

‘Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord:’ Here joy begins to enter into us, there we shall enter into joy: God keeps his best wine till last. Heliogabalus bathed himself in sweet perfumed waters: What joy when the soul shall forever bathe itself in the pure and pleasant fountain of God’s love? What joy to see the orient brightness of Christ’s face, and have the kisses of those lips which drop sweet smelling myrrh? *Laetabitur sponsa in amplexibus Domini*, Aug. Oh! if a cluster of grapes here be so sweet, what will the full vintage be? How may this set us all a-longing for that place, where sorrow cannot live, and where joy cannot die.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

2 PET. iii. 18. *But grow in grace.*

FRUIT IV.

GROWTH of grace. True grace is progressive, of a spreading, growing nature. It is with grace, as with the light: First, There is the *Crepusculum*, or day-break: then it shines brighter to the full meridian. A good Christian is like the crocodile, *quandiu vivit crescit*; he hath never done growing. The faints are not only compared to stars for their light, but to trees for their growth, Isa. lxi. 3. Hof. xiv. 5. A good Christian is not like Hezekiah’s sun that went backward, nor Joshua’s sun that stood still, but it is always advancing in holiness, and increasing with the increase of God, Col. ii. 16. Now, to amplify and illustrate this?

Q. 1. *How many ways may a Christian be said to grow in grace?*

Ans. 1. He grows *vigore*, in the exercise of grace; his lamps are burning and shining: therefore we read of a lively hope, 1 Pet. i. 3. Here is the activity of grace; the church prays for the blowing of the Spirit, that her spices might flow forth, Cant. iv. 61.

2. A Christian grows *gradu*, in the degree of grace; he goes from strength to strength, Psal. lxxxiv. 7. viz. from one degree of grace, to another. A faint goes from faith to faith, Rom. i. 17. and his love abounds more and more, Phil. i. 9. Here is growing in the degree.

Q. 2. *What is the right manner of a Christian’s growth?*

Ans. 1. The right manner of growth, is to grow less in one’s own eyes, Psal. xxii. 6. ‘I am a worm, and no man.’ The sight of corruption and ignorance make a Christian grow into a

dislike of himself, he doth vanish in his own eyes. Job abhorred himself in the dust, *ch. xlii. 6.* This is good to grow out of conceit with one's self.

2. The right manner of growth, is to grow proportionably, when a Christian grows in one grace as well as another, *2 Pet. i. 5.* To grow in knowledge, but not in meekness, brotherly love, good works, this is not the right growth; a thing may swell, and not grow; a man may be swelled with knowledge, yet may have no spiritual growth: the right manner of growth is uniform, growing in one grace as well as another. 'As the beauty of the body is, when there is a symmetry of parts, not only the head grows, but the arms and breast; so spiritual growth is most beautiful, when there is a symmetry and proportion, every grace thrives.'

3. The right manner of growth is, when a Christian hath grace suitable to his several employments and occasions; when corruptions are strong, and he hath grace able to give check to them; burdens are heavy, and he hath patience able to bear them; temptations fierce, and he hath faith able to resist them: here is grace growing in the right manner.

Q. 3. *Whence is it that true grace cannot but grow?*

Ans. 1. It is proper for grace to grow; it is *semen manens*, the seed of God, *1 John iii. 9.* It is the nature of seed to grow; grace doth not lie in the heart, as a stone in the earth, but as seed in the earth, which will spring up, first the blade and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear.

2. Grace cannot but grow, from the sweetness and excellency of it; he that hath grace, is never weary of it, but still would have more; the delight he hath in it, causeth thirst; grace is the image of God, and a Christian thinks he can never be enough like God. Grace insuils peace; therefore a Christian cannot but strive to increase in grace, because, as grace grows, so peace grows.

3. Grace cannot but grow, from a believer's ingrafting into Christ; he who is a scion, ingrafted into this noble, generous stock, cannot but grow. Christ is so full of sap, and vivifical influence, that he makes all inoculated into him, grow fruitful, *Hof. xiv. 8.* 'From me is thy fruit found.'

