

humble Adam he useth this expression, 'Out of the dust wast thou taken,' Gen. iii. 16. Why art thou proud O dust and ashes? Thou art made out of coarse metal; *Cum sis humi, limus, cur non humilimus?* Ber. David saith, 'I was curiously wrought,' Pl. cxxxix. Thy being curiously wrought, may make thee thankful; but being made of the dust, may keep thee humble. If thou hast beauty, it is but well-coloured earth. Thy body is but air and dust mingled together, and this dust will drop into the dust. When the Lord had said of the judges, they were gods, Plal. lxxxii. 6. Lest they should grow proud, he tells them, they were dying gods, ver. 7. 'Ye shall die like men.'

4. Did God create our souls after his image, but we lost it? let us never leave it till we are restored to God's image again. We have now got the devil's image in pride, malice, envy, let us get God's image restored, which consists in knowledge and righteousness, Col. iii. 10. Grace is our best beauty, it makes us like God and angels: as the sun is to the world, so is holiness to the soul. Let us go to God to repair his image in us: Lord! thou hast once made me, make me anew, sin hath defaced thy image in me, O draw it again by the pencil of the Holy Ghost.



## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

### Q. XI. *WHAT are God's works of providence?*

*Ans.* God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

The work of God's providence, John v. 27. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' The great God hath rested from the works of creation, he doth not create any new species of things, Gen. i. 7. He rested from all his works: and therefore this scripture must needs be meant of God's works of providence, 'My Father worketh, and I work.' Plal. ciii. 19. 'His kingdom ruleth over all;' *i. e.* His providential kingdom. Now, for the clearing of this point, I shall,

1. Shew you that there is a providence. 2. What that providence is. 3. Lay down some maxims or propositions concerning the providence of God.

*1<sup>st</sup>*, That there is a providence: there is no such a thing as blind fate, but there is a providence that guides and governs in the world, Prov. xvi. 33. 'This lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.'

*2<sup>dly</sup>*, What this providence is? I answer, Providence is God's ordering all issues and events of things, after the counsel of his

will, to his own glory : 1. I call providence God's ordering of things, to distinguish it from his decrees : God's decree ordains things that shall fall out, God's providence ordereth them.

1. I call providence the ordering of things after the counsel of his own will.

3. God ordereth all events of things after the counsel of his will, to his own glory ; the glory of God being the ultimate end of all God's actings, and the centre where all the lines of providence do meet. The providence of God is *Regina mundi*, the queen and governess of the world : it is the eye that sees, and the hand that turns all the wheels in the universe. God is not like an artificer that builds a house, and then leaves it, and is gone ; but like a pilot, that does with a great deal of care, steer on the ship of the whole creation.

*3dly*, Positions about God's providence.

1. God's providence reaches to all places, persons and occurrences : 1. To all places, Jer. xxiii. 23. ' Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off ? ' The diocese where providence visits is very large ; it reaches to heaven, earth, and sea, Psal. cvii. 23, 24. ' They that go down to the sea, see the wonders of God in the deep. ' Now that the sea, which is higher than the earth, should not drown the earth, is a wonder of providence : and the prophet Jonah, he saw the wonders of God in the deep, when the very fish which did devour him and swallow him, did bring him safe to shore. 2. God's providence reaches to all persons, especially the persons of the godly, they are in a special manner taken notice of ; God takes care of every saint in particular, as if he had none else to take care for, 1 Pet. v. 7. ' He careth for you, ' *i. e.* Elect in a special manner. Psal. xxxiii. 18, 19. ' The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him ; to preserve them from death, and to keep them alive in famine. ' God, by his providential care, shields off dangers from his people, he sets a life-guard of angels about them, Psal. xxxiv. 7. God's providence keeps the very bones of the saints, Psal. xxxiv. 10. In bottles their tears, Psal. lvi. 8. It strengthens the saints in their weaknesses, Heb. xi. 34. It supplies all their wants out of its alm-basket, Psal. xxiii. 5. Thus providence doth wonderfully supply the wants of the elect. When the Protestants in Rochelle were besieged by the French king, God, by his providence, sent in a great number of small fishes that fed them, such as were never seen before in that haven. So the raven, that unnatural creature (that will hardly feed its own young, yet) providentially brought sustenance to the prophet Elijah, 1 Kings xvii. 6. The virgin Mary, though by bearing and bringing forth the Messiah, she helped to make the world rich, yet she herself was very poor ; and now, being warned of the angel to go into Egypt, Matth. ii. 13. the virgin had scarce

