

THE CHURCH'S BLACKNESS.

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NOTE.

'The Church's Blackness' forms No. 17 of the sermons in *The Saint's Cordials* of 1629. It was withdrawn in the after-editions. Its separate title-page is given below.* G.

* THE
CHVRCHES
BLACKNES.

In One SERMON.

SHEWING,

{ *That the best of Gods Saints, whilst they are here, are in
imperfect estate.
That though our estate be here imperfect, yet we must not
be discouraged.
As also, that Christians have beauty as well as blacknesse.
And that there is a glory and excellency in the Saints of
God, in the midst of all their deformities and debasements.*

Prælucendo Pereo.

VPRIGHTNES HATH BOLDNES,

L O N D O N,

Printed in the yeare 1629.

THE CHURCH'S BLACKNESS.

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, and as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me; my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards: but mine own vineyard have I not kept.—CANT. I. 5, 6.

IN the former verses of this chapter, the church having shewed her fervent love and dear affection unto Christ, and longing for a nearer communion with him; having also confessed and professed her own weakness and inability to come towards him, for which cause she says, 'Draw me, we will run after thee;' in the words which I have read, and in the verse following, she comes to remove certain objections and impediments, which might either discredit her or discourage her daughters, which she doth by turning her speeches unto them, who are answered as though they had expressed their objection in direct words; for the Spirit knows how to meet with our secret thoughts, either present or to come. Now these daughters who here make the objection, are supposed to be such as have no sanctifying grace as yet in them, at least very little (as it appeareth by their contemning of the church, ver. 6, and disacquaintance with Christ, chap. v. 9), yet daughters of Jerusalem. Now the first objection the church hath to meet with, is by reason of such as live in the church, are bred and born there, partake of the ordinances, are in the church, though not all of it, and these the church hath to do withal. As for the daughters of Babylon, and those out of the church, they do not heed what she saith, nor understand in any measure her language, they are neither for her nor her love. Well, with these daughters she deals, and taking up their objection, first, she answers it, ver. 5; secondly, she enlarges her answer, ver. 6. The objection is, 'Thou art black;' and this is aggravated from a comparison; the manner with her affected love, thus: And is Christ indeed, as thou reportest him, the best lover, full of sweetness and holiness, a king? what an unwise woman art thou to entertain any hopes of marrying him, sith you have nothing, be poor, afflicted, filthy; in a word, black, yea, very black. This is the objection, which she answers nimbly two ways.

1. By yielding what was said: 'I am black;' that is, my estate here is imperfect, subject to sin, to affliction; not beautiful, therefore, in carnal eyes and judgments, but deformed.

2. By denying the argument, that therefore she must be despised of men, rejected of Christ as one that had nothing in her; nay, black folks may be handsome and desirable, and so saith she, I am to the eye contemptible, yet inwardly rich, desirable, and lovely, which she sheweth by two comparisons.

First, thus: It is with me as with the tents of Kedar. The Kedarenes dwelt in Arabia, they dwelt in tents covered with hair (as Solymus and Pliny speaks) (*a*), which tents were very coarse to look to, tanned, exposed to all weather, rough with the sun, and hard, and yet in those tents they had much treasure, they were full of wealth, in cattle, in spices, in gold, in precious stones. So is it with the church; though outwardly base, yet there are treasures within, and much glory, as further she shews, saying, she was like Solomon's curtains; his bed is after mentioned; and out of question all his doings were admirable.

This is her second comparison. You read what a glorious house he built, how long it was a-building. If the church therefore be like his curtains, she is very glorious, amiable, and rich. But how is she like them? Thus, as the curtains of Solomon's bed were most glorious, and yet did not lie open to every eye, it being for those especially favoured to be admitted into such a king's bedchamber, and inmost rooms, which be for the king and his spouse, so it is with the church; she is rich, though her riches be inward, and not discernible by every eye: as Ps. xlv. 13, 'The king's daughter is all glorious within; like Solomon's curtains and Kedar's tents.' As if she should say, 'I am black,' so are the tents of Kedar, and yet have treasures in them. And not to send you so far, ye daughters of Jerusalem, know that there is much treasure and glory in Solomon's palace, which every one sees not, and so in me. Thus she answers the objection, and next, ver. 6, she dwelleth upon it, and enlargeth it. But first of this. For the meaning thereof, you see what we conceive of it; we will not be prejudicial to any man's opinion (*b*). The very matter is, she contends that it is possible for her to be rich, glorious, and lovely inwardly, though not in show (because her outward blackness did expose her to censure in the eyes of most men), and this she proves by two instances, well known unto these daughters: 1, of the Arabians, who brought treasure yearly to Solomon, 2 Chron. ix. 14, which argued their riches, though they lived in sun-burnt tents; and 2, of Solomon, who was as rich within doors as without, though all saw it not. Thus you have the church's confession, and her defence; black outwardly, and inwardly for some corruption, as after this is objected. Thus much is yielded. Hence then learn we,