Q. 4. *What motives or incentives are there to make us grow in grace?*

Ans. 1. Growth is the end of the ordinances. Why doth a man lay out cost on ground, manure and water it, but that it may grow? The sincere milk of the word is, that we may grow thereby, *1 Pet. ii. 2.* The table of the Lord is on purpose for our spiritual nourishment and increase of grace.

2. The growth of grace is the best evidence of the truth of it: things that have no life will not grow, a picture will not

grow, a stake in the hedge will not grow ; but a plant that hath a vegetative life grows. The growing of grace shews it to be alive in the soul.

3. Growth in grace is the beauty of a Christian. The more a child grows, the more it comes to its favour and complexion, and looks more ruddy ; so, the more a Christian grows in grace, the more he comes to his spiritual complexion, he looks fairer. Abraham's faith was beautiful when in its infancy, but at last it grew so vigorous and eminent, that God himself was in love with it, and crowned Abraham with his honour, to be the ' father of the faithful.'

4. The more we grow in grace, the more glory we bring to God : God's glory is more worth than the salvation of all men's souls. This should be our design, to raise the trophies of God's glory ; and how can we do it more, than by growing in grace ? John xv. 8. ' Hereby is my Father glorified, if ye bring forth much fruit.' Though the least drachm of grace will bring salvation to us, yet it will not bring so much glory to God, Phil. i. 11. ' Filled with the fruits of his righteousness, which are to the praise of his glory.' It commends the skill of the husbandman, when his plants grow and thrive ; it is a praise and honour to God, when we thrive in grace.

5. The more we grow in grace, the more will God love us. Is it not that we pray for ? the more growth, the more will God love us. The husbandman loves his thriving plants ; the thriving Christian is God's *Hephzibah*, or chief delight. Christ loves to see the vine flourishing, and the pomegranates budding, Cant. vi. 11. Christ accepts the truth of grace, but commends the growth of grace, Matth. viii. 10. ' I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.' Would you be as the beloved disciple that lay in Christ's bosom ? would you have much love from Christ ? labour for much growth, let faith flourish with good works, and love increase into zeal.

6. What need we have to grow in grace. There is still something lacking in our faith, 1 Thess. iii. 10. Grace is but in its infancy and minority, and we must be still adding a cubit to our spiritual stature ; the apostles said, ' Lord, increase our faith,' Luke xvii. 5. Grace is but weak, 2 Sam. iii. 39. ' I am this day weak, though anointed king.' So, though we are anointed with grace, yet we are but weak, and had need arrive at further degrees of sanctity.

7. The growth of grace will hinder the growth of corruption. The more health grows, the more the distempers of the body abate ; so it is in spirituals ; the more humility grows, the more the swelling of pride is assuaged ; the more purity of heart grows, the more the fire of lust is abated. The growth of flowers in the garden doth not hinder the growing of weeds ; but the

growing of this flower of grace hinders the sprouting of corruption. As some plants have an antipathy, and will not thrive if they grow near together, as the vine and the bay-tree; so, where grace grows, sin will not thrive so fast.

8. We cannot grow too much in grace; there is no *nimum*, no excess there. The body may grow too great, as in the droply; but faith cannot grow too great, 2 Thess. i. 3. 'Your faith groweth exceedingly;' here was exceeding, yet not excess. As a man cannot have too much health, so not too much grace. Grace is the beauty of holiness, Psal. cx. 3. We cannot have too much spiritual beauty; it will be the only trouble at death, that we have grown no more in grace.

9. Such as do not grow in grace, decay in grace: *Non progredi in via est regredi*, Bern. There is no standing at a stay in religion, either we go forward or backward: if faith doth not grow, unbelief will; if heavenly mindedness doth not grow, covetousness will. A man that doth not increase his stock, diminisheth it; if you do not improve your stock of grace, your stock will decay. The angels on Jacob's ladder were either ascending or descending; if you do not ascend in religion, you descend.

