

DAVID'S CONCLUSION; OR, THE SAINT'S
RESOLUTION.

DAVID'S CONCLUSION; OR, THE SAINT'S RESOLUTION.

NOTE.

'David's Conclusion' is one of the sermons of the 'Beams of Divine Light.' (4to, 1639. Cf. Vol. V. p. 220.) Its separate title-page is given below.*

DAVIDS
CONCLUSION:
OR,
THE SAINTS
RESOLUTION.

In one Sermon.

By the late learned, and reverend Divine,

RICHARD SIEBS.

Doctor in Divinitie, Master of Katherine-Hall
in *Cambridge*; and sometimes Prea-
cher at *Grays-Inne*.

Jeremy 30. 21.

*Who is this that ingageth his heart to approach un-
to me, saith the Lord?*

James 4. 8.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

LONDON,

Printed by *E. P.* for *Nicholas Bourne*
and *Rapha Harford*.

1639.

DAVID'S CONCLUSION; OR, THE SAINT'S RESOLUTION.

But it is good for me to draw near to God.—Ps. LXXIII. 28.

THIS psalm is a psalm of Asaph, or a psalm of David, and committed to Asaph the singer, for Asaph was both a seer and a singer. Those psalms that David made were committed to Asaph, so it is thought to be a psalm of David. And if not of David, yet of Asaph, that likewise was a singer in the house of God (*a*).

The psalm represents to us a man in a spiritual conflict, by a discovery of the cause of it, and a recovery out of the conflict, with a triumphant conclusion afterwards.

1. He begins abruptly, as a man *newly come out of a conflict*: 'Truly God is good to Israel;' as if he had gained this truth in conflicting with his corruptions and Satan, who joins with corruption in opposing. Say the flesh what it can, say Satan what he can, say carnal men what they can, 'yet God is good to Israel.'

2. After his conflict he sets down *the discovery*, first of his weakness, and then of his doubting of God's providence, and then the cause of it, the prosperity of the wicked, and God's contrary dealing with the godly. Then he discovers the danger he was come to, ver. 13, 'Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency,' &c.

3. And then *the recovery*, in ver. 17: 'I went into the sanctuary, and there I understood the end of these men.' The recovery was by going into the sanctuary; not by looking upon the present condition, but upon God's intention, what should become of such men; and there he had satisfaction.

4. Then his *victory and triumph over all*: ver. 23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee.' It was a suggestion of the flesh that thou wast gone far from me, by reason of the condition of carnal men that flourish in the eye of the world. No: 'Thou art continually with me, and thou holdest me by my right hand.' Thou upholdest me, I should fall else. But what, would God do so for the time to come? 'He will guide me by his counsel,' while I live here and when I am dead. What will he do for me after? 'He will receive me to glory.' Whereupon saith he, 'Who have I in heaven but thee? and there is none in earth that I desire besides thee.' Therefore, though for the present 'my flesh fail,' yea, and 'my heart fail,'

yet God is the 'strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' We see here his victory set down, and he gives a lustre to it, by God's contrary dealing with the wicked: 'For lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee.' Now, in the words of the text, you have his conclusion upon all this, 'Nevertheless it is good for me to draw near to God.'

This is the conclusion upon the former principles. This is, as it were, the judgment upon the former demurs. The sum of all comes to this: Let all things be weighed and laid together, I am sure this is true, 'it is good for me to draw near to God.' So he ends where he began, 'God is good to Israel.' Therefore, because God is so good to Israel, 'it is good to draw near to God.' So you see in what order the words come. They are the words of a man got out of a conflict, after he had entered into the sanctuary, and after he had considered the end of wicked men, at whose prosperity he was troubled and took scandal.

Before I come to the words, it is not amiss briefly to touch these points, to make way to that I am to deliver.