Point 1. The church of God and Christians, whilst they are here, *are in an imperfect state.* No Christian in this life attains to full happiness and brightness, but is attended on by those sins and sorrows that argue an imperfect estate. The church of God, and every converted Christian, must needs confess that they be black outwardly and inwardly. This we hear not only from her own mouth, in her first conversion, but after; for howsoever we conceive of these things in the first chapter and part of the second, to agree with the first age of a Christian especially, yet not only; for what is here said of her is ever true whilst here on earth, though the degree be somewhat varied. The Holy Ghost useth a fair comparison; he makes the church to be born in the night, and to travel towards the day; she is going towards perfection, as one that sets out before day; yea, she is gone so far that it draweth towards the dawning. There is a mixture of

some light and darkness together, and so it will be till we come to heaven, both for sin and sorrow, for sins and defects in soul. So, 1 Peter ii. 20, the saints have faults in this life, and are buffeted for them; there must be addition of grace to grace, 2 Peter i. 5, so Eph. i. 18. The eye of our understanding is shut until it be opened; and we have wonderful things to look after beyond the power of our present condition; for outward estate, see Prov. iv. 18, the church's path is like the shining light, 'which shineth more and more unto the perfect day;' for both she is dusky between night and day, and so will be till that full morning come. So Ps. xlix., what is the whole tenor thereof, save only a large commentary of our frailties and imperfections whilst we live here? So we find by Paul's description of the church, Eph. iv. 12, she is a house not yet fully furnished, nor beautified, but exposed to storms, and imperfect; she is a body not yet grown, like the tabernacle, an imperfect thing. This we see, Rev. ii. 3. Every church there is noted for sins, or afflictions, or both. If we conceive these churches to be types, the proof is most pregnant; if not (for I am persuaded God hath done teaching his church by types; for, as Heb. i. 2, 'In these last and latter days he speaks unto us by his Son, whom he hath made heir of all things'), yet since no church was more famous than those, who yet had blemishes and frailties a-many, it warrants here, and strengthens the point we have in hand. Hence comes the church's confession here both of sin and sorrow. Hence Paul saith, 1 Cor. xiii. 9, speaking of the church's estate, 'We know in part, and prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.' Hence 1 John i. 8, it is said, 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. The causes why God will have it so are,

Reasons. 1. First, In regard of outward infirmities, that we might be made conformable to his Son, Rom. viii. 17, and so reign with him, being first made suitable to the body. Christ was to be like us in all things, sin excepted, and to partake with us in flesh and blood, that he might destroy him that had the power of death; that is, the devil, Heb. ii. 14. And we are to partake of him and his afflictions, that so we may come to partake of the divine nature, and be all in a suit,* as servants of the same master.

2. Secondly, In respect of outward and inward infirmities, both because God's glory is seen in our infirmities, 2 Cor. xii. 7, his grace being sufficient to uphold us, and also in regard our weakness commends his strength, and our folly his wisdom.

3. Thirdly, Because he would draw us out of the earth, and have us hasten to accomplish the marriage and come away, therefore he sends us so many crosses, and so little rest in the flesh.

4. Again, Because God would have us humble, patient, and pitiful people, neither of which would be unless our state were imperfect; we would never know ourselves, our brethren, and God, unless it were so, that on both sides we saw the prints of our imperfections. The use is twofold.

