

THE DISCREET PLOUGHMAN.

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NOTE.

'The Discreet Ploughman' forms No. 26 of 'The Saint's Cordials' of 1629. It was withdrawn from the other two editions. The separate title-page is given below.*—G.

* THE
DISCREET
PLOUGHMAN.

In One SERMON.

WHEREIN THE FRIVITLES VANITY, and needlesse carking and vexing Cares of Gods Children under the hand of God is reprov'd, and better Directions given them what to doe:

Informing them for the time to come, how to attaine a more speedy and easie end of their Afflictions.

Prælucendo Pereo.

VPRIGHTNES HATH BOLDNES.

IAMES 1. 4.

But let patience have her perfect worke, that ye may be perfect and intire, lacking nothing.

I A M. 4. 10.

Humble your selves in the sight of God, and he shall lift you up.

L O N D O N,
Printed in the yeare 1629.

THE DISCREET PLOUGHMAN.

Give ye ear, and hear my voice ; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow ? doth he open and break the clods of his ground ? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and the rye, in their place ? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not thrashed with a thrashing-instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin ; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread-corn is bruised ; because he will not ever be thrashing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.—ISA. XXVIII. 23-29.

THE drift of these words is to comfort God's children in afflictions ; and because in such smarting crosses, when one is sorrowful, weak, taken up and overpressed with grief, we are then unfit and incapable of instruction, the anguish of the suffering destroying our attention ; he therefore says, doubling it four times, ' Give ye ear,' ' hear my voice,' hearken ye,' and ' hear my voice ;' wherein he insinuates that the matter he is about to deliver requires attention. As though he should say, You can hearken to the world, to carnal reason, to the devil and his instruments, who lead you astray ; but if you would have sound peace and comfort, you must hearken unto God's word, because it is his voice, one who loves you, tenders* your good, and does all things well.

Then he comes to the consolation, the sum whereof is, *that none loseth by God's afflictions, but rather they are gainers, and great gainers.* This he shews by two comparisons, both taken from a husbandman, who when he hath sowed will not harrow it always, but will give every ground sufficient labouring and manuring ; who will sow seed, and every seed, and fit seed, in measure, time, and fit place. And then he shews, when God doth give this discretion to a husbandman, how much more doth he abound therein, who, John xv. 1, is called an husbandman ; yea, he is the best husbandman who knows times and seasons, when to begin and when to make an end. This is the ground, as the wise husbandman's discretion teaches him how, when, and how much to plough his ground, and when and what seed

* That is, ' cares for,'—G.

to sow ; so God is much more the greatest and wisest husbandman, who knows when and how much to afflict us ; when to begin and when to make an end ; when to sow, and how to make fruitful.

The second work of the husbandman is taken from the purging of his grain, where he shews the labourer will take and use fit instruments to cleanse it with. First, cummin, a cart-wheel is not turned about upon it ; then, secondly, the fitches shall not be thrashed with a thrashing-instrument. Thirdly, then the third he shews as having most need, shall have the wheel to go over it ; yet he shews the wheel shall not always go over it, nor break it so as to have any hurt by the pressure, for it shall lose nothing thereby but the chaff.

Now having declared thus much, then he shews, this discretion of wisdom in husbandry comes from the Lord of hosts, ' who is wonderful in counsel,' knowing with the height of deliberation and knowledge how to do all things. And then ' excellent in working,' to make all things frame to a good, sweet, seasonable, and happy end.

Before I come to the particulars, see in general he applies both comparisons to one and the same end, to evince* us of this great truth. As Pharaoh had his vision and dreams of the seven ears and seven lean kine doubled unto him, which two were but to confirm one thing that Pharaoh must be assured of ; so here he deals in drawing us the right way to find comfort.

' Give ear, and hear my voice ; hearken, and hear my speech,' &c.

Doct. 1. Hence observe, *the only way to quiet one's heart, and pacify one in all distresses, is to hearken what God says.* Therefore he goes over and over with it, ' give ear ;' ' hearken,' and ' hear my voice,' for this shall quiet your souls, and bring you much quiet and peace of mind. In afflictions we toss, turmoil, and trouble ourselves more than we need. We cry out, Oh, none were ever so vexed and crossed as we are ! and so say, Oh, I shall never get an end of this cross ! this affliction will make an end of me ! And then God comes to us to parley with us in this slumber, and hath much ado to wake us. He loves us best, and shews us this is our best way to find ease, to hear his voice.

Reasons. 1. First, Because God's word will work faith, which does purify the heart, overcome the world, and quenches the fiery darts of Satan.