First of all, that,

1. *God's dearest children are exercised with sharp spiritual conflicts.*

God suffers their very faith in principles sometimes to be shaken. What is more clear than God's providence? Not the noonday. Yet God suffers sometimes his own children to be exercised with conflicts of this kind, to doubt of principles written in the book of God, as it were, with a sunbeam, that have a lustre in themselves. There is nothing more clear than that God hath a particular special providence over his; yet God's ways are so unsearchable and deep, that he doth spiritually exercise his children; he suffers them to be exercised, as you see here he comes out of a conflict; 'but it is good for me to draw near to God.' I will touch it. Therefore I will extend it only to God's people, that, if by reason of the remainders of corruption God suffer their rebellious hearts to cast mire and dirt, to cast in objections that are odious to the spiritual man, that part that is good, they may not be cast down too much and dejected. It is no otherwise with them than it hath been with God's dear children, as we see in Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and others. It is a clear truth. I only point at it that we might have it ready to comfort ourselves when such things rise in our souls. It is no otherwise with us than it hath been with other of God's dear children.

The second point is, that,

2. *God's children, when they are in this conflict, they recover themselves.*

God suffers them to be foiled, but then they recover themselves. First, there is a conflict, and then oftentimes the foil. A man is foiled by the worst part in him, and then after a while he recovers; and then, as in other conflicts, there is triumph and victory, as we see here his conflict and recovery.

For God's children go not far off from him, as it is in ver. 27, 'Lo, they that are far off from thee shall perish.' They may have their thoughts unsettled a little concerning God's providence, but they run not far off, they go not a-whoring, as carnal men do. They begin to slip, but God hath a blessed hand under them to recover them, that they do not fall away, that they fall not foully. They may slip and fall a little, to stand better and surer after, but they go not far off as wicked men do. They never slip so low but God's goodness is lower to hold them up. He hath one hand under them and another hand above them, embracing them, so that

they cannot fall dangerously. This is the second; from this that we see here, he recovers out of this conflict.

Use. Which may serve to *discern our estate in grace.* If we belong to God, though such noisome imaginations rise, yet, notwithstanding, there is a contrary principle of grace always in God's children that checks them, at the least afterwards, if not presently. Such noisome thoughts as these rule and reign in carnal men, for they take scandal* at God's government, and they judge, indeed, that the ways of wicked men are happy. They have false principles, and they frame their course of life to such false principles and rules, from cherishing atheistical doubts of God's providence, and the like. It is far otherwise with God's children. There are conflicts in them, but there is a recovery; they check them presently; they have God's Spirit, and the seed of grace in them. That is never extinct.

3. *The way of recovery is to enter into God's sanctuary.* For we must not give liberty to ourselves to languish in such a course, to look to present things too much, but look into God's book, and there we shall find what is threatened to such and such ill courses, and what promises are made to good courses. And then apply God's truth to the example; see how God hath met with wicked men in their ruffe,† and advanced his children when they were at the lowest, when they were even at the brink of despair. Examples in this kind are pregnant and clear throughout the Scripture. The Lord saith, 'It shall go well with the righteous, and it shall [not] go well with the wicked,' Ps. xci. 8; 'Let him escape a thousand times.' Doubtless there is a reward for the godly,' Ps. lviii. 11. Let us look in the book of God, upon the predictions, and see the verifying of those predictions in the examples that act the rules, and bring them to the view: let us see the truths in the examples. This entering into God's sanctuary it is the way to free us from dangerous scandals, and to overcome dangerous conflicts; for the conclusions of the sanctuary are clean contrary to sensible carnal reason. Carnal reason saith, Such a one is a happy man; sure he is in great favour; God loves him. Oh, but the sanctuary saith, It shall never go well with such a man. Carnal reason would say of Dives, Oh, a happy man; but the sanctuary saith, 'He had his good here,' and 'Lazarus had his ill here.' Carnal reason saith, Is there any providence that rules in the earth? Is there a God in heaven, that suffers these things to go so confusedly? Ay, but the word of God, the sanctuary, saith, there is a providence that rules all things sweetly, and that 'all things are beautiful in their time,' Eccles. iii. 11.