Use 1. Is this so? Learn these lessons. First, *confess if we be of the church, so much.* No man is more ready to charge the church than she is to confess her infirmities. She never hideth them, she never justifieth them; she is black, she hath afflictions, she kept not her own vine, she wants knowledge, affection, discretion, love. She never denies it, but confesseth all freely from her heart; she hides not her sin, but tells what she

* That is, as elsewhere, 'wear the same dress.'—G.

is, what she hath done, that so she may give glory to the Lord God of Israel. And indeed, it maketh much for the honour of Christ, and commends his grace, that he, such a king, will set his heart and his eye upon such a deformed slut as the world deemeth her to be. It makes for the comfort of her poor children, and much stayeth them, when they shall hear the church in all ages, and in her Abraham, David, and Paul, saying, 'I am black,' I have affliction, corruption, as well as others. It makes for the silencing of all saucy daughters that will upbraid her; an ingenuous confession, stops their mouths, and puts them all to silence. It much quickens her to the use of the means, and maketh her cry, 'Shew me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest.' And to seek her comfort in Christ Jesus. Oh it doth her good to receive the sentence of death, shame, poverty, damnation, in herself, that so she may be found in Christ, arrayed with the rich robes of his righteousness. Hence her plain-hearted openness in her confession. Let us do the like, and leave it to the harlot and whore of Babylon to say herself is a queen, she is glorious, she cannot err. But let us say with the church, we are black; yea, let us see it, let us speak it with sorrow, with shame, as the saints have done, and be so affected with our estate, that it may truly humble us, and cause us to say, 'It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.' And let us so confess it in ourselves, that we pity others, and bear with them, though full of sins and miseries; so confess it, that we stir up others thereby to run, as Paul did, and use the ordinances with all diligence, to pray much, to read much, to hear, to confer, to advise, and be humble and sincere. A verbal confession of frailties, without humility, mercy, diligence, without the use of the means, is hypocrisy. If we will speak with the church, we must feel what we say, and so well understand ourselves and our estate, that we may gain humility, mercy, watchfulness by it.

Use. 2. In the second place, *thirst after heaven, nay, after the day of resurrection.* Well may it be called the day of refreshing, the day of marriage. Till then the church is parched with the sun, and not half dried, till then she is accompanied with sundry imperfections in her outside. The saints are subject to aches, shames; their bodies are vile, corruptible; though in the grave free from pain, yet not from dishonour. Imperfections within the soul there are many, conflicts, corruptions, temptations, fears, sorrows, &c. Imperfections also in company: she is not taken out of the world; she hath her dwelling in the tents of Kedar, meets with hypocrites, atheists, persecutions, devils. Imperfections for means; she seeth but in a glass, she beholds Christ but through a window; she is in prison, and speaks through it; and there are imperfections in services, repentance, faith, prayer; and imperfections in parts and members: some members be not called yet, and it grieves her; some being called are very sickly, weak, heady; the best on earth imperfect, those in heaven not perfected till we come also, Heb. xii. 23. Nay, Christ himself, as head of the body, not yet perfected in his members, and in his church, which is his fulness, as Paul speaks, Eph. i. 23. Oh then, sith nothing in the church attains its perfection till that day, sith Christ calleth, come away, that head and members may have the same glory together, sith the creatures here, and all saints cry, come; let us so well understand our estate here, and there, and the odds of both, that we may say also, come, fly, my beloved, and be like the roe, that so all the shadows may fly away; and therefore, not only pray and hasten ourselves, but others also, that so harvest may be ripe when we sow betimes.

Well, then, she yields herself to be black, but yet she is not discouraged; she will not be set down, she is comely for all her blackness, she will to Christ still, as the verse tells us. Hence learn,

Doct. 2. Though our estate be here imperfect, yet we must not be discouraged. God's children must so see their sins, and sorrow for them, as that though they be thereby sent to humiliation, yet they may retain hope of mercy. So the church does, Ps. xlv. 17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant; our heart is not turned back,' &c. So Isa. lxiii. 17, though the church was hard-hearted, yet she goes to Christ to bemoan herself: 'Oh Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return, O Lord,' &c.; yet she conceives hope. This was Samuel's counsel to the people, 'Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart,' 1 Sam. xii. 20, 21. And David likewise to his soul, Ps. xlii. 11, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou discouraged within me? yet trust in God.' So the like is Paul's practice, Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?' &c. Then he answers, 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Thus you see the point is plain; now the reasons.