enough to bear her charges thither : see now how God provides for her before-hand ; he, by his providence, sends the wise men from the east, and they bring costly gifts, gold, myrrh, and frankincense, and present these to Christ : and now the virgin had enough to defray her charges into Egypt. God's children sometimes scarce know how they are fed, and yet providence feeds them, Psa. xxxvii. 3. ' Verily thou shalt be fed.' If God will give his people a kingdom when they die, he will not deny them daily bread while they live. 3. God's providence reaches to all affairs and occurrences in the world ; there is nothing that stirs in the world, but God hath, by his providence, the over-ruling of it. The raising of a man to honour, Psa. lxxv. 7. ' He puts down one, and raises up another.' Success and victory in battle is the result of providence : Saul had the victory, but God wrought the salvation, 1 Sam. xi. 13. That among all virgins that were brought before the king, that Esther should find favour in the eyes of the king, was not without God's special providence ; for, by this means, the Lord saved the Jews alive that were destinated to destruction. Providence reaches to the least of things, to the birds and pismires ; providence feeds the young raven, when the dam forsakes it, and will give it no food, Psa. cxlvii. 9. Providence reaches to the very hairs of our head, Mat. x. 30. ' The hairs of your head are all numbered ;' and surely if providence reaches to our hairs, then much more to our souls. And thus you have seen, that God's providence reaches to all places, to all persons, to all occurrences and affairs. Now there are two objections against this doctrine.

*Obj. 1. But some may say, There are many things done in the world which are excentrical, they are very disorderly and irregular ; and surely God's providence doth not reach these things.*

*Ans.* Yes, these things that seem to us irregular, God makes use of to his own glory. For instance : suppose you were in a smith's shop, and there should see several sorts of tools, some crooked, some bowed, others hooked, - would you condemn all these things for nought, because they do not look handsome ? the smith makes use of them all for the doing of his work. Thus it is with the providences of God, they seem to us to be very crooked and strange, yet they all carry on God's work. I shall clear this to you in two particular cases :

1st, God's people are low ; why, this seems to be very much out of order, that these that are best, should be in the lowest condition : but there is much wisdom to be seen in this providence, as appears thus ; 1. Perhaps the hearts of the godly were lifted up with riches, or with success : now God comes with an humbling providence to afflict them and fleece them ; better is the loss that makes them humble, than the success that makes them

proud. Again, 2. If the godly were not sometimes afflicted, and suffered an eclipse in their outward comforts, how could their graces be seen, their faith and patience? If it were always sunshine, we should see no stars; if we should have always prosperity, it would be hard to see the actions of men's faith. Thus you see God's providences are wise and regular, though to us they seem very strange and crooked.

2dly, Here's another case, the wicked flourish; this seems to be very much out of order; ay, but God, in his providence, sees good sometimes that the worst of men should be exalted; they may do some work to God, though against their will, Isa. x. 7. God will be in no man's debt. God makes use of the wicked sometimes to protect and shield his church: he makes use of them to refine and purify his people, Hab. i. 12. 'Thou hast ordained them for correction.' As if the prophet had said, thou hast ordained the wicked to correct thy children. And indeed, as Austin saith well, "We are beholden to wicked men, who against their wills do us good." As the corn is beholden to the flail to thresh off its husks, or as the iron is beholden to the file to brighten it, so the godly are beholden to the wicked, though it be against their will, to brighten and refine their graces. Now, then if the wicked do God's own work, though against their will, God will not let them be losers by it; he will raise them in the world, exalt them, and wring out the waters of a full cup to them. Thus you see these providences are wise and regular, which to us seem strange and crooked.

Object. 2. *But, may some say, If God hath a hand in ordering all things that fall out, why then he hath a hand in the sins of men.*

I answer, no, by no means, he hath no hand in any man's sin. God cannot go contrary to his own nature, he cannot do any unholy action, no more than the sun can be said to be darkened. Here you must take heed of two things; as you must take heed of making God ignorant of men's sins, so you must take heed of making God to have a hand in men's sins: Is it a thing likely, that God is the author of sin, that is an avenger of it? Is it a likely thing that God should make a law against sin, and then have a hand in breaking his own law: is that likely? and therefore to answer the objection, God in his providence doth permit men's sins, Acts xiv. 16. 'He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.' God permitted their sin, and he would never permit their sin, if he could not bring good out of it; as the apothecary can make a treacle of poison. Had not sin been at all permitted, God's justice in punishing sin, and his mercy in pardoning sin, had never been so well known. The Lord is pleased to permit it, but he had no hand in sin.