We must not look upon things in their confusion, but knit things. 'Mark the end, mark the end of the righteous man,' Ps. xxxvii. 37. Look upon Joseph in prison. Here is a horrible scandal! For where was God's providence to watch over a poor young man. But see him after, 'the second man in the kingdom.' Look on Lazarus at the rich man's door, and there is scandal; but see him after in Abraham's bosom. If we see Christ arraigned before Pilate, and crucified on the cross, here is a scandal, that innocency itself should be wronged. But stay awhile! See him at the right hand of God, 'ruling principalities and powers, subjecting all things under his feet,' Eph. i. 21.

Thus the sanctuary teacheth us to knit one thing to another, and not brokenly to look upon things present, according to the dreams of men's

* That is, 'make a stumbling-block of.'—G.

† Edward Philips, Sibbes's contemporary, uses the word 'ruffe' very much as here. See 'Godly Learned Sermons' (1605), p. 160. It seems = height of prosperity.—G.

devices ; but to look upon the catastrophe and winding up of the tragedy ; not to look on the present conflict, but to go to the sanctuary, and see the end of all, see how God directs all things to a sweet end. ' All the ways of God to his children are mercy and truth,' Ps xviii. 3, though they seem never so full of anger and displeasure. Thus you see God's children are in conflict oftentimes, and sometimes they are foiled in the conflict ; yet by way of recovery they go into the sanctuary, and there they have spiritual eye-salve. They have another manner of judgment of things than ' flesh and blood hath.'

4. Again, we see, when he went into the sanctuary, *the very sight of faith makes him draw near to God.* Sometimes God represents heavenly truths to the eye of sense, in the examples of his justice. We see sometimes wicked men brought on the stage. God blesseth such a sight of faith, and such examples to bring his children nearer to him ; as we see immediately before the text, ' thou wilt destroy all that go a-whoring from thee ;' and then it follows, ' It is good for me to draw near to God.' So that the Spirit of God in us, and our spirits sanctified by the Spirit, takes advantage when we enter into the sanctuary, and see the diverse ends of good and bad, to draw us close to God.

Indeed, that is one reason why God suffers different conditions of men to be in the world, not so much to shew his justice to the wicked, as that his children, seeing of his justice and his mercy, and the manifestation and discovery of his providence in ordering his justice towards wicked men, it may make them cleave to his mercy more, and give a lustre to his mercy. ' It is good for me to cleave to the Lord.' I see what will become of all others.

5. The next that follows upon this, *that God's children, thus conflicting and going into the sanctuary, and seeing the end of all there, they go a contrary course to the world.* They swim against the stream. As we say of the stars and planets, they have a motion of their own, contrary to that rapt motion, whereby they are carried and whirled about in four-and-twenty hours from east to west. They have a creeping motion and period of their own, as the moon hath a motion of her own backward from west to east, that [she] makes every month ; and the sun hath a several* motion from the rapt motion he is carried with that he goes about in a year. So God's children, they live and converse, and are carried with the same motion as the world is. They live among men, and converse as men do ; but notwithstanding, they have a contrary motion of their own, which they are directed and carried to by the Spirit of God, as here the holy prophet saith, ' It is good for me to draw near to God.' As if he should say, For other men, be they great or small, be they of what condition they will, let them take what course they will, and let them see how they can justify their course, and take what benefit they can ; let them reap as they sow ; it do not matter much what course they take, I will look to myself ; as for me, I am sure this is my best course, ' to draw near to God.'

So the sanctified spirit of a holy man, he looks not to the stream of the times, what be the currents, and opinions, and courses of rising to preferment, of getting riches, of attaining to an imaginary present happiness here ; but he hath other thoughts, he hath another judgment of things, and therefore goes contrary to the world's course. Hear St Paul, Phil. ii. 21 ; saith he there, ' All men seek their own,—I cannot speak of it without weeping,—whose end is damnation, whose belly is their god, who mind

* That is, ' separate.'—G.

earthly things.' But what doth St Paul, when other men seek their own, and are carried after private ends? Oh, saith he, 'our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, who shall change our vile bodies, and make them like his glorious body, according to his mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.' So you see the blessed apostle, led with the same Spirit as the man of God here, he considers not what men do, he fetcheth not the rules of his life from the example of the great ones of the world or from multitude. These are false, deceiving rules. But he fetcheth the rule of his life from the experimental goodness he had found by a contrary course to the world. Let the world take what course they will, 'it is good for me to draw near to God.'

