.' Christ, we see, upbraided not any of his followers with their former sins. He regarded not what they had been formerly. Zaccheus the extortioner, Mary Magdalene, Matthew the publican, Peter that denied him. We never hear that he upbraided any of them. He doth not only vouchsafe mercy to Peter repenting, but advanceth him to his former office apostolical. So sweet a God have we to deal with! Let this encourage us.

2. Again, It is the way to *prevent God's judgments*, as we see in Nineveh and others. Put case we repent not: we cannot go safe in the city nor anywhere, but God may meet with us, and strike us with his arrow. The only way to prevent his judgments is to meet him speedily by repentance. This is the way, not only to turn away the wrath of God concerning eternal damnation, but outward judgments, as we see Joel ii. 12, *seq.*, and many other places.

3. Then again, should we be stricken, if we have made our peace with God,

if we have repented, *all shall be welcome, all shall be turned to our good.* We know the sting is pulled out. If the sting of death be pulled out, if the malignity and poison of any sickness, be it the plague or whatsoever, be pulled out, why should we fear it? It comes in love, and shall be turned to our good; and in the mean time God sweetens it. Here is a grand difference between the children of God and others. If the judgment of God light upon a repentant person, it comes from favour and love, to correct him for his former sins. It is turned to good, and in the mean time it is sweetened with love, and mixed with comfort, and moderated, as it is Isa. xxvii. 7, 'Hath he afflicted thee as I afflicted others?' No. He moderates his judgments to his children; and not only moderates them, but sweetens them with comfort. If God do correct a repentant person, he is no loser by it, nay, he is a gainer. 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted,' Ps. cxix. 67. Oh the blessed estate of that person that repents and turns from his evil ways! But if a man do not repent, but live still in sin, what a state is he in! *God cares not for his prayers.* 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayers,' Ps. lxi. 18. And what a state is a man in, when his prayers, that should beg for blessings, and avoid judgments, and procure deliverance, are not heard, 'but shall be turned into sin!' When God, that is 'a God hearing prayer,' shall not regard his prayer, what a case is this! Yet if we regard iniquity in our hearts, if we repent not of our sins, God will not regard our prayers.

Then, besides that, *there is a noise of fear in the unrepentant person's heart.* Whosoever he goes, he is afraid of the plague, afraid of sickness, afraid of death, afraid of everybody. He knows he hath his heaven here: he hath not the sting of evils pulled out, therefore he is afraid he shall go from the terrors of conscience to the torments of hell. His conscience speaks terrible things to him. What a cursed state is this? How can he look with comfort any way? If he look to heaven, God is ready to pour the vials of his wrath, to execute his vengeance on him. If he look to the earth, he knows not how soon he shall be laid there, or that the earth may swallow him up. If he think of death, it strikes terror to him. Everything is uncomfortable to an unrepentant sinner. Let all this stir us up to this duty of repentance. It is the end why God sends his judgments. First, he warns us by his word. And if we neglect that, he sends judgments, and they seize on us. That is a second warning. And if lesser judgments will not warn us, then he sends greater, and all to make us repent. If we repent, we give the judgments their answer, and he will either remove them or sanctify them. So much for that. A word of the generality.

'No man.'

'No man repented of his evil ways.' We see, then,

Doct. That generality is no plea.

'We must not follow a multitude to do evil,' Exod. xxiii. 2. We must not follow the stream, to do as the world doth. Will any man reason thus? Now there die so many weekly of the plague. It is no matter whither I go. I will go now into any place, without any respect to my company, &c. Will he not reason, on the contrary, Therefore I will take heed, I will carry preservatives about me, and look to my company? Self-love will teach a man to reason so. The infection is great, therefore I will take the more heed. And will not spiritual wisdom teach us, the more spreading and infectious sin is, the more heed to take? 'When all flesh had corrupted their way, then came the flood,' Gen. vi. 12. Generality of sin makes way

for sweeping judgments that takes all away. Therefore we have more reason to tremble when the infection of sin hath seized upon all, when 'no man repents of his wickedness.' A man should resolve, Surely I will come out of such company, as we see Lot departed out of Sodom, and David in his time 'was as a pelican in the wilderness,' Ps. cii. 6. I will rather go to heaven alone, than go to hell and be damned with a multitude. Multitude is no plea to a wise man. Shall we think it a means to increase danger in worldly things? and shall we think it a plea in spiritual things? It hath been the commendation of God's children, that they have striven against the stream and been good in evil times. 'Redeem the time, because the days are evil,' saith the apostle, Eph. v. 16. A carnal Christian saith, Do as the rest do; but saith David, 'Mine eyes gush out with rivers of waters, because men keep not thy law,' Ps. cxix. 136. Do not fear that you shall pass unrespected if you be careful to look to yourselves this way. If there be but one Lot in Sodom, one Noah and his family in the old world, he shall be looked to as a jewel among much dross. God will single him out as a man doth his jewels, when the rubbish is burnt. God will have a special care to gather his jewels. When a man makes conscience of his ways in ill times and ill company, God regards him the more for witnessing to his truth and standing for and owning his cause in ill times. It shews sincerity and strength of grace, when a man is not tainted with the common corruptions. 'No man repented.'

What was the cause of all this, that they were thus unrepentant, and that generally 'no man said,'

'What have I done?'