2. Secondly, It will teach a man wisdom, whence and why it comes, and that struggling with God is in vain, and that in so doing we shall have the worse. The greatest hurt of our crosses comes from passion and distemper ; for if we put no more in crosses than God puts in, all should be well ; but we put in other things, our own impatience, false fears, fretting, and carnal reason, which makes this good purge of our heavenly Father's providing, be so bitter and heavy unto us. This we should by all means strive against, and make a good use of affliction, such as God would have and intends.

3. Thirdly, It will be a means to work patience in the heart. All the Scriptures are written to work patience in us ; for God would have us submit, and our proud hearts can hardly be brought to stoop. This is the end of all.

4. Fourthly, If we hearken to God, this will make us go to God and pray, and prayer will bring comfort and ease to the heart ere long ; but if we hearken to the flesh, the further we run this way, the more we plunge ourselves in misery. God, you know, bids us come to him, and says,

* That is, ' convince.'—G.

Wait a while, and all shall be well; he will come flying with deliverance when the hour is come. Thus, if a man do pray and wait, he shall be heart-whole quickly. What saith the apostle in this case? Phil. iv. 7, 'And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.' As though he should say, You think the cross causes this disquietness, carking and caring; but if you trust, wait, and pray, you shall have quietness and ease in the most boisterous afflictions.

Use. The use hereof is, to take no more such unprofitable courses for comfort and ease in afflictions, as we have done in running to broken cisterns that can hold no water. It is usual with us, when afflictions are great, and pressing down, to complain, Oh, I have great crosses, never the like; they are beyond my strength; God is against me, and these and these afflict me. But the truth is, if we look to it, we may say, My folly, my pride, my foolishness, distrust, unbelief, and our great* hearts, these be the special causes that disquiets us. So that if we would have a quiet heart in trouble, and a happy end of it, we must hearken to God. He loves us as well in trouble as out of trouble, and there is a medicine in the word against all troubles whatsoever. Then he asks,

'Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow?' &c.

Doct. 2. Hence we see all God's children must be ploughed. All the elect are compared to God's husbandry, all who must be ploughed and humbled. To this the Lord exhorts them, Hos. x. 12, 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground,' &c. God hath no heath nor brakes in his church but are or shall be ploughed; they shall at one time or other have deep furrows made in them; they shall go whither they would not; all must be taken down.

Reason. And there is great reason for it; for naturally, all the elect of God be as subject to that would cross and keep down the seed as others. They have thorns and brambles growing, weeds of all sorts, which would quickly mar them if they were not soundly ploughed. Job for this purpose says that 'man new born is like an ass's colt; nay, like a wild ass's colt,' Job xi. 12. A tame ass might perhaps be ruled, but a wild ass's colt, this is worst of all. So is man following his own reason, led by his own affections, passions, desires, and actions. We would run riot, never be tamed unless the Lord did plough us and cause us break up our fallow ground. Even God's elect are foolish, worldly, covetous, full of envy, lusts, passions, mistakings, ignorance, and the like. God's ploughing helps all, tempers the ground better, digs out and keeps down the weeds, and makes the seed to grow, which otherwise would be cropped and destroyed. Thus, howsoever we may think of ourselves, and please ourselves in a thing of nought, no corn is more apt to have weeds amongst it than our hearts, unmastered, are unfit to bear or bring forth fruits of grace. We would think a husbandman foolish and mad that would sow corn amongst grass, where, having no root, it must rot, and not grow, the ground being unploughed. So we must hold this judgment in ourselves; for unless our hearts be tamed, no good seed will grow or take root there. To this effect our Saviour speaks: John xv. 2, 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' If God be a husbandman, we shall be ploughed and pruned to make us be fruitful, lest we grow wild, and so be only fuel for condemnation.

* That is = 'proud.'—G.

The uses are,

Use 1. First, *not to envy those who are not thoroughly ploughed with afflictions*, for to admire the happiness of such, is no more than if a man should pass through a barren heath, and say this is good ground. I say no; if it were so, it should not lie unploughed. So we may fear of the state of many wicked men; unless they repent, they are not God's; were they of his husbandry they should be ploughed.