10. The more we grow in grace, the more we shall flourish in glory. Though every vessel of glory shall be full, yet some vessels hold more: he whose pound gained ten, was made ruler over ten cities, Luke xix. 17. Such as do not grow much, though they do not lose their glory, yet they lessen their glory. If any shall follow the Lamb in whiter and larger robes of glory than others, they shall be such as have none most in grace here.

Uſe. Lament we may the want of growth: religion in many is grown only into a form and profession; this is to grow in leaves, not in fruit; many Christians are like a body in an atrophy, which doth not thrive; they are not nourished by the sermons they hear: like the angels who assumed bodies, they did eat, but did not grow. It is very suspicious where there is no growth, there wants a vital principle. Some instead of growing better, grow worse; they grow more earthly, more profane, 2 Tim. iii. 13. Evil men *proficient in pejus*, shall wax worse and worse. Many grow hell-ward, they grow past shame, Eph. ii. 3, 5. they are like some watered stults, which grow more rotten.

Q. 5. *How shall we know whether we grow in grace?*

A. For the deciding of this question, I shall, *First*, Shew the signs of our not growing; *Secondly*, Of our growing.

1st, The signs of our not growing in grace, but rather falling into a spiritual consumption.

Sign 1. When we have lost our spiritual appetite. A con-

sumptive person hath not that stomach to his meat as formerly. Perhaps, Christian, thou canst remember the time when thou didst hunger and thirst after righteousness, thou didst come to the ordinances with such a stomach as to a feast: but now it is otherwise, Christ is not so prized, nor his ordinances so loved: a sad presage, grace is on the declining hand; thou art in a deep consumption. A sign David was near his grave, when he covered him with clothes, and got no heat, 1 Kings i. 1. So, when a person is plied with hot clothes, I mean ordinances, yet he hath no heat of affection to spiritual things; this is a sign he is declining in grace.

Sign 2. When we grow more worldly. Perhaps once we were mounted into higher orbs, we did set our hearts on things above, and speak the language of Canaan; but now our minds are taken off heaven, we dig our comfort out of these lower mines, and with Satan compass the earth: a sign we are going down the hill apace, and our grace is in a consumption. It is observable, when nature decays, and people are near dying, they grow more sloping; and truly, when men's hearts grow more sloping to the earth, and they can hardly lift up themselves to an heavenly thought, if grace be not dead, yet it is ready to die, Rev. iii. 2.

Sign 3. When we are less troubled about sin. Time was when the least sin did grieve us, (as the least hair makes the eye weep) but now we can digest sin without remorse. Time was when a Christian was troubled if he neglected closet-prayer; now he can omit family-prayer. Time was when vain thoughts did trouble him: now he is not troubled for loose practices. Here is a sad declension in religion; and truly grace is so far from growing, that we can hardly perceive its pulse to beat.

Sdly, The signs of our growing in grace.

1. The first sign of our growing is, when we are got beyond our former measures of grace: a sign a child thrives, when he hath outgrown his clothes, his clothes are too little for him. That knowledge which would serve us before, will not serve us now; we have a deeper insight into religion, our light is clearer, our spark of love is increased into a flame; there is a sign of growth. That competency of grace we once had, is too scanty for us; we have outgrown ourselves.

2. When we are more firmly rooted in religion, Col. ii. 7. 'Rooted in him, and established:' the spreading of the root shews the growth of the tree. When we are so strongly fastened on Christ, that we cannot be blown down with the breath of heretics, a blessed sign of growth. Athanasius was called *Adamus ecclesie*, an adamant that could not be removed from the love of the truth.

3. The third sign of growth; When we have a more spiritual

frame of heart. *1st*, We are more spiritual in our principles: we oppose sin out of love to God, and as it strikes at his holiness. *2dly*, We are more spiritual in our affections: we grieve for the first rising of corruption, for the bubbling up of vain thoughts, the spring that runs under ground. We mourn not only for the penalty of sin, but the pollution. It is not only a coal that burns, but blacks. *3dly*, We are spiritual in the performance of duty; we are more serious, reverent, fervent; we have more life in prayer, we put fire to the sacrifice, Rom. xii. 'Fervent in spirit.' We serve God with more love, which ripens and mellows our duty, and makes it come off with a better relish.