They did not say in their hearts and tongues, 'What have I done?' They were inconsiderate, they did not examine, and search, and try their ways. Here we see,

First, That a man can return upon himself; he can search and try his own ways, and cite, and arrest, and arraign himself, 'What have I done?' This is a prerogative that God hath given to the understanding creature. The reasonable soul, it can reflect upon itself, which is an act of judgment. The brute creatures look forward to present objects; they are carried to present things, and cannot reflect. But man hath judgment to know what he hath done and spoken, to sit upon his own doings, to judge of his own actions. God hath erected a tribunal in every man; he hath set up conscience for a register, and witness, and judge, &c. There are all the parts of judicial proceeding in the soul of man. This shews the dignity of man; and considering that God hath set up a throne and seat of judgment in the heart, we should labour to exercise this judgment.

Secondly, God having given man this excellent prerogative to cite himself and to judge his own courses, when man doth not this, it is the cause of all mischief, of all sin and misery. Alas! the vile heart of man is prone to think, it may be God hath decreed my damnation, and he might make me better if he would. But why dost thou speak thus? O wicked man, the fault is in thyself, because thou dost not what thou mightst do. Hath not God set up a judgment-seat in thy heart, to deliberate of thine own courses, whether thou dost well or ill? And thy own conscience, if thou be not an atheist and besotted, tells thee thou dost ill, and accuseth thee for it. An ordinary swearer, that by atheistical acquaintance and poisonous breeding is accustomed to that sin, if he did consider, What good shall I get by this? by provoking God, who hath threatened that I shall not go guiltless, and

that 'I shall give an account for every idle word,' much more of every idle oath? the consideration of this would make him judge and condemn himself, and repent and amend his ways.

Thirdly. The exercising of this judgment, *it makes a man's life lightsome.* He knows who he is and whither he goes. It makes him able to answer for what he doth at the judgment-seat of God. It makes him do what he doth in confidence, it perfects the soul every way.

Fourthly, Again, Whatsoever we do without this consideration, *it is not put upon our account for comfort.* When we do things upon judgment, it is with examination whether it be according to the rule or no. Our service of God is especially in our affections, when we joy, and fear, and delight aright. Now how can a man do this without consideration? For the affections, wheresoever they are ordinate and good, they are raised up by judgment. They are never good but when they are regular and according to judgment. When judgment raiseth up the affections, and we see cause why we should delight in God, and love him and fear him more than anything in the world, they are then an effectual part of divine worship; but else they are flat, and dead, and dull, if we waken them not with consideration. The heart follows the judgment. The brain and the heart sympathise, when we see cause and reason to love, and fear, and worship God. We must 'love God with all our mind,' that is, with our best understanding. We must see reason why we do so.

Therefore let us labour to use our understanding more this way. Is our understanding and judgment given us to plot for the world, to be judicious for the things of this life only? No; but to be wise for the main end, to glorify God, to save our souls, to get out of the corruption of nature, to maintain our communion with God every day more and more. The end of our living in the world is to begin heaven upon earth; so to live here as that we may live for ever in heaven. Whatsoever is done in order to this end is good; but nothing can be done to this end but upon due consideration. Let us improve our judgments for that end. They are principally given us, not for particular ends, to get this or that man's favour, to get wealth, &c., but to use all as they may serve the main. We know not how short a time we shall enjoy these things; and further than they serve for the main, we shall have no comfort of them ere long. Our projects should be to gain glory to God, and to bring ourselves and others to heaven. There is excellent use of this consideration. This way it is one main way to repentance. We see here, 'No man repenteth,' because 'no man said, What have I done?'

Now if we would practise this duty, we must labour to avoid the hindrances. The main hindrances of this consideration are,

(1.) *The rage of lusts*, that will not give the judgment leave to consider of a man's ways; but they are impetuous, commanding, and tyrannous, carrying men, as we shall see in the next clause, 'as the horse rusheth into the battle.' We see many carried to hell that never enjoyed themselves, but are alway under some base pleasure. When the devil hath filled them with one pleasure, then they project for another, and never take time to say, 'What have I done?' Oh the tyranny of original corruption! If we had in our eye the vile picture of our nature, that carries us to things present, to profits and pleasures, and gives us not liberty and leisure to bethink ourselves, would we do as we do? Alas! we see some men so haunted with their lusts that they cannot be alone, they cannot sleep; and when they are awake they must have music, as that king when he mas-

sacred a world of men, he could not be quiet a whit, conscience raged so.* When men follow their pleasures, they rob them of themselves. Therefore they are said in Scripture to be madmen, and fools without wit. They are so taken up with the rage of their lusts that they have not liberty to enjoy themselves, they have no time for consideration.

(2.) And then another hindrance is *too much business*, when men are distracted with the things of this life. They are overloaded with cares, with Martha's part, and so neglect Mary's part. This makes men toil and droll† for the world, and never consider where they are nor whither they go, how it shall be with them when they go hence, how the case stands with them before God, whether they be gotten out of the cursed state of nature that we are all born in. They never think of this, but all the marrow and strength of their souls is eaten out with the world. Those that in their youth followed their lusts, when they come to years are taken up with the world, and slight religion. Their minds are employed how to get the favour of this man and that, and so have not leisure to consider what will become of their souls. Therefore too much distraction with the things of the world is joined with drunkenness: 'Be not overcome with the cares of this life, with surfeiting and drunkenness,' saith Christ, Luke xxi. 34.