6. I might add a little further, that *the course and corrupt principles of the world are so far from shaking a child of God, that they settle him.* They stir up his zeal the more. As we say, there is an *antiperistasis*, an increasing of contraries by contraries, as we see in winter the body is warmer by reason that the heat is kept in, and springs are warmer in winter because the heat is kept in; so the Spirit of God, in the hearts of his children, works and boils when it is environed with contraries. It gathers strength and breaks out with more zeal, as David, Ps. cxix. 126, when he saw men did not keep God's law. We see how he complains to God, 'It is time, Lord, for thee to work.' Indeed, it is the nature of opposition to increase the contrary. Those that have the Spirit and grace of God in truth, they gather strength by opposition.

Use. Therefore the use we are to make of it, is to *discern of ourselves of what spirit we are, what principles we lead our lives by;* whether by examples of greatness, or multitude, or such like, it is an argument we are led by the spirit of the world and not by the Spirit of God. God's children, as they are severed from the world in condition, they are men of another world, so they are severed from the world in disposition, in their course and conversation. Therefore, from these grounds their course is contrary to the world. 'But it is good for me;' 'but' is not in the original. It is, 'And it is good for me;' but the other is aimed at. The sense is, 'But it is good for me to draw near to God,' and so it is in the last translation (b). Thus you see what way we have made to the words. I do but touch these things, and it was necessary to say something of them, because the words are a triumphant conclusion upon the former premises.

7. And in the words, in general, observe this first of all, that *God by his Spirit enableth his children to justify wisdom by their own experience.*

To make it good by their own experience: 'It is good for me to draw near to God.' And this is one reason why God suffers them to be shaken, and then in conflict to recover, that after recovery they may justify the truth. *Nihil tam certum, &c.*, nothing is so certain as that that is certain after doubting (c). Nothing is so fixed as that that is fixed after it hath been shaken, as the trees have the strongest roots, because they are most shaken with winds and tempests. Now God suffers the understanding, that is, the inward man, of the best men to be shaken, and after settles them, that so they may even from experience justify all truths; that they may say it is naught,* it is a bitter thing to sin. Satan hath abused me, and my own lust abused me, and enticed me away from God; but I see no such good thing in sin as nature persuaded me before. As travellers will tell men you live poorly here. In such a country you may do wondrous

* That is, 'naught' = wicked.—G.

well. There you shall have plenty and respect. And when they come there, and are pinched with hunger, and disrespect, they come home with shame enough to themselves that they were so beguiled ; so it is with God's children. Sometimes he suffers them to be foiled, and lets them have the reins of their lusts awhile, to taste a little of the forbidden tree ; that after they may say with experience, it is a bitter thing to forsake God, it is better [to] go to my ' former husband,' as the church saith in Hosea, when God took her in hand a little, ii. 7. Sin will be bitter at the last. So the prodigal he was suffered to range till he was whipped awhile, and then he could confess it was better to be in his ' father's house.' God suffers his children to fall into some course of sin, that afterward, by experience, they may justify good things, and be able to say that God is good.

And the judgment of such is more firm, and doth more good than those that have been kept from sinking at all. God, in his wise providence, suffers this.