Use 2. Secondly, If we be of God's husbandry, and would be thought so indeed, then *think we not the fiery trial of our ploughing to be a strange new thing, that God should sometimes set so sore upon us and plough us to our cost.* If we would have an easier way, take the prophet's counsel, 'Plough up your fallow ground, and sow no more amongst thorns.' Oh, but some may say, I read and pray, and go to sermons. Ay, but you sow amongst thorns if thorns come up; look to this. The husbandman will plough indeed, but he will not sow amongst thorns. The church complains, Ps. cxxix. 3, 'The ploughers ploughed upon my back, and they made long their furrows.' Why did God suffer this? They were ploughed deep indeed, but had no hurt by it, but only ploughed them so as to be fit and good ground. Because in her ploughing she ploughed short, and left many balks and patches unploughed; therefore when we plough not ourselves as we should, it is a merey of God to send us many ploughers. God will plough us rather than we should be overtaken with sins. God will find other means of afflictions to plough us. If, therefore, we plough ourselves soundly, crosses when they come will not do us so much hurt. If we ourselves be not guilty of neglect this way, afflictions when they come will be nothing so weighty, or of continuance. It follows:

The first comparison.

'Doth he open and break the clods of his ground, when he hath made plain the face thereof?' &c. The sum is, as if he should say, I appeal to your consciences, if you did see a husbandman ploughing and breaking the clods of his ground, casting out rubbish and the like, would you imagine he did spoil the ground, to break it up so always, and be still digging in it? Sure no. From our confession he would have it, that no husbandman knows so well how to plough, dig, and when to make an end of ploughing and afflicting as he doth, whose infinite knowledge and skill is beyond all others' knowledge, and therefore will make an end of ploughing his children in the best time. Whereby we learn thus much,

Doct. 3. *God will make a sweet and seasonable end of afflicting his children.* He doth correct us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness: for, as it is, Ps. cxxv. 3, 'The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth his hand unto iniquity.' Miseries and afflictions never rest till they meet with wicked men; but on the righteous they come as a sojourner, which comes to tarry a while and so be gone; it shall not rest on them. And why so? Because, if God did not help us betimes, we would either murmur, or use some ill means to help ourselves. God will therefore make a good and seasonable end of the afflictions of his children.

Obj. Ay, but when will God will make an end of afflicting his servants? How shall it be known when he will make an end?

Ans. Why, as husbandmen, when the clods lie high, bring the harrow over the same, that the seed may spring through with the more ease; and when the weeds are ploughed and weeded out that would mar all, then he will make an end; and then affliction shall cease when the ground is made

smooth and apt to bear and be fruitful in due season. Whence we may observe this much,

Doct. 4. When the Lord hath made us plain, and hath fitted us with hearts to receive good seed, then is the time of rest. If a man would plough in seed-time, we would think this a foolish, unwise action. God's ploughing is seasonable to cleanse and purge us, that we may have all fit helps to enable us for his service, as it is written, Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin,' &c.

Use. Therefore, if we would have a good and a speedy end of our crosses, fears, and afflictions, if we would have rest, and God to make an end of ploughing us, we must labour to be plain and even ground, to take down the pride of our hearts and wills; all high things, and everything which exalts itself, must be cast down and laid low. Many of God's children yet are weary, and suffering, and cry out, Oh when, when shall there be an end? In this case, I say, see in what fitness thy heart is brought to attend upon the word, look in what measure it is engrafted in thy heart. When we can hear the word with joy, and the stream of our endeavours is that way, then we are near an end of our affliction; when the ground is once made plain and fit, then the hour is come.

What remains then? When he hath made plain the face of the ground, he will sow seed, and the fittest seed, and do it in measure with wisdom. Whence observe:

Doct. 5. When God hath humbled us by his word, then he will furnish and arm us with his word, and enable us with strength that way. This is a difference betwixt his teaching of godly and wicked men: the one are the better, and mend by it; the other worse and worse; for the godly, with ploughing, he doth instruct and teach them, and make them pliable, it being contrary with the wicked. Many heaths, you know, do meet with streams and floods of water, and yet are nothing the better nor more fruitful; but God's arable, the saints, they are ploughed and instructed, as the psalmist speaks: 'Blessed is the man whom thou correctest, and teachest in thy law,' &c., Ps. xciv. 12. To have the one without the other is nothing, and does no good, but when correction and teaching go together, then one sees all the good of affliction, and why God sent it upon him. It is said in the Hebrews, that, 'he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth:' he corrects them, and convinces them of that evil by his word, of that sin which brought such and such a misery upon them, and makes them acknowledge God's justice in it. Conviction is this, when I bring evident reasons unanswerable, for to prove that which I would bring another to practise and believe. Now, we must acknowledge God's goodness unto us, that gives us not the one without the other, not correction only, but his word also to instruct and teach us. Hereby we know afflictions come from God's love, when they make us in love with the word, and cleave unto it. When we see a husbandman in a field ploughing, and one in a garden digging, we hope for good corn, fine herbs and flowers ere long; so we may say, Thus doth the Lord; now he is a-ploughing and digging of my heart: it is because he means to sow good seed, the seed of eternal life therein. Now, understand thou therefore by afflictions, when God is the husbandman, and afflictions the seed, there must come a good crop of it; God will make it multiply and increase abundantly to our comfort, whatsoever the difficulties be which may seem to hinder the growth of it. The reason hereof is added in the next place.