(3.) Then, *it is a secret and hard action*; because it is to work upon a man's self. It is an easy matter to talk of others, to consider other men's ways. You shall have men's tongues ready to speak of other men; they do so and so. And thus they feed themselves with talking of other men, and in the mean time neglect the consideration of their own state. And again, it is a plausible thing. He that talks of other men's faults gives an intimation that he is innocent, and he had need be so. It is easy and plausible. Men glory in it. It feeds corrupt nature to talk of other men's faults, but to come home to a man's self, that is a hard thing. It is without ostentation or applause. The world doth not applaud a man for speaking of his own faults. Men are not given to retired actions. They care not for them, unless they have sound hearts; and this being a retired action, that hath no glory nor credit with it, men are loath to come to it.

(4.) Then, again, it is not only hard and secret, but this returning upon a man's self, *it presents to a man a spectacle that is unwelcome*. If a man consider his own ways, it will present to him a terrible object. Therefore as the elephant troubles the waters, that he may not see his own visage, so men trouble their souls, that they may not see what they are. They shall see such a deal of malice and self-love, and fear and distrust, that they would not have others in the world to see for anything. But it is good to see it; for repentance and consideration it is physic, it is sharp but wholesome. It is better to have the physic a day than to have the sickness and disease all the year. So this consideration and repentance, though it be sharp, yet take it down, for it will prevent God's eternal judgment; as the apostle saith, 'If we would judge and condemn ourselves, we should not be condemned with the world,' 1 Cor. xi. 31. What an excellent thing is this, that we may keep sessions in our own souls, and so need not be called to God's assizes! Men are called to that, because they slubber over and neglect this. Men will not keep this sessions in their own hearts—which they might do not only quarterly, but daily—and thereby they make work for God. Is it not better now to unrip our consciences by consideration and repentance, than to have all ripped up then, when the devil shall stand

* Cf. note, Vol. I. page 149.—G.

† That is, 'drudge.'—G.

by to accuse us, who will say, This was done by my instigation ; and it is so ; and our own consciences shall take part with the devil, and accuse us also ? It will be little for our ease to make God our judge. We might save the labour by putting conscience to its office now, to examine our ways every day, especially now, when God calls for it by his judgments. Repentance is the covenant of the gospel, and repentance depends upon this consideration. So much for that. 'No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ?' But did they stay here ? No ; it follows,

'Every one turns to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.'

Every one hath his course, his way, whether good or evil. The course of a wicked man it is a smooth way perhaps, but it is a going from God ; it leads from him. And where doth it end ? for every way hath its end. It is a going from God to hell. There all the courses of wicked men end. Examine, then, where thy course begins, and where it ends ; from what thou walkest, and to what ; whither thy course aims ; consider where thy speeches and actions are like to end. The specification and denomination of our ways to be good or evil is especially from the end. The wicked they take their courses, smooth wide courses, the broad beaten way, where they may have elbow-room enough, though it end in hell and destruction. But the wicked and their ways are both hated of God. Otherwise it is with God's children. They may sometimes step into ill ways, but they have not an ill course ; and God doth not judge a man by a step, but by his course and way. Therefore consider what is the tenor of thy life. Is thy way good ? Oh, it is an excellent thing to be in a good way ! for a man every day to repent of his sins, to make his peace with God, to practise the duties of Christianity in his general calling, and in his particular calling to call upon God for a blessing. Such a man's way is good ; it hath a good end. Perhaps he may step out of his way by the temptations of Satan, but that is not his course. The best man in the world for a passion on the sudden may step into an ill way ; as David, when he determined to kill Nabal, but it was not David's way. Therefore we see how soon he was put off with a little counsel, and how thankful he was : 'Blessed be the Lord, and blessed be thou, and blessed be thy counsel,' &c., 1 Sam. xxv. 32. His way and course was another way. And so on the other side the wickedest man in the world may set a step in a good way for a fit, a very Saul may be amongst the prophets, and speak excellently and divinely ; but all this while he is out of his way. His way is a course of wickedness, to which therefore he will soon betake himself again ; as it is here said of these men, 'They turned to their own courses.'

'As the horse rusheth into the battle.'

Here it is comparatively set down. If you would see how the 'horse rusheth into the battle,' it is lively and divinely expressed, Job xxxix. 19, by God himself : 'Hast thou given the horse strength ? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder ? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper ? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength ; he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted ; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage ; neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha ! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.' There

you have an excellent description of this creature's fierceness—the wit of man hath not such expressions—and how 'he rusheth into the battle.' God, to abase wicked men, compares them here to the horse; not for that which is good in him, but for their violence in ill courses. They rush into them 'as the horse rusheth into the battle.' Now, the horse rusheth into the battle, (1.) *eagerly*, as you see him described in the place of Job; and (2.) *desperately*, he will not be pulled away by any means; and then (3.) *dangerously*, for he rusheth upon the pikes, and oftentimes falls down suddenly dead. He regards not the pikes, nor guns, nor nothing, but rusheth on the danger. Herein wicked men are like unto the horse, going on in their course eagerly, desperately, dangerously.

1. *They go on eagerly.* It is meat and drink unto them: 'they cannot sleep until they have done wickedness.' They plot and study it; it is their delight. They are not in their element but when they are talking wickedly and corruptly, or deceiving, or satisfying their desires, the ambition and lusts of their corrupt nature. They can no more live out of these courses than the fish can live out of the water. Therefore they go eagerly upon them.