Use. We should labour, therefore, *to justify in our own experience all that is good.* What is the reason that men are ashamed of good courses so soon ? It may be they are persuaded a little to pray, and to sanctify the Lord's day, to retire themselves from vanity and such like. Ay, but if their judgments be not settled out of the book of God, and if they have not some experience, they will not maintain this ; therefore they are driven off. Now a Christian should be able to justify against all gainsayers whatsoever can be said, by his own experience. That to read the book of God, and to hear holy truths opened by men led with the Spirit of God, it is a good thing, I find God's Spirit sanctify me by it. To sanctify the Lord's day, I find it good by experience. That where there is the communion of saints, holy conference, &c., I can justify it, if there were no Scripture for it : I find it by experience to be a blessed way to bring me to a heavenly temper, to fit me for heaven. So there is no good course, but God's children should be able, both by Scripture, and likewise by their own experience, to answer all gainsayers. When either their own hearts, or others, shall oppose it, he may be able to say with the holy man here, it is no matter what you say, ' it is good for me to draw near to God.' So much for the general. To come more particularly to the words.

' It is good for me to draw near to God.'

Here you have the justification of piety, of holy courses, which is set down by ' drawing near to God ;' and the argument whereby it is justified, ' It is good.' This gloss put upon anything commends it to man ; for naturally since the fall there is so much left in man, that he draws to that which is good ; but, when he comes to particulars, there is the error, he seeks heaven in the way of hell, he seeks happiness in the way of misery, he seeks light in the way of darkness, and life in the way and path of death : his lusts so hurry him and carry him the contrary way. But yet there is left this general foundation of religion in all men ; as the heathen could say, naturally all men from the principles of nature draw to that which is good. Here religious courses are justified and commended from that which hath the best, attractive, and most magnetical force. ' It is good to draw near to God.' ' Good' hath a drawing force ; for the understanding, that shews and discovers ; but the will is the chief guide in man, and answerable to the discovery of good or ill in the understanding, there is a prosecution or aversation* in the will, which is that part in the soul of man that cleaves to good discovered. To unfold the words a little.

* That is, ' turning from.'—G.

'It is good' to draw near to God, who is the chief good. It is good in quality, and good in condition and state. It is good in quality and disposition; for it is the good of conformity for the understanding creature to draw near to God the Creator, who hath fitted the whole inward man to draw near, to conform to him.

And then it is good in condition; for it is his happiness to do so. The goodness of the creature is in drawing near to God. The nearer anything is to the principle of such a thing, the better it is for it; the nearer to the sun, the more light; the nearer to the fire, the more heat: the nearer to that which is goodness itself, the more good; the nearer to happiness, the more happy; therefore it must needs be the happiness of condition to draw near to God. So you see what is meant, when he saith here, 'It is good.' It is a pleasing good, conformable to God's will; he commands it; and it is for my good likewise; it advanceth my condition to draw near to God.

'To draw near.' What is it to draw near to God? We shall see by what it is to go from God. God is everywhere. We are always near to God. 'Whither shall I go from thy presence? If I go to hell, thou art there,' &c., saith the psalmist, Ps. cxxxix. 8. God is everywhere indeed in regard of his presence, and power, and disposing providence; but then there is a gracious presence of God in the hearts of his children. And there is a strange presence of God to Christ, the *presence of union*; which makes the human nature of Christ the happiest creature that ever was, being joined by a hypostatical union to the second person. But we speak not of that nearness here. There is a gracious nearness when the Spirit of God, in the spirits of those that belong to God, sweetly enlargeth, and comforts, and supports, and strengtheneth them, working that in them that he works in the hearts of none else. For instance, the soul is in the whole man. It is diffused over all the members. It is in the foot, in the eye, in the heart, and in the brain. But how is it in all these? It is in the foot as it moves it. It is in the heart, as the principle of life. It is in the brain and understanding, using and exercising his reasoning, understanding power. So that, though all the soul be in the whole man, yet it is otherwise in the brain than in the rest. So, though God be everywhere, yet he is otherwise in his children than in others. He is in them graciously and comfortably, exercising his graces in them, and comforting them. He is not so with the rest of the world. You see how God is present everywhere, and how he is graciously present with his. So answerable we are said to be near to God. We are near him in what state soever we are, but then there is a gracious nearness when our whole soul is near to God, as thus: *when our understandings conceive aright of God*; as it is said of the young man in the Gospel, when he began to speak discreetly and judiciously, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' When men have a right conceit* of divine truths, they are not far from the kingdom of God, when there is clearness of judgment to conceive aright. Those that have corrupt principles are far off. If the understanding be corrupt, all the rest will go astray. There is the first nearness when the judgment is sanctified by the Spirit to conceive aright.