‘For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him.’ Whence, in brief, learn we thus much :

Doct. 6. Skill in husbandry is the gift of God, wisdom must come from him. ‘Every good gift, and every perfect gift,’ says James, ‘is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning,’ James i. 17. So, in other deep things, wherein we have ability to discourse of, know, and practise, let us give God the praise. Usually we are prone to sacrifice to our own nets, to magnify nature in our actions which we do wisely ; but, know we, all is of God. If we did believe this, we would never be proud of our skill, and wit, and whatsoever gifts, but labour rather to use it to God’s glory, and the good of others. Now comes

The second comparison.

‘For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin,’ &c. Hence see,

Doct. 7. All God’s grain needs threshing and ploughing; and as they need it, so they shall have it. There is no husbandman but he sends his corn to the mill ; wheat, or barley, and all sorts of grain must be purged and winnowed, ere it be useful and serviceable unto us. And whereas he speaks of divers grains, some more useful and excellent than others, this shews that some be of more excellent degree in the church than others. But the sum is, that all the best corn hath chaff, and all shall and must be purged, which shall ever be of use to God’s service, and the good of others, as Zech. xiii. 9. All God’s third must be purged and passed through the fire. As the best gold and silver hath dross in it, which must be purged and refined, so the best Christians must be melted, in a manner, and tried ; but he shews they shall lose nothing by afflictions but the dross and chaff, which shall be purged out, during which trial as he brings them into the fire, so he will be with them in it, and bring them through it in safety. Again,

It is said, ‘Bread corn is bruised, because he will not ever be threshing it.’ This shews,

Doct. 8. The best grain shall have the sorest trial, and hardest pressure. So God proportions answerable crosses to our strength, and no further. The rest have not such manner of usage. The fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, but are beaten with a staff ; neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin, but beaten with a rod ; but the wheat must have the wheel go on it. The meaning is an allusion unto that manner of the ancient Jews in treading their wheat, as appears by that precept, ‘Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox or the ass that treadeth down thy corn,’ Deut. xxv. 4, for then the oxen, drawing a wheel over the wheat, did so bruise it, but not break it. So the best Christians and patriarchs have been visited with sore and hard trials. Jacob, even after the blessing, how grievous crosses and afflictions endured he ! how was he tossed and tumbled up and down ! Alas, saith the prophet, speaking of a great calamity, ‘it is a time of great trouble, there is none like it : it is like the time of Jacob’s trouble ; yet he shall be delivered,’ Jer. xxx. 7. And Abraham, the friend of God, had many, and sore afflictions. The prophets also, you know how they had all their several crosses in life, many in life and death. Jeremiah complains of his persecutors, which were many. Holy David, a man of sorrows all his lifetime, how was he vexed with variety of crosses, one after another ! What shall I say of Job, the mirror of patience, and his many sorrows ? And the apostles, were they not the

chiefest men next unto Christ? and yet all destinate to sore and great afflictions and trials, so that the nearer they were unto him, the greater were their afflictions.

Reason. And that because God thereby doth humble us and make us heavenly-minded, and keeps us low, for if God did not thus put water amongst our wine, and now and then give us vinegar and wormwood to drink, we would have been proud, and lifted up above measure: as we read of Paul, he was buffeted, and had a prick in the flesh to keep him under, 2 Cor. xii. 7. For, as the main posts and beams of a house are laid forth a long time ere they be used, endure many winds, storms, and tempests, lest, being unseasoned, they should warp, bear no weight, and shrink, marring the building, so God's warriors, the main posts of his spiritual building, if not seasoned with winds and tempests of afflictions, they would grow to ease and pomp, to abound in vanity. Therefore, that they may bear weight, and not warp or shrink, but hold out, Paul, a chosen vessel, what shall be told him? Why, this, 'I will tell him what he shall suffer for my name's sake,' saith our Lord, Acts ix. 16.