2. And as they go eagerly, so *desperately and irreclaimably too*; nothing will restrain them, no thorns nor troubles that can lie in their way. Though God hedge in their ways with thorns, they break through all, Hosea ii. 6. Even as Balaam, he would go on though there were a sword drawn before him, he was more brutish and unreasonable than his poor beast; the very sword of the angel could not move that covetous wretch to go back. So it is with every wicked man, he goes on desperately, nothing will keep him back and reclaim him. Though God take many courses to do it, by his ministers, magistrates, by the motions of his Spirit, by his judgments threatened, by judgments executed upon others, and upon themselves sometimes, yet they are so eager upon their sins, all this will not beat them off. They love their sins better than their souls; nor is it only open riotous persons that thus rush into sins, but civil* rebellious persons also, that bless themselves in their ways, and it may be live as irreligiously as the other. Take a covetous or an ambitious man: he sacrificeth all to get such a place, &c. Such a man mocks Christ, as the Pharisees mocked him, notwithstanding all his good sermons and miracles. He goes on desperately, nothing will hold him. He breaks through all bars and oppositions. He cracks his conscience, grieves the good motions of the Spirit, despiseth good counsel, and will venture upon the outward breach of laws sometimes, rather than he will be defeated of his designs.

3. And as they go eagerly and desperately, so *dangerously too*; for is it not dangerous to provoke God? to rush upon the pikes? to run against thorns? 'Do you provoke me to jealousy,' saith God, 'and not yourselves to destruction?' 1 Cor. x. 22. No. They go both together. If you provoke me to anger, it will be to your own ruin. In Lev. xxvi. 23, 'God will walk stubbornly to them as they have done to him; and he will be froward with the froward,' Ps. xviii. 26. Those that are rebellious sinners, whom no bonds will hold, no counsel, that break all laws, as the man possessed with the devil brake his chains, the time will come that when God executes his wrath he will be too good for them, the devil will be too good for them, hell will be too good for them, conscience will tear them in pieces, and the judgment of God will seize on them. The way of wicked men is a wretched, a desperate, and dangerous course. Thou art

* That is, 'moral.'—G.

stubborn against God, and he is so against thee. He will do to thee as thou doest to him. Who are we? 'Are we stronger than God?' 1 Cor. x. 23. Careless, atheistical persons think they are. Tush! they can wind out well enough: but they will find it otherwise. 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?' saith the apostle. Let us lay this to heart.

We see here again how sin hath clean defaced the image of God in man. 'Man being in honour,' he would become like God. He was weary of his subordination. He would be absolute; and because he would be like God, God made him like the beast; and it is worse to be like the beast than to be a beast. For the beast in his own condition follows the instinct of nature; but to be like a beast, is for a man to unman himself, to degrade himself to a baser condition than God made him in; and when a man doth this, he is either in malice like the devil, or in licentiousness as the beast is. He is always like the devil or a beast till he be a new creature. And that our nature is come to this, we are beholding to our own yielding to Satan and his counsel. We 'rush as the horse into the battle.' Therefore let us beware of this. 'Be ye not as the horse and mule,' &c., saith David, Ps. xxxii. 9. Who would not labour to be in a better condition? to be a new creature, to be changed by the powerful ordinances and Spirit of God? So much for that briefly. Come we now to the last clause.

'Yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.'

Here is another expression comparative, or rather superlative. He compares them to the 'stork and turtle, the crane and swallow; and prefers these poor creatures, in wisdom and providence, as going before men. 'But my people know not the judgment of the Lord.' There needs no great explication of the words. Judgment is directive or corrective.

The directive is the law of God; setting down God's judicious* course. This you shall do, or if you do not this you shall be punished. When we obey not God's directive course, we meet with his corrective; for judgment is the stablishing of judgment. Judgment of correction is the stablishing of judgment of direction. God's laws must be performed. They are not scare-crows. If we avoid the one, we shall run into the other. If we do not meet him in the judgment of his directive law, we must be met with in his law corrective—if we be good men—or destructive if we be bad men. Now here, I take it, he means especially the judgment of correction, the time of visitation. It was a dangerous time, as it is now among us. They were already under several heavy judgments, as famine, &c. We see in the next verse, 'there was no vines, no grapes,' &c., all failed. And besides, a far heavier judgment was ready to come upon them. They were ready to be carried into Babylon, 'and they knew not the judgment of the Lord.'

'They knew not;' that is, they did not make use of it; for in divinity, things are not known when they are not affected.† God knoweth all things, but when he doth not affect and delight in us, he is said 'not to know us.' So we are said not to know, when we do not affect and make use of things. 'They know not the judgment of the Lord.' They were not ignorant.‡ He had told them of vengeance; he had told them that they should be carried into captivity; but they made not that use they should of it. Therefore they

* That is, 'judicial.'—G.