Then again, there is a nearness when we not only know things aright, but mind them; when the things are present to our minds; when God is in our thoughts. David saith of the wicked man, 'God is not in his thoughts.' When we mind and think of God and heavenly things, they are near to us, and we to them. For the soul is a spiritual essence. It

* That is, conception.—G.

goes everywhere, it goes to heaven, and is present with the things it minds. We are nearer to God and heavenly things when we mind them, and think on and feed our thoughts on them.

Again, we are near them *when our wills first make choice of the better part with Mary* ; when upon discovery of the understanding, the will chooseth deliberately. Upon consideration follows the determination and choosing of the will ; and upon choice, cleaving, which is another act of the will. When it chooseth that which is spiritually best, every way best for grace and condition, then it cleaves to it. As it is said of Jonathan, 'His heart did cleave to David,' 1 Sam. xviii. 1. So the woman cleaves to her husband, as Saint Paul speaks, 1 Cor. vii. 10. When the will chooseth and cleaves to that which is good, then there is a drawing near.

And likewise, *when the affections are carried to God as their object*, then there is a drawing near to God ; when our love embraceth God and heavenly things, for love is an affection of union. It makes the thing loved and he that loveth to be one. It is the primary, the first-born affection of the soul, from which all other affections are bred. When we love God, we desire still further and further communion with him. And where there is love, if we have not that we love, then the soul goes forth to God in desire of heavenly things. 'The heart pants after God, as the hart doth after the rivers of waters,' Ps. xlii. 1, and after holy things, wherein the Spirit of God is effectual. And when we have it in any measure, then the soul shews a sweet enlargement of joy and delight in God. Thus when we judge aright of and mind heavenly things, and make choice of them, and cleave to God with all our affections of love, and joy, and delight, when these are carried to God and heavenly things, then we draw near to him.

And especially when the 'inward man' *is touched with the Spirit of God*. Even as the iron that is touched with the loadstone, though it be heavy of itself, it will go up, so, when the inward man is touched by the Spirit of God with a spirit of faith, which is a grace by which we draw near to God with trust,—for it is confidence and trust that draws us near to God,—faith, it is wrought in the whole inward man, in the understanding, in the mind, in choosing and cleaving, but especially it is in the will ; for faith is described to be a going to God, a coming to him, which is a promotion or going forth, which is an act of the will ; so by faith and trust specially we draw near and cleave to God. Even as at the first we fell from God by distrusting of his word ; saith the Devil, 'Ye shall not die at all,' Gen. iii. 4 : we believed a liar more than God himself. Now we are recovered by a way contrary to that we fell ; we must recover and draw near to God again by trusting and relying upon God. You see what is meant by the words, 'It is good for me to draw near to God.'

To come to observe some things from them, first this, that

Spiritual conviction of the judgment, it is the ground of practice.

It is good, and good for me. For we know in nature that the will follows the last design of the understanding. That which the understanding saith it is to be done, here and now, all circumstances considered it is best, that the will chooseth and that a man doth, for the will rules and leads the outward man. Now where there is a heavenly conviction of the understanding of any particular thing, this at this time is good, all things considered ; and weighed in the balance, on the one side and on the other, where this is, there comes in practice and drawing near to God alway. Conviction is when a man is set down, so that he cannot gainsay nor will not, but falls to practice presently ; then a man is convinced of a thing.

That which is immediately before practice, and leads to practice, it is conviction. Now, there are these four things in conviction.