Reason 1. We have a great and mighty deliverer. He loves his children in the midst of all their deformities. Like a good father, he tenders us in our weaknesses of soul and body, and as a father pities his child the more for being sick, so here he calls her for all this, 'O thou fairest amongst women,' &c.

2. Secondly, He is able to help them in all estates; his grace is still sufficient, he hath present help. What needs the child be dismayed for pain, when the Father can remove it at his pleasure?

3. Thirdly, The saints of God in all ages have gone through imperfections; they have been sick, poor, doubtful, passionate, as well as we. God hath brought them to heaven, to happiness, through all storms. Though in their life they cried, 'we are black,' we are forsaken; and why should we fear to wade through those waters where all have escaped that went before us?

4. Fourthly, Uprightness may stand with imperfection, some gold may be amongst earth; as the church shews here, beauty and deformity may stand together, some light, some darkness. Now God bids the upright hope, rejoice, says he is blessed, Ps. xxiii. 6.

5. Lastly, Because the effects of discouragement are too bad, as fretting, Ps. xlii. 11; yea, this doth not only keep out praises, but causes neglect of all ordinances, drives from God, makes one fierce, envious, uncomfortable, impotent, &c.

Use 1. This is to humble ourselves for our weakness; for, alas! how soon are we swooning and discouraged. Every slight affliction, corruption, temptation, doth dismay and put us to silence. If storms fall, and winds blow, if flesh stir, and Satan be busy, our faith trembles, and hearts are shaken; we meditate, fear and suspect ourselves; we suspect God, and shun his presence, and say in our haste 'we are forgotten;' this is our death. Oh how unworthy Christ is this carriage! How unlike the church in this place. She is charged with faults, upbraided with baseness, yet she holds on, she prayeth still. To Christ she runs; no affliction, no temptation, no corruption shall keep her from him, because nothing can keep him from her, as Rom. viii. 38 is at length shewed. Where is our

faith, strength, courage, patience? Where is the spirit of power, that we are so weak in every temptation? Verily, these faintings of spirit, these despairing questions, these violent fears, do argue much weakness. Let us be humbled for this; humbled, I say, but not discouraged; for even the church sometimes, sometimes Manoah, yea, a David, have thus failed.*

Use 2. Now learn to be courageous. Are afflictions upon thee? Be sensible of them, be humbled in them, but never shrink from thy hold of Christ or hope of mercy. Be of Paul's resolution; 'We are distressed,' saith he, 'but yet faint not.' See God at thy right hand, as David did, and therefore be not moved. See what is gained by affliction, 'the inward man grows.' See what is laid up for these light and short afflictions, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'even a far more excellent and eternal weight of glory.' Art thou censured and scorned by men? Make use of it, but not to discouragement. Remember Christ was despised, counted a worm, judged wicked, and then say with the church, 'Rejoice not against me, O my enemy, though I fall I shall rise again: When I am in darkness, the Lord he will be a light unto me,' Micah vii. 8. Art thou assaulted by Satan? Cry with Paul, and bemoan thyself; but know therewith that God's 'grace is, and shall be sufficient for thee,' 2 Cor. xii. 9; that he hath overcome, and therefore resolve, with Job, to receive from God what he will put upon thee, yea, to die at his feet, Job xiii. 15. Art thou led captive with thy corruptions? Mourn with Paul, but say withal, 'It is not I, but sin in me; I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,' Romans vii. 17, 25. It is a most worthy service to give Christ the glory of his riches in poverty, of his power in weakness, grace in sin, life in death. Then we live by faith, then we shew forth the strength of the Spirit. To this purpose, first learn to know thyself, what thou art by nature, and all men else. The want of this knowledge breeds pride, discouragement, error in judgment, mistaking, misapplication of things. Secondly, know what Christ is, how lovely, how rich, how able, how true; how willing he is to help the distressed and miserable, never adding affliction unto affliction. Thirdly, see what he hath done for others, for thyself heretofore. Now lay grace by infirmities with the church here, and when the devil upbraids thee with thy maims, look on thy cures; when he sets before thee the tempestuous dark works of the first Adam, do thou oppose, and lay before thee the quiet fruit of righteousness and peace-making reconciliation and works of Christ, the second Adam, thy surety, who hath paid thy debts and satisfied divine justice to the full.