Use. The use hereof, briefly, is thus much, *to reform our judgments, to be comforted, not to be dismayed, nor condemn ourselves or others because of great afflictions.* The afflictions of wicked men make them more proud; but what afflictions bring out more prayers, and drive us nearer to God, these are happy afflictions. 'It is good for me,' saith David, 'that I have been afflicted, for thereby I have learned thy law,' Ps. cxix. 71. When we are come thus far, then we shall be no more bruised. He knows how to deliver his own out of temptation, and how to moderate the cross when they have been humbled, and make a speedy and a seasonable end, even of great crosses. As a wise husbandman knows when to stay the wheel of his cart, when the wheat is, and when it is not, enough bruised; as he is careful of the treading and bruising, so is he also of rest and ease, the work being done; much more so is the Lord careful of his spiritual husbandry, not to overdo, but to give his children sufficient ploughing, in measure, and not beyond measure. Oh, but some for all this cry out, Oh, I have been long afflicted, things are worse and worse, I see no hope of any end; the more I pray, all is one, no deliverance comes, I grow more impatient, not able to hold out. Sure, if this cross continue thus and thus, it will make an end of me. Oh the foolishness of flesh and blood! What is the matter? Knowest thou in whose hands thou art? Look about thee, unto the experience and confession of all the saints, and unto which of them canst thou turn thee, who have not been the better by their afflictions, and come forth as the gold, as Job assured himself he should before his delivery, Job xxiii. 10. Look upon them, and see what end the Lord made. This is as much as for thee to say, the Lord is an ill husbandman; he can, indeed, tread his corn, but he knows not when it is enough bruised, or he is careless of it, indifferent whether it be broken or spoiled, or what come of it. Oh take heed, know thou, that thy God, who gives the husbandmen all their discretion, much more doth he know the best time and fittest for thy deliverance. Which is now the next point to speak of.

'Bread corn is bruised, because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheels of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen.' The point is this,

Doct. 9. God almighty knows best, and he appoints what shall be the means, time, and measure of the trials of his children. He knows what is the fittest instrument to purge his grain with. The husbandman, he knows

the fittest instruments to purge his corn with: 'The fitches are beaten with a staff, and the cummin with a rod, the wheel going over the wheat;' much more God will have the fittest rod, to do all in love, and for our good. Thus he corrects all he loves. I note this so much the more, because, in a great cross we are ready to fly out, and say, Oh, if it had been any cross, any trouble but this, I could have borne it, but oh, this, this, I know not how to bear it. Why, what's the matter? Know, none was so good or fit for thee as this. Might the patient appoint the potion or plaster to be applied and taken, it is like he might perish, or the wound rot; he would endure no corrosive to eat out the proud* and dead flesh, nor anything to make him sick, and purge out his bad humours. So, if we might have what instrument or cross we list to appoint, our corruptions would never be mastered and cured. If a child should see his father use the wheel to bruise and fit the wheat for purging and winnowing, and should come and say, Father, why do you use this instrument? this were better; would not we judge such a one to be a foolish, rash child, and that a frivolous, idle question? Surely so is the case with us, when we cry out, Oh, were it any other instrument, or any other cross but this, I could bear it. No; thou deceivest thyself; we cannot, without him, bear the least, and supported by his strength, we shall be able to bear the greatest. Job had many and strong crosses, and many creatures against him,—the Sabceans, Chaldeans, wind, and fire from heaven,—yet he would not do them that credit, as to think or say, it was the Sabceans or Chaldeans that destroyed his substance, but this, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh, blessed be the name of the Lord,' Job i. 21.

Use. The use hereof is, Since the Lord himself appoints the instrument, time, measure, and ending of our afflictions, *therefore never fear, we shall not be overpressed or overborne by them*, as Isa. xxvii. 8, 'In measure he will contend with us, he stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind'; and Job xxxiv 23, it is said, 'He will not lay upon man more than right, that he should enter into judgment with God'; and the apostle says, 1 Peter i. 6, that 'these afflictions are but for a season (if need be), otherwise we should not be in heaviness through manifold temptations.' Therefore, always think and be persuaded of this, that his instrument is the best. Every one shall be beaten with the fittest rod, and not too long nor too much. He who is able to make a good and a holy use of a former affliction, having his ground made plain and fit for good seed, he shall have the cross mitigated or removed, with a comfortable issue of all his troubles.