There is first truth. A man must know that such a thing is true. Then it must not only be a truth, but a good truth; as the gospel is said to be 'the good word of God,' Heb. vi. 5, and 'it is a true and a faithful saying,' 1 Tim. i. 15. It is a true saying, 'that Christ came to save sinners,' Matt. ix. 13; and it is a faithful, a good saying. If it be not good as well as true, truth doth not draw to practice as it is truth, but as it is good.

As it must be truth, and a good truth, so it must be good for me, as the holy man saith here, 'It is good for me,' &c. A thing may be good for another man. The devil knows what is good; and that makes him envy poor Christians so. Wicked men know that which is good when they sin against the Holy Ghost; but for them it is better to keep in the contrary. So that we must know it is a truth, and a good truth, and good for us in particular, that it is best for us to do so.

The fourth is this: Though it be true, and good, and good for us; yet before we can come to practice, *it must be a good that is comparative, better than other things that are presented, or else no action will follow.* A man must be able to say, This is better than that. A weak man that is led with passions and lusts, he oftentimes sees the truth of things, and sees they are good, and good for me, and wishes that he could take such a course; but such is the strength of his passions at this time, that it is better to do thus, it is better to yield to his lusts, and he trusts that God will be merciful, and he shall recover it afterwards. These four things, therefore, must be in conviction before we can take the best course; and these are all here in this holy man, for he saw it was a truth, a duty, and likewise that it was a good truth; for to be near to God, the fountain of good, it must needs be good. And then it was good for him to be so, nay, it was good, all things considered; for it is a conclusion, as it were, brought out of the fire, out of a conflict. Nay, say the flesh, and say all the world what it can to the contrary, 'It is good for me to draw near to God.' He brings it in as a triumphant conclusion. Put drawing near to God in one balance, and lay in that balance all the inconveniences that may follow drawing near to God,—the displeasure of great ones, the loss of any earthly advantage,—and lay in the other balance all the advantages that keep men from drawing near to God,—as if a man do not keep a good conscience, he may please this or that man, he may get riches, and advance himself, and better his estate,—consider all that be, yet notwithstanding, it is better to draw near to God, with all the disadvantages that follow that course, than to take the contrary. Thus you see the truth clear, that conviction is the way and foundation of practice.

Use. Therefore we should labour by all means to be convinced of the best things. It is not sufficient to have a general notion, and slightly to hear of good things. No; we must beg the Spirit of God that he would seal and set them upon our souls; and so strongly set and seal them there, that when other things are presented to the contrary, with all the advantages and colours and glosses that flesh and blood can set upon them, yet out of the strength of spiritual judgment we may be able to judge of the best things out of a spiritual conviction, and to say it is best to cleave to God. So said the blessed man of God Moses. There was in the one end of the balance the pleasures of sin, the honours of a court, there was all that earth could afford,—for if it be not to be had in a prince's court,

where is it to be had? His place was more than ordinary; he was accounted the son of Pharaoh's daughter,—yet lay all that in the balance, and in the other part of the balance, to draw near to God's people, though the people of God were a base, forlorn, despised, afflicted people at that time, yet notwithstanding to draw near to the cause of religion, the disgraced cause of religion, 'to draw near to God' when he is disgraced in the world,—it is easy to draw near to God when there is no opposition,—but to draw near to God's part and side when it is disgraced in the world, Moses saw it the best end of the balance, put in the afflictions, and disgracing of God's people, or what you will. So it was with Abraham when he followed God as it were blindfold, and left all, his father's house and the contentments he had there. So it was with our Saviour's disciples. They left all to follow Christ; they were convinced of this, Surely we shall get more good by the company of Christ than by those things that we leave for him.