4. The fourth sign of growth; When grace gets ground by opposition. The fire, by an antiperistasis, burns hottest in the coldest season. Peter's courage increased by the opposition of the high-priest and the rulers, Acts iv. 8, 11. The martyrs' zeal was increased by persecution. Here was grace of the first magnitude.

Q. 6. What shall we do to grow in grace?

Ans. 1. Take heed of that which will hinder growth, the love of any sin: the body may as well thrive in a fever, as grace can where any sin is cherished.

2. Use all means for growth in grace. *1st*, 'Exercise yourselves to godliness,' 1 Tim. iv. 7. The body grows stronger by exercise. Trading of money makes men grow rich; the more we trade our faith in the promises, the richer in faith we grow. *2dly*, If you would be growing Christians, be humble Christians. It is observed in some countries (as in France) the best and largest grapes which they make their wine of, grow on the lower sort of vines; the humble saints grow most in grace, 1 Pet. v. 5. 'God giveth grace to the humble.' *3dly*, Pray to God for spiritual growth. Some pray that they may grow in gifts. It is better to grow in grace than gifts: gifts are for ornament, grace is for nourishment; to edify others, to save ourselves. Some pray that they may grow rich; but a fruitful heart is better than a full purse. Pray that God would make you grow in grace, though it be by affliction, Heb. xii. 10. The vine grows by pruning. God's pruning-knife is to make us grow more in grace.

Q. 7. How may we comfort such as complain they do not grow in grace?

Ans. They may mistake; they may grow, when they think they do not, Prov. xiii. 7. 'There is that maketh himself poor, yet he is rich.' The sight Christians have of their defects in grace, and their thirst after greater measures of grace, makes them think they do not grow when they do. He who covets a great estate, because he hath not so much as he desires, there-

fore he thinks himself to be poor. Indeed Christians should seek after the grace they want, but they must not therefore overlook the grace they have. Let Christians be thankful for the least growth; if you do not grow so much in assurance, bless God if you grow in sincerity; if you do not grow so much in knowledge, bless God if you grow in humility. If a tree grows in the root, it is a true growth; if you grow in the root-grace of humility, it is as needful for you as any other growth.

OF PERSEVERANCE.

1 PET. i. 5. *Who are kept by the Power of God, through Faith unto Salvation.*

THE fifth and last fruit of sanctification, is perseverance in grace. The heavenly inheritance is kept for the saints, 1 Pet. i. 4. and they are kept to the inheritance; in my text, ‘Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.’ The apostle asserts a saint’s stability and permanency in grace. The saint’s perseverance is much opposed by Papists and Arminians; but it is not the less true, because it is opposed. A Christian’s main comfort depends upon this doctrine of perseverance: take away this, and you much prejudice religion, and cut the sinews of all cheerful endeavours. Before I come to the full handling and discussing this great point, let me first clear the sense of it, which I shall do by way of concession or grant.

When I say, believers do persevere: *1st*, I grant, that such as are so only in profession, may fall away, 2 Tim. iv. 10. ‘Demas hath forsaken us.’ Blazing comets soon evaporate. A building on sand will fall, Matth. vii. 26. ‘Seeming grace may be lost.’ No wonder to see a bough fall from a tree that is only tied on. Hypocrites are only tied on Christ by an external profession, they are not ingrafted. Who ever thought artificial motions would hold long? the hypocrites’ motion is only artificial, not vital. All blossoms do not ripen into fruit.

2dly, I grant, that, if believers were left to stand upon their own legs, they might fall finally. Some of the angels, who were stars full of light and glory, yet did actually lose their grace; and if those pure angels fell from grace, much more would the godly, who have so much sin to betray them, if they were not upheld by a superior power.

3dly, I grant, true believers, tho’ they do not fall away actually, and lose all their grace, yet their grace may fail in the degree, and they may make a great breach upon their sanctification. Grace may be *meritura, non mortua*; dying, but not