Further, in that the church here stands upon her comeliness, notwithstanding of all her deformities and infirmities, learn we,

Doct. 3. *There is a glory and excellence in the saints of God in the midst of all their deformities and debasements.* Though they be encompassed with many miseries, yet are they glorious even in this life. Indeed their glory is like Solomon's curtains, not obvious to every eye; like Kedar's tents, or a heap of wheat in the chaff, and outwardly base, but inwardly excellent. Their life is sanctified indeed, and they live the life of grace, hence they are termed glory, Isaiah iv. 5; hence, as Ps. lxxviii. 13, after their misery, it is promised they should be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold; hence, Ps. xlv. 16, they are called princes in all lands, all glorious within, to be of excellent beauty; hence, Ps. cx. 3, their beauty is termed a holy beauty; yea, that which is said of the church of Smyrna, Rev. ii. 9, may be said of every church, 'She is poor,

* Cf. Judges xiii. and Ps. lxxi.—G.

but rich;' and that which Paul saith of the apostles may be said of all, they are poor and rich, base and honourable, dying and yet living, having nothing, and yet possessing all things, 2 Cor. iv. 8, *et seq.* And why?

Reason 1. Needs it must be so, for being converted, they obtain a new name, Rev. ii. 17; yea, they have this peculiar favour granted, as 1 John iii. 1, to be called the 'sons of God.' This is set down with a 'behold,' to admire the wonderful love of God and excellency of the saints, who are also called princes on earth, as Ps. xlv. 16.

2. Secondly, they have a new nature, being made partakers of the image of God, and so of the divine nature; as it is, 2 Pet. i. 4, 'having escaped that corruption which is in the world through lust.'

3. Thirdly, they have a new estate; Christ Jesus makes them free, as John viii. 35, and he makes them also rich, supplying all their wants with the riches of his glory: as Ps. iv. 3, the prophet says, 'But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself,' &c.

4. Lastly, they have a new kindred and guide. God is their Father, they are members of Christ: 1 Cor. xii. 13, they are 'led by the Spirit of God.' God dwelleth in them, and the Spirit of glory rests upon them even in affliction, 1 Pet. iv. 14, and filleth them with glorious faith and precious graces.

[1.] *This first discovers a wonderful blindness in us*, who can see no such matter in the saints of God. Christians shine in the world as stars in a dark night, and as far excel all others as corn weeds, chaff; yea, as far as lilies and roses do thorns and briars; and yet we cannot see it, unless we have riches, titles, fashions, wit, beauty to grace them. We see no beauty in them, we do not regard nor reverence them, we neglect, nay, despise them. Oh hearts of flesh, oh carnal eyes, that can see nothing but outward gauds and toys! How do we stick in the outward mud of this world, that serve only the world! How do we judge by the outward appearance! How carnal to have the glorious faith of Christ in respect of persons! Jude 16. How blind are we who cannot see the sunshine, and no excellency in those whom all the glorious angels serve, whom the King of glory terms 'the fairest of women!' Brethren, what shall I say to you? If your eyes be so blinded that you cannot see the church like Solomon's curtains, cannot see beauty in a Christian's face, wisdom in his language, glory in his behaviour, even in affliction; when their happiness is revealed, it will be a proof against you that you have not that anointing of God which teaches you all things, that you are but natural. Ask yourselves, therefore, the question, what men do I most admire, reverence, and who is most glorious in my eye? And if the Christian be not, you have but fleshly eyes, hearts, and affections. Strive and labour reformation.

[2.] Secondly, *This is comfort to saints now and hereafter.* Now they be glorious, but yet they are but in the way going to glory; as Prov. iv. 18, 'The path of the just is as the shining light' that waxeth more and more unto the perfect day.' Yet 'their life is hid with God in Christ.' When Christ, 'which is their life, shall appear, then shall they likewise appear in glory,' Col. iii. 3. Now they are the sons of God; but it appeareth not in this world what they shall be; and if they be now such, whilst black, what when in heaven, when Christ is made glorious in them? If thus in their pilgrimage, what at home in their country? If thus, imperfect, what in perfection? If thus, in corruption, what when this corruption shall put on incorruption? And if thus, in mortality, what when mortality shall be swallowed up of life?