Let us labour therefore to be convinced of the excellency of spiritual things, and then spiritual practice will follow. And undoubtedly the reason of the profane conversation of the world, it comes from hidden atheism; that men make no better choice than they do, that they draw not near to God. Let them say what they will, it proceeds from hence. I prove it thus. When men are convinced of good things, they will do good, for conviction is the ground of practice; and when men do not take good courses, it is because they are not convinced of the best things. Therefore men that swear, and blaspheme, that are carnal, brute persons, at that time atheism rules in their hearts, that they believe not these things in the book of God to be true. Can the swearer believe that 'God will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain; that a curse shall follow the swearer,' Exod. xx. 7, and the whoremonger; 'that whoremongers and adulterers God will judge?' Heb. xiii. 4, and so the covetous, and extortioners, they that raise themselves by ill means, 'shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Can men believe this, and live in the practice of these sins? If they did believe these things indeed, as the word of God sets them down, if they did believe that sin were so bitter, and so foul a thing as the word of God makes it, certainly they would not; therefore it comes from a hidden atheism. Indeed, there is a bundle of atheism and infidelity in the heart of man, and we cannot bewail it [too much. In the best there are some remainders of it: as this holy man, 'So foolish was I, and as a beast before thee,' Ps. lxxiii. 22, when he thought of his doubting of God's providence. Therefore considering that the cause of all ill practice is that we are not spiritually convinced of the contrary, that sin is a naughty and bitter thing, nor are we sufficiently convinced of the best things, let us labour more and more to be soundly convinced of these things.

Now, nothing will do this but the Holy Ghost, as ye have it John xvi. 7, *seq.*: 'Christ promiseth to send the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, and he shall convince the world of sin;' that is, he shall so set sin before the eyes of men's souls, that they shall know there is no salvation but in Christ. He shall convince them of unbelief, that horrible sin. They shall have it presented so to them, that they shall believe presently upon it. This the Holy Ghost must do.

But the Holy Ghost doth it in the use of means. Therefore it must be our wisdom to hear and pray and meditate much, that God would vouchsafe his Spirit to persuade us, to convince our understanding, to convince

us of all our false reasonings against good things, that there may not a vile imagination rise in our hearts contrary to divine principles.

'It is good to draw near to God.' Therefore it is good to come to the sacrament, which is one way of drawing near to God. Let us be so convinced of it, that it is not only a necessary, but a comfortable and sweet duty to have communion with God; for will we suffer for Christ if we will not feast with him? What shall we say of those, therefore, that are so far from drawing near to God, when they have these opportunities, that they turn their backs? They clean thwart this blessed man here. He saith, 'It is good for me to draw near to God;' nay, say they, it is good for me to have nothing to do with God, nor Christ, no, not when he comes to allure me. Now, he is come near us indeed, that we might come near him. Because we were strangers to God, and could not draw near to him, simply considered, God became man, Emmanuel, God with us, that he might bring us to God. Christ is that Jacob's ladder that knits heaven and earth together. Christ, God and man, knits God and man together. This was the end of his incarnation and of his death, to make our peace, to bring those near that were strangers, nay, enemies before; and of our part and portion in the benefits of his death, we are assured in the sacrament. Therefore let us draw near to our comfort, with cheerfulness, for his goodness that we have these opportunities. Let us draw near to God to have our faith strengthened and our communion with him increased.

Only let us labour to come with clean hearts. 'God will be sanctified in all that come near him,' Lev. x. 3. Let us know that we have to deal with a holy God, and with holy things, and therefore cast aside a purpose of living in sin; let us not come with defiled hearts, for then, though the things be holy in themselves, they are defiled to us. Let us come with a resolution to renew our covenant, and come with rejoicing that God stoops so low to use these poor helps, that in themselves are weak, yet by his blessing they are able greatly to strengthen our faith.

NOTES.

(a) P. 81.—'This psalm is a psalm of David, or of Asaph.' Cf. Dr J. A. Alexander and Thrupp *in loco*. Modern criticism seems to have no doubt that Asaph was the author, not merely the 'singer,' of this psalm.

(b) P. 85.—'But' is not in the original." Cf. above reference. Dr Alexander renders, 'And I,' &c. 'As for me—the approach of God to me (is) good.' The 'last translation' is our present authorised version. G.

(c) P. 85.—'Nihil tam certum,' &c. An apophthegm common to Philosophy, and met with in various forms; *e.g.* it is a common saying, 'He who never doubted, never believed.'