**Object.** *But is it not said, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart? Here's more than God's bare permitting of sin.*

*Ans.* God doth not infuse evil into men, only he withdraws the influence of his graces, and then the heart hardens of itself; even as the light being withdrawn, darkness presently follows in the air: but it were absurd to say, that therefore the light darkens the air; and therefore you will observe, that Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart, *Exod. viii. 15.* God is the cause of no man's sin; it is true God hath a hand in the action where sin is, but no hand in the sin of the action. He that plays upon a jarring instrument, but the jarring is from itself: so it is here, the actions of men, so far as they are natural, are from God; but so far as they are sinful, they are from men themselves, and God has no hand at all in them. And so much for the first position, that God's providence reaches to all places, to all persons, and to all occurrences.

2. A second position is this, there are providences that are casual and accidental to us that are pre-determined by the Lord: the falling of a tye upon one's head, the breaking out of a fire to us, is casual, but it is ordered by a providence of God. You have a clear instance of this, *1 Kings xxii. 34.* 'A certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the King of Israel between the joints of the harness.' This accident was casual as to the man that drew the bow; but it was divinely ordered by the providence of God; God's providence directed the arrow to hit the mark. Things that seem to fall out casual, and by chance, they are the issues of God's decrees, and the interpretation of his will.

3. God's providence is greatly to be observed, but we are not to make it the rule of our actions, *Psal. cvii. 43.* 'Who is wise will observe these things.' It is good to observe providence, but we must not make it our rule to walk by; providence is a Christian's diurnal, but not his bible. Sometimes a bad cause prevails and gets ground; it is not to be liked because it doth prevail: we must not think the better of what is sinful, because it is successful; here is no rule for our actions to be directed by.

4. Divine providence is irresistible, there is no standing in the way of God's providence to hinder it: when God's time was come for Joseph's release, the prison could hold him no longer. 'The king sent and loosed him,' *Psal. cv. 20.* When God would indulge the Jews with liberty in their religion, Cyrus by a providence, puts forth a proclamation to encourage the Jews to go and build their temple at Jerusalem, and worship God, *Ezra i. 2, 3.* If God will shield and protect Jeremiah's person in captivity, the very king of Babylon shall nurse up the prophet, give charge concerning him that he want nothing, *Jer. xxxix. 11, 12.*

5. God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises. God promised David to give him the crown, to make him king; but providence runs contrary to his promise: David was pursued by Saul, was in danger of his life; but all this while it was David's duty to trust God. Pray observe, the Lord doth oftentimes by cross providence, bring to pass his promise. God promised Paul the lives of all that were with him in the ship; but now the providence of God seems to run quite contrary to his promise, the winds blew, the ship splits and breaks in pieces; and thus God fulfilled his promise; upon the broken pieces of the ship, they all came safe to shore. Trust God when providences seem to run quite contrary to promises.

6. The providences of God are chequer-work, they are intermingled; in the life to come, there shall be no more mixture; in hell there is nothing but bitter; in heaven there is nothing but sweet; but in this life the providences of God are mixed, there is something of the sweet in them, and something of the bitter. Providences are just like Israel's pillar of cloud, that conducted them in their march; it was dark on one side, and light on the other; so the providences of God are a dark part and a light part. In the ark there was laid up the rod and manna, so are God's providences to his children; there is something of the rod, and something of the manna; so that we may say with David, 'I will sing of mercy and judgment.' Joseph was in prison, there was the dark side of the cloud; but God was with Joseph, there was the light side of the cloud. Acher's shoes were of brass, but his feet were dipt in oil, Deut. xxxiii. 24. So affliction is the shoe of brass that pinches; ay, but there is mercy mingled with the affliction, there's the foot dipt in oil.

7. The very same action, as it comes from God's providence, may be good, which, as it comes from men, may be evil. For instance, Joseph being sold into Egypt, as he was sold by his brethren, it was evil, very wicked, for it was the fruit of their envy; but as it was an act of God's providence, so it was good, for by this means Jacob and all his family were preserved alive in Egypt. Another instance is in Shimei's cursing David: now, as Shimei cursed David, it was wicked and sinful, for it was the fruit of his malice; but as his cursing was ordered by God's providence, so it was an act of God's justice to punish David, and to humble him for his adultery and murder. The crucifying of Christ, as it came from the Jews, is an act of hatred and malice to Christ: so Judas' betraying him was an act of covetousness; but as it was an act of God's providence, so there was good in it, for, see it was an act of God's love in giving Christ to die for the world. Thus I have cleared to you

the doctrine of God's providence, in these several positions : let me now speak something by way of application.