† That is, 'chosen,' = attended to.—G.

are said not to know it. So the old world. It is said they did not know of the flood. Certainly Noah had told them of it. But when they made not a right use of it, but went on brutishly, they knew it not. It is all one not to know it at all, and not to make use of it. Wicked men think they know God, and they know religion well enough; ay, but what use do they make of it in their particular course? That which we do not use we do not know in religion. If ill be discovered, and be not avoided by thee, thou art a brutish, senseless creature. Thou dost not know it, and so thou shalt be dealt with. 'They know not the judgment of the Lord;' that is, they will not know it; it was affected ignorance. The words being thus unfolded, here, first, we see,

That God confounds the proud dispositions of wicked men by poor, silly creatures—the crane, the turtle, the swallow, and the like.

What their wisdom is we see by experience. In winter, to fly from hard and cold parts to those where there is a spring. They are here in the moderate season; and when the summer is gone, they go to a more moderate air, where they may live better. For the life is the chief good of such poor creatures, and their happiness being determined in their life, they labour to keep that. They have an instinct put in them by God to preserve their being by removing from place to place, and to use that that may keep life.

Now, man is made for a better life; and there be dangers concerning the soul in another world, yet he is not so wise for his soul and his best being as the poor creatures are to preserve their being by the instinct of nature. When sharp weather comes they avoid it, and go where a better season is, and a better temper of the air; but man, when God's judgments are threatened and sent on him, and God would have him part with his sinful courses, and is ready to fire him, and to force him out of them, yet he is not so careful as the creatures. He will rather perish and die, and rot in his sins, and settle upon his dregs, than alter his course. So he is more sottish than the silly creatures. He will not go into a better estate, to the heat, to the sunbeams to warm him. He will not seek for the favour of God, to be cherished with the assurance of his love, as the poor creature goeth to the sun to warm it till it be over hot for it. Man should know what is good and what is evil. The new creature doth so. For with the change of nature there is a divine wisdom put into the soul of a Christian, that teacheth him what is good and what is evil; that he may be careful to avoid the evil; that he may discern of things that differ; that he may say, This is good for my soul, and all the world shall not scoff me out of that that I know to be good. With their profane jesting, they shall not drive me from that is good; and for courses that are ill, they shall not draw me with all their allurements. I know what belongs to the good of my soul better than so. It should be thus with Christians, to be wise for their spiritual being, as the poor creatures, the stork, and the crane, and the turtle, are to preserve their poor life here with as much comfort as they can.

God takes out of the book of nature things useful, to insert them into his divine book; because now no man shall be ashamed to learn of the creatures. Now, since the fall, man must learn of the poor creatures, and such a dunce is man, it is well for him if he can learn of the ant, and crane, and turtle; and therefore doth God take lessons out of the book of nature, and put them into his book, to teach us to furnish ourselves with divine mysteries and instructions from the creatures. And indeed a gracious heart

will make use of everything, and have his thoughts raised with them. As the prophet Jeremiah here, he shames them by the example of the creatures. But of this by the way.

The thing most material, with which I will end, is this :

Doct. That God, after long patience, hath judgments to come on people ; and it should be the part of people to know when the judgment is coming.

There is a season when God will forbear no longer in this world. 'They know not the judgment of the Lord.' The meaning is not, in hell, though that may come in : that is implied in all ; but 'they know not the judgment of the Lord,' that is, they know not the judgments that are coming. When judgments are coming, God opens the hearts and understandings of his people to know them ; as there is an instinct in the creatures to know when there will be hard weather.

Quest. But how shall we know when a judgment is near hand ?

Ans. 1. *By comparing the sins with the judgments.* If there be such sins that such judgments are threatened for, then as the thread followeth the needle, and the shadow the body, so those judgments follow such and such courses. For God hath knit and linked these together. All the power in the world and hell cannot unlink them, sin and judgment ; judgment either correcting us to amendment, or confounding us to perdition. God, therefore, having threatened in the Scriptures such judgments to such sins ; if we live in such and such sins, we may look for such judgments. Thus a wise man, by laying things together, the sins with the judgments, though he cannot tell the particular, yet he may know that some heavy judgment is at hand.

2. Again, There is a nearer way to know a judgment, *when it hath seized on us in part already.* He that is not brutish and sottish, and drunk with cares and sensuality, must needs know a judgment when it is already inflicted, when part of the house is on fire. We see judgment hath seized now on the places where we live, and therefore we cannot be ignorant of it.

3. Again, We may know it *by the example of others.* God keeps his old walks. Therefore it is said, 'As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be when the Son of man comes : they were eating, and drinking, and marrying, and knew not till the flood came and took them away,' Mat. xxiv. 38, 39. God will be like himself, if sinners be like themselves. He will not change, if they change not ; but will deal alike with them in his judgments, as he hath dealt with others. What ground have we to hope for immunity more than others ? We may rather expect it less, because we have their examples ; and so they wanted those examples to teach them which we have. In Jer. vii. 12, saith God, 'Consider, look to Shiloh, and see what I did there : so will I do to you.' So likewise the judgments on Jerusalem are a fearful spectacle for us. These and other examples may help us to judge of our condition in regard of approaching judgments.