But how shall all this be made good? What assurance may we have of this discreet and seasonable ploughing, in time, measure, and continuance, we having so many enemies without us, and corruptions within us? 'This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.' From hence we observe,

Doct. 10. *God, in the chastisements, trials, and afflictions of his elect, hath wonderful wisdom and power beyond our understanding.* He knows not only which is the best way to lead us to heaven, but also he is excellent in working, to bring his counsel to pass. See it in examples. As in Joseph, appointed to be the greatest save Pharaoh in all Egypt. First, he is sold for a slave. Secondly, accused falsely by his mistress; so cast into prison, that for a long time, as it is Ps. cv. 18, 'the iron entered in his feet, until the Lord's time was come.' What meant God thus to suffer an innocent man to be wronged and disgraced? He was 'wonderful in counsel' all

* That is, 'inflamed'—G.

this while. One might think at first that counsel was darkened without knowledge ; but, indeed, this affliction was the best means for him, as upon stairs, to climb up to his preferment. Besides all this, while in the prison, God so tamed him that he bare all patiently. He could not have come to this honour, nor borne it as became him, unless the Lord had first thus ploughed him. So David, after he was anointed king, in a state of honour, and all pomp and pleasure, how was he vexed and ploughed with many crosses ? In all likelihood he lived a much better and quieter life when he was a shepherd. What means was this to raise him, to be so afflicted ere he came to it ? He was humbled and acquainted with God by these trials, which drove him to prayer, to believe, trust, and wait upon God ; and then, all these were helps to fit and enable him for his kingdom. So at Ziklag, his wives and all his goods were taken away ; the flesh had a bout,* he wept till he could weep no more ; yet then was God excellent in working ; Saul was overthrown within a while ; and the Amalekites, having much goods together, he asked counsel of God, being but four hundred men, and overtook, overthrew them, and had a great spoil, being able to send presents and rewards to all his men. So that which was at first a strange and uncouth thing, a most grievous cross, was turned into a very great blessing. So God was wonderful in counsel, to put all their store in his possession ; secondly, he was excellent in working, his enemies had no heart to withstand him.

Use. The use is, therefore, *to be patient, because in all troubles and afflictions 'he is wonderful in counsel ;'* and all his works are beautiful in time, which we shall see when both ends of the cross shall meet ; and though we see not which way things shall be effected, yet he is infinite in wisdom. If we will but be quiet, stand still, and see his salvation, we shall see a wonderful issue, if we wait in patience.

Obj. Oh but, say some, they come, I know, from God ; but I cannot bear this cross, I see no fruit of the working thereof upon me.

Ans. I say, Yet stay a while ; as it is true his physic always works at length, so it is as true that he is not bound it shall work by and by at all times. Perhaps this is not good for thee ; yet know, that as he is 'wonderful in counsel,' so he is also 'excellent in working.' We give counsel many times, and cannot make the party follow it ; but God can, he hath power, and wisdom, and will abundantly ; he who gives the purge, can cause it work to purpose ; he who applies the plaster, can make it cure and heal, and in the best time ; therefore we must be comforted in all our troubles with these considerations.

Lastly, to conclude, where he says, 'This also comes forth from the Lord of hosts,' thereby he shews,

Doct. 11. *That nothing can stay him from working, to hinder our comfort and deliverance in due time.* Why ? Because 'he is Lord of hosts,' and all the creatures are his soldiers at command, and must do what he will, as, Isa. liv. 16, he most excellently shews, that no weapon without him shall prosper to hurt his people : 'For,' saith he, 'behold I have created the smith that bloweth the coals of the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work, and I have created the water † to destroy ;' therefore he overrules all things to work for our good, so as we shall have a seasonable, happy, and blessed end to all our afflictions. Oh, if we could believe this, how happy were it for us !—that God is the Lord of hosts, that the devil is chained up, and all the creatures, from hurting us, till he

* That is, 'round' = turn.—G.

† Qu. 'waster' ?—Ed.

arm them with his power against us ; that he is a fiery wall about us, and hath hedged us, and all that we have, about ; that he loves us, pities us, delights not in chastising and afflicting us ; that he doth it not willingly, but enforced, in a manner, for our good ; and that all the while, as the prophet Isaiah speaks, 'he waits to have mercy upon us,' Isa. xxx. 18, having a certain appointed time for our deliverance. This, I say, being believed, would help to carry our heads above water, in all the tempestuous waves of our afflictions, so as to expect and hope for the accomplishment of this divine scripture : that, as the ploughman will not plough all the day to sow, &c., no more will our all-sufficient, only wise God ; but will make a happy and comfortable end of his spiritual husbandry, in the best and fittest time, to the everlasting comfort and salvation of his children.