*Use 1.* By way of exhortation in these particulars. (1.) Admire God's providence : the providence of God keeps the whole creation upon the wheels, or else it would soon be dissolved, and the very axle-tree would break in pieces : if God's providence should be withdrawn but for a while, creatures would be dissolved, and run into their first nothing. Without this wise providence of God, there would be anxiety and confusion in the whole world, just like an army when it is routed and scattered. The providence of God infuses comfort and virtue into every thing we enjoy ; our clothes would not warm us, our food would not nourish us, without the special providence of God. And doth not all this deserve your admiration of providence?

(2.) Learn quietly to submit to divine providence ; do not murmur at things that are ordered by divine wisdom. We may no more find fault with the works of providence, than we may with the works of creation : It is a sin as well to quarrel with God's providence, as to deny God's providence. If men do not act as we would have them, they shall act as God would have them. His providence is his master-wheel that turns these lesser wheels, and God will bring his glory out of all at last : *Psal. xxxix. 9.* ' I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou, Lord, didst it.' It may be, we think sometimes we could order things better if we had the government of the world in our hands : but, alas ! should we be left to our own choice, we should choose those things that are hurtful for us. David did earnestly desire the life of his child, which was the fruit of his sin ; now, had the child lived, it had been a perpetual monument of his shame. Let us be content God should rule the world, learn to acquiesce in his will, and submit to his providence : doth any affliction befall you ? Remember God sees it is that which is fit for you, or it should not come ; your clothes cannot be so fit for you, as your crosses. God's providence may sometimes be secret, but it is always wise ; though we may not be silent under God's dishonour, yet we should learn to be silent under his displeasure.

(3.) You that are Christians, believe that all God's providences shall conspire for the good at last. The providences of God are sometimes dark, and our eyes dim, and we can hardly tell what to make of them : but when we cannot unriddle providence, believe it shall work together for the good of the elect, *Rom. viii. 28.* The wheels in a watch seem to move cross one to another, but they help forward the motion of the watch, and make the larum strike : so the providences of God seem to be cross wheels ; but, for all that, they shall carry on the good of the elect. The pricking of a vein is in itself evil and hurtful ;

but as it prevents a fever, and tends to the health of the patient, so it is good : so affliction in itself is not joyous, but grievous : but the Lord turns this to the good of his saints. Poverty shall starve their sins, afflictions shall prepare them for a kingdom. Therefore, Christians, believe, that God loves us, that he will make the most cross providences to promote his glory and our good.

(4.) Let this be an antidote against immoderate fear ; for nothing comes to pass but what is ordained by God's decree, and ordered by his providence. We sometimes fear what the issue of things will be ; men grow high in their actions : let us not make things worse by our fear. Men are limited in their power, and shall not go one hair's-breadth further than God's providence will permit : he might let Sennacherib's army march towards Jerusalem, but he shall not shoot one arrow against it, Isa. xxxviii. 36. ' Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand.' When Israel was compassed in between Pharaoh and the red-sea, no question, some of their hearts did begin to tremble, and they looked upon themselves as dead men ; but providence so ordered it, that the sea was a safe passage to Israel, and a sepulchre to Pharaoh and all his host.

*Use 2.* Comfort in respect of the church of God : God's providence reacheth in a more special manner to his church, Isa. xxvii. 2. ' Sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine.' God waters this vineyard with his blessings, and watcheth over it by his providence, ' I the Lord, keep it night and day.' Such as think totally to ruin the church, must do it in a time when it is neither day nor night ; for the Lord keeps it by his providence night and day. What a miraculous conduct of providence had Israel ! God led them by a pillar of fire, gave them manna from heaven, set the rock abroach. God by his providence preserves his church in the midst of enemies ; which is as to see a spark kept alive in the ocean, or a flock of sheep among wolves. God saves his church strangely : 1. By giving unexpected mercies to his church, when she looked for nothing but ruin, Psal. cxxvi. 1. ' When the Lord turned the captivity of Sion, we were like them that dreamed.' How strangely did God raise up queen Esther to preserve alive the Jews, when Haman had got a