4. Again, *General security is a great sign of some judgment coming.* In the days of Noah, there was a general sensual security. Notwithstanding the prophet foretold them of the deluge, they were eating, &c., and knew not till the flood came and took them away. So likewise, if we eat, and drink, and marry, and build, and be negligent and careless of making our peace with God, especially when warning is given us, it is a sign that some judgment, either personal on ourselves, or generally on the place we live in, will come upon us. There is never more cause of fear, than when there is least fear. The reason is, want of fear springs from infidelity, for faith stirs up fearfulness and care to please God : 'By faith Noah, moved with

fear,' or reverence, 'buildd the ark,' Heb. xi. 7. It proceeds from infidelity, not to be afraid when there is cause. Again, where there is no fear, there is no care. So the root of the want of fear is infidelity, and the spring that comes from it is carelessness, which always goes before destruction. When men care not what becomes of them : if God be pleased, so it is ; if judgment come, so it is ; the care* is taken. ' When men thus say, Peace, peace, then cometh destruction.' It is a terrible thing for a state or a city, or a particular person, to be careless ; for the life of a Christian it is a watching, as well as a warring, condition. He must be alway on his guard. Therefore he must not be careless, ' and say, Peace, when God speaks no peace.'

5. Again, We may know that some judgment is coming, *by the universality and generality of sin, when it spreads over all.* When there is a general infection of sin, we may well fear the infection of the air. Sin hath infected the souls of men ; therefore no wonder if God, in the plague, have a hand in infecting their bodies. We see here, before the prophet threatened this destruction, there was a generality of sin. In the 10th verse of this chapter, he cries out against the covetousness and false dealing of the priests and prophets, and men of all estates. And so also chapter v. ver. 4, ' The poor they were naught : ' they were poor in grace and goodness, as well as in condition. Then saith he, ' I will see if there be any goodness in the great ones : I will get me to the great men.' Ver. 5, &c., ' They have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God ; but they have broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.' When poor and rich, great and small, when all are sottish and brutish, ' when all flesh had corrupted their ways,' Gen. vi. 12, as it was before the flood, then judgment must needs come. Surely generality of sin makes way for generality of judgment. As the deluge of sin made way for the deluge of water, so the overflow of sin will make way for a flood of fire. God will one day purge the world with fire.

But now for particular sins, whereby we may know when judgment is coming. These they are :

(1.) First, Injustice and formality in religion. When men are generally unjust, destruction is near ; and indeed, how can a Christian soul look upon men's courses abroad in these regards, ' but he shall weep in secret,' Lam. i. 16 ? Is there not a general injustice ? Will not men get any cause, so they have a good purse ? Is not innocency trodden down ofttimes ?

2. And so for religion. It is generally neglected. Indifferency and formality they are the sins of the times. Here is a sweet progress. In Queen Elizabeth's time, we began with zeal and earnestness ; but now we begin to stagger whether religion is the better. We will join and put them together, that God hath put an eternal difference between, ' light and darkness.' Is this our progress after so much teaching, to put off God with formality, and deny the power ?

(3.) Again, Another particular sin foreshewing judgment, is *persecution of religion and religious men.* When God is worshipped with conscience as he should be, what imputations are laid on it ! I need not speak. The world knows well enough. Can God endure this, when conscience of his service shall go under the brand of opposition ? God is much beholding to the times, when there is nothing so heartily hated as that. There are many things loathsome, as deboishness,† &c. But what is so eagerly and heartily hated as the power of godliness ? That which they have been known to do

* Qu. ' no care ' ?—ED.

† That is, ' debauchery.'—G.

for conscience, hath been matter of reproach and ruin almost to many men. If a man will not prostitute his conscience to a creature, to make an idol of him, to set him highest, if he will not be buxom, and crack his conscience for a creature, he is scarce thought fit to live in the world. Will God suffer this, if these things be not amended? If anything be good in religion, the more the better, the more exact Christian the better. Exactness in other things is best. Is to be best in the best naught, when to be best in that which is not so good carries away the commendations? In 1 Thess. ii. 16, 'The wrath of God is come on them to the utmost; God they hate and they are contrary to all men.' This is a forerunner of destruction, the spiteful opposing of goodness. God will not endure it long.

(4.) And so when men will *go on incorrigibly in sin*, as these here, 'they rush as the horse into the battle;' when they will not be reclaimed, it is a forerunner of destruction. Alas! the ministers of God strive with men, 'but they break off the cords,' Ps. ii. 3, and cry, Tush! they are silly men; shall we yield to them? We know what is for our gain, and profit, and credit in the world better than so. Let us look to that, and not be hampered in these religious bonds. No; we are wiser than so. Thus when men are incorrigible, and account the wisdom of God stark folly, it is a sign of destruction. There is an excellent place for this, Ezek. xxiv. 12-14, 'She hath wearied herself with lies, and her great scum went not out of her: she would not have her filthiness taken from her. In her filthiness is lewdness; because I would have purged thee,' with the word and the preaching of judgments, 'and thou wouldst not be purged; therefore thou shalt not be purged till thou die, until I cause my fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, I will do it.' When God goes about to purge us by his word, and we will not amend our ways, we will not stoop, but 'strengthen an iron sinew, and a whore's forehead,' Jer. iii. 3. We will not be purged, nay, saith God, thou shalt not be purged till I purge thee out of the world to hell, till my fury rest on thee. I the Lord have spoken it, it shall come to pass, Isa. xli. 11. There is another notable place, Prov. xxix. 1, 'He that is a man of reproof,' that is, a man that is sermon-proof, that is often reprov'd and yet carries himself impudently and hardens his heart, and stiffens his neck, 'he shall suddenly be destroyed.' He doth not mean but that he had warning enough; but because after long warning he hardens his neck, he shall suddenly be destroyed, when he looks not for it, 'and that without remedy.' There is the same phrase in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, 'There was no remedy,' when they did not regard God's ministers, that directed them the way to heaven, but would live in rebellion against the means of salvation. Then saith God, 'there was no remedy.' God sent his messengers betimes, and had compassion on his people. He would not have had them perish. 'They trifled with him and mocked his messengers,' accounted them weak men. They despised his word, and misused his prophets; and then the Lord's wrath rose against his people, and 'there was no remedy.' So when people are as those here in the text, that 'they rush as the horse into the battle,' that they are sermon-proof, that when every sermon they hear, as the hammer on the smith's anvil, makes them harder and harder, as Moses speaking to Pharaoh increased the hardness of his heart, it is a sign of destruction.