Thus we have heard the church's apology for her blackness. The next verse, which I cannot now speak of as I would, contains the remainder of her answer, wherein she proceeds to shew thus much, that the church and Christians, even at the worst, are not to be despised for infirmities. This she takes for granted, as formerly proved, and then goes on to shew the causes which wrought her blackness and misery.

1. First, outwardly; *The sun had parched her*, that is, many afflictions had overtaken her; and then, in her particular, her mother's sons had crossed her; false hypocrites, erroneous, proud professors, carrying the name of brethren, had vilified and taken all occasions to put base drudgery upon her.

2. The second cause was inward; *She kept not her own vineyard*, that is, she did not husband her own soul aright; she looked not to her own work and charge; which words contain not an extenuation of her blackness, but an amplification of the causes of it rather. Thus you see the church's mind: she thinks men should rather comfort and encourage her, than despise her for her many afflictions, seeing she doth so freely confess them; and those who are in misery ought to be comforted. Not to stand upon it: hence we learn,

Doct. 4. We must not still be poring into the deformities of God's church and people, like flies on galled places, or dogs upon garbage and raw flesh. For,

Reason 1. First, This is a practice which utterly crosseth God in his commandments, who chargeth us 'not to despise the day of small things,' Zech. iv. 10.

Reason 2. Secondly, This is quite against justice; for Christians have beauty as well as blackness, graces as well as corruptions.

Reason 3. Thirdly, This neither cometh from any good, nor worketh good. It ariseth from pride, ignorance, &c., and sheweth that a man neither knows his own estate, nor God's proceedings with his people, who brings them to honour through baseness, and confounds the glory of the world with base things.

Use 1. This condemneth those Christians who have their eyes still upon the blackness of the church, who are of three sorts:

First, papists, who deck a whore, and call her Christ's spouse, and in the mean time despise the church of Christ for blackness and outward deformities.

Secondly, against such who stumble as much at our inward deformities, as these at our outward debasements, at our discipline, preaching, ministry, sacraments, calling, ordinances, as though all were antichristian. Why will not such see white with black? good with bad? We confess that in our church, as in every church visible, there is corn and tares, fish, good and bad, sometimes children, sometimes bastards, only sons by the mothers' side: we never knew it otherwise in any church.

Thirdly, This is against such as like bats can see to fly in the dark only. The prosperity of Christians they cannot see, or graces, nor comforts, nor good works, to be provoked thereby to obedience; but if any one be crossed in his profession, they speak of it; if any fall into sin, they remember him; if any suffer shipwreck, if any live less comfortably, or die less cheerfully, oh then there is work enough: who would be a Christian? How doth it make men mopish and lumpish, and bring men out of their wits? And whence is all this; but from ignorance or great hypocrisy, or malice? In love there is no such offence, as John speaks, and

therefore to these the church speaks, 'Look not upon me, because I am black, &c.

A word only of the causes of her affliction, and so I have done—which came by her mother's sons, such as live in the church. So that we see the church hath those who afflict her and persecute her even within herself. See for this point: Rebekah's sorrow and struggling within her, two nations, Gen. xxv. 22. Next, see how they use her, and why? They take her by violence, and force her to slavery, and exercise too much hardness over her; and the reason that she apprehends is, she neglects in her own business; lay these together: so we learn,

Doct. 5. Then God's children pay for it, when they do not their own work, not keeping their own standing. It is with them as soldiers and scholars, when they keep not their own places, and learn not their own lessons: they are met with on every side. And that,

Reason 1. First, because no man speeds well out of his own place, but Christians worst of all; as Prov. xxvii. 8, a thousand inconveniences befall to one's self, to his charge, when absent. God will be upon him, and leave him to himself, till he hath wound himself into woeful brakes.*

Reason 2. Secondly, Men will be upon his back, as Paul on Peter's, or else grow strange till he be humbled; but bad men they will curse him, all the hypocrites in the town will be at his heels.