Now whether it be so or no, I leave it to your particular consciences. We that are ministers tell you of your filthiness, of your profaning the name of God, and contempt of God's word. Whether have we gained upon you

or no? Who hath left an oath? Who hath left his wicked courses and entered into a nearer communion with God for all our teaching? Blessed is that man. It is a sign God will not destroy him. It is a sign that in the general visitation God will regard that man. But, alas! we may almost complain with Jeremiah in his prophecy, Jer. v. 1, where he runs up and down to seek a man. Alas! they are very few. They are thick sown, but come thin up, that obey the ordinance of God. It is some comfort that men will submit to the ordinance, that they will come to hear. Some good may be learned. It is better than to keep out of the compass of God's law, as those men do that pretend they can read sermons at home, and so will teach God a course to bring men to heaven. There is hope of men when they submit to God's ordinance. But, I beseech you, how are you affected now for the present? How do you come now into the presence of God, if you will not amend and resolve to enter into a new course? He that is often reprov'd and will not come in, 'judgment will come suddenly on him without all remedy.' And it is good it should be without remedy; because it is without excuse. You cannot plead, and say that there were not prophets among you. If the heathens were hardened and given up to destruction,—'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them,' Rom i. 18, because they lived in a course of rebellion against the light of nature;—shall you, that have the light of nature, and the word of God, and the motions of his Spirit too, think to live in rebellion and not be accountable for it? It shall be easier for them that never heard of the word of God. Where God hath magnified his mercy, he will exalt judgment. Those that are lift up to heaven in privileges, shall be cast down to hell. 'Woe unto thee, Capernaum,' &c., Mat. xi. 21. The more in privileges, the more in judgment if they be abused.

(5.) Again, Another particular sin whereby we may discern a judgment coming is, *unfruitfulness under the means*; as the fig-tree, when it was digg'd and dunged, and yet was unfruitful, then it was near a curse. In Heb. vi. 3, the ground that is tilled and manured, and hath the rain falling on it, it is then 'near unto cursing' if it bring not forth. Perhaps a heathen, a pagan, if he were under the means, would be fruitful; therefore there might be hope of him. But those that are under the means, under the sunshine of the gospel, under the influence of it, the Spirit working on their hearts; and yet they live in the sin of unfruitfulness, it makes way for judgment. 'The axe is laid to the root,' Mat. iii. 10. When men are taught, then the instrument of vengeance is laid to the root, and down they go if they bring not forth good fruit.

Sins of omission, when that all hath been taught, are sufficient to bring a man to judgment. At the last judgment, 'you have not visited me in prison, you have not relieved the poor,' &c., will be evidence enough to cast a man into hell, Mat. xxv. 43. And the like may be said of the omission of other duties. When a man is called to place, when he hath opportunity to do good, 'he hath a price in his hand, and yet hath no heart to lay it out to his power.' God hath made him a steward, and yet he is unfruitful, and labours to undermine and ruin the state of others. What can such a man look for but the judgment of God to light on him first or last? If not present judgment on his body, yet to be given up to hardness of heart, and so to hell, which is worst of all.

(6.) Nay more, *decay in our first love* is a forerunner of judgment, when we love not God as we were wont. In Rev. ii. 5, 'I will take away thy candlestick, because thou hast left thy first love.' Is there not such a

plenty and depth in good things, especially of the gospel, whereby our sins are pardoned, and grace is given? Is there not that sweetness in them whereby to gain our love more and more? Is there not a necessity to renew our peace? Why should we decay in our love? The things of the gospel are so excellent and so necessary, that when God sees them undervalued, it is a forerunner of judgment. Let us take heed of decay in our affections. When there is no zeal for the truth, it is an ill sign.

It is a good sign for the present that God hath some blessing for us, that now in our public meetings there is regard to religion; and that, in the first place, there is some zeal for the cause of God against those that would wrong the cause of religion. We have some cause to hope in respect of that. And let every one labour to stir up the Spirit of God, and study how he may do and receive good, and be fruitful and warm in his affections, considering what excellent blessings we enjoy in the gospel. What is the glory of the kingdom we live in above popery? Our religion that we have, the sunshine of the gospel. Now the riches of Christ are unfolded; we have the key of heaven, heaven opened; what glorious times are these! The glory of the times is the manifestation of the gospel; and shall we grow in the decay of our love? Is there not cause to grow in love to the gospel, when God hath taken it from others and hath given it to us? Now, idolatry is where true religion was; and the mass is said where God was religiously worshipped in other places and countries. Shall God so deal with us, and shall we not be in love with that truth? Since we have had the truth, what peace and plenty have we had! And if ever we lose it, it will go with other things. If God takes away the truth, away goes our peace and prosperity. He will not take it away alone. It came not alone, and he will not take it away alone. Doubtless it must needs make way for judgment, when our love to so precious a jewel as the gospel shall begin to die and decay, when we shall begin to slight and disregard it. And so for any particular man that hath had good things in him. If they now begin to decay, it is an ill sign, that God is fitting him for judgment.

Well, but what shall we do when judgments are coming? We see judgments are like to come, nay, are in part come. The plague of pestilence hath seized on us already; and then war is threatened, and that by enemies that have been foiled before. Foiled enemies are dangerous enemies, if they be proud. Now we have proud enemies that have been foiled, and idolatrous withal, and what mercy can we look for from them? God fought against them for us from heaven in some measure, and they being cruel provoked enemies, are the less likely to shew any mercy.* God is indeed so merciful to us yet, that he hath taken us into his own hands, rather than to give us up to the malice and fury of idolatrous enemies. But yet those that can lay things together, and consider the times, they shall see there is more cause of fear than is taken to heart.

Well, and in this case, what shall we do?

1. First, In the interim between the threatening and the execution. There are some judgments in the cloud, and the storm seems to hang over us, and the sword of the pestilence is drawn over our heads by the destroying angel, though he hath not yet stricken us in our particular. Now in the time between the threatening and the execution; *oh improve it, make use of this little time; get into covenant with God; hide yourselves in the providence and promises of God; make your peace, defer it no longer.*

2. And secondly, *Mourn for the sins of the time, that when any judg-*

* Spain.—G.

ment shall come, you may be marked with those that mourn. Take heed of the errors and sins of the times, lest, when a judgment comes, you be swept away in the general judgments. But let us rather have our part with those that mourn, that God may give us our lives for a prey.

3. And thirdly, *Be watchful*. Practise that duty, We have the plague to put us in mind of it, besides the threatening of dangers by enemies abroad. If we will not watch now and stand upon our guard, when will we? Let us be watchful to do all the good we can, to be fruitful, to be good stewards, to have large hearts. The time may come that we may be stripped of all, and we know not how soon. Having but a little time, let us do good in it; study all opportunities in these times; rouse up our sluggish souls. Fear, it is a waking affection. Jacob, when his brother Esau was ready to seize on him, 'he could not sleep that night.' We know not how soon the hand and arrow of God may strike us, besides other judgments. Let us shake off security, and do everything we do sincerely to God. We may come to God to make our account, we know not how soon. Let us do everything as in his presence, and to him. In our particular callings, let us be conscionable,* and careful, and fruitful. Let us do all in our places to God, and not to the world, or to our own particular gain, but do it as those that must give account ere long to God. Now, God threateneth us to come and give our account; who can be secure he shall have life for a week, or for one day? We cannot. 'Our times are in God's hands,' Ps. xxxi. 15. We came into the world in his time, and we must go out in his time. But now we have less cause to hope for long life. This is to make a right use of the judgment of God, to be watchful in this kind.

And withal, let us be good husbands now in the interim. Between the threatening and the execution of the judgment, let us store up comforts from the promises of God, and store up the comforts of a good life. We shall have more comfort of the means we have bestowed wisely than of that we shall leave behind us. Thus if we do, come what will, we are prepared. Many holy and heavenly men have been visited with pestilential sickness. Hezekiah was a king, and his was a pestilential sickness; and many holy divines of late, and other Christians, have been swept away by the sickness—Junius, and other rare men of excellent use in the church (*b*). Therefore let us labour to get into the favour of God; make use of our renewing our covenant for the time to come. That is one end of fasting now, to renew our covenants, to remake them for the time to come. And then come what will, and welcome, life or death; for there is a blessing hid in the most loathsome sickness and death. If we come to heaven, it is no matter by what way, though the body 'be sown in dishonour.' We may die of a noisome disease, that we cannot have our friends near us, yet 'the body shall rise again in honour,' 1 Cor. xv. 43. What matter, saith St Paul, 'if by any means I may come to the resurrection of the dead;' by fair death or foul death, it is no matter. And if so be that God makes not good his promise of particular protection of our bodies from contagion, &c., it is no matter. We have a general promise 'that he will be our God.' 'He is the God of Abraham,' the God of the dead as well as of the living, Mat. xxii. 32. He is a God that is everlasting in the covenant of grace, in life and death, and for ever. If we be entered into the covenant of grace, it holds for ever. And when all other promises fail, and all things in the world fail, stick to the main promise of forgiveness of sins, 'and life everlasting.'

* That is, 'conscientious.'—G.

When all things in the world will fail, we must leave them shortly, wealth and whatsoever, what a comfort is in that grand promise that God will forgive us our sins, and give us life everlasting for Christ! Therefore, when all things else are gone, let us wrap ourselves in the gracious promises of Christ, and then we shall live and die with comfort.

NOTES.

(a) P. 213.—‘Therefore an ancient saith, “He that is good only under the cross is never good.”’ Qu. Bernard?

(b) P. 227.—‘Junius.’ The allusion to the ‘plague’ shews that Sibbes speaks of Francis Du Jou or Junius of Leyden, an eminent theologian who was swept off by the plague there in 1602. He is sometimes confounded with a contemporary Baldwinus Junius, and sometimes with his own son and namesake. There are others of the same name more or less distinguished. G.