Reason 3. Thirdly, The devil will be upon them, and having drawn them out of the way, will either still mislead them, or else cut their throats and steal all, or hold them, if possible he may, from returning unto God; as in the prodigal son.

Reason 4. Fourthly, Their own consciences will be upon them, and it is with them as with a child that plays truant, his heart throbs, he hath no peace: so a Christian, whether he prosper or not prospers, he hath no peace, he eats not, he sleeps not in peace. The uses briefly are two.

Use 1. Is this true? It first teacheth us to do as the church doth, to *examine ourselves when troubles come*, when the Lord sends officers to arrest us, sets dogs upon us to fetch us in. When we meet stirs and storms abroad, when wicked men bark and brawl, when they tyrannize and task, when good men look strangely on us, when God hides his face, and our consciences be not comfortable unto us, oh, then, let us ask ourselves the question, *where am I? what have I done? wherein have I been negligent?* This, this is that which God aimeth at. Therefore he makes our paths uncomfortable, to the end we should examine our vaunts; therefore he turneth loose wicked men, that we might inquire. This is that which will work us patience in all provocations, drive us to repentance, and bring us home; this will make one lay his face in the dust, and rather justify God, than charge him foolishly. Therefore let us not fret or chafe at men, their pride, malice, &c., but say, why doth living man fret? He suffers for sin: Lament. iii. 1, *et seq.*, say with the church here, 'I kept not mine own vine: and this hath hurt me.' And then howsoever God's people may sometimes smart for not keeping their vines, and performing their own duties; yet those crosses sting not, but comfort; they then ere long abound with joy, peace, increase of love and watchfulness, which are let in most an end by former negligences. God saw his people drowsy, worldly, secure, and therefore is constrained to send persecution, so that if evils be upon us, we have cause to say, 'I kept not mine own vine;' time was when I was idle all day in the vineyard, and did nothing, and yet I am too negligent.

* That is, 'thickets' = difficulties.—G.

Use 2. Secondly, Here see *what is the best way to prevent crosses.* All crosses be rods, as Christ speaks in the gospel, and scourges. Now if a child will do well, what father will whip him? If we will learn the lessons of our salvation, Christ, God will not scourge us; if we would follow the shepherd and not stray, what need dogs run at us? Why then, let us know the duties of our place and do them, and keep ourselves close to them, for all our safety, peace, comfort, lieth there. Our place is a ship on the seas. Now two ways we fail in our course. First, by out-running our callings. We grow too far over-busy, and indeed this is most incident to the church in her first beginning. She is then too nimble with others, and too busy; her zeal, as she thinks, carries her captive. Secondly, by running too slowly. This is incident to Christians of riper years. After a while they slack, cooling apace, and it is with us as with children, so eager to go to school at first, that there is no quiet, but after hardly* drawn. So it is with us. Amend, amend therefore these: turn neither to the right hand nor the left; for if thou doest, thou art like to smart for it. Then up and upon your callings as Christians, as masters, as servants, as magistrates, as husbands, as wives. Every one hath a vine to look to, look to your callings; and then whatsoever befall you, 'if you suffer not as evil doers, blessed are you,' 1 Peter iii. 14.

* That is, 'with difficulty.'—G.

NOTES.

(a) P. 96.—'They dwelt in tents, covered with hair (as Solymus and [as] Pliny speaks).' The tents of the Kedareens, a nomadic tribe of North Arabia (Gen. xxv. 13, Isa. xxi. 17), were and still are made of coarse cloth obtained from the shaggy hair of their black goats (Rosenmüller, *Orient.* iv. 939; Saalschütz, *Archäologie der Hebräer*, Erster Theil. p. 63). Cf. Guisburg among modern, and Robotham and Trapp among early, commentators *in loco*. For Sibbes's references to Pliny, see *Natural History*, lib. vi. c. 28; and for Solinus (not Solymus), c. 26; *i. e.*, Caius Julius Solinus, who has been called the 'ape of Pliny,' for the large use he makes of that writer's works. Among the many services to our early English literature by Arthur Golding, was a translation—racy and finely touched—of Solinus.

(b) P. 96.—'For the meaning, . . . we will not be prejudicial to any man's opinion.' Commentators named in above, note a, will shew the various 'opinions,'—the Puritans having much quaint fancy, and not less quaint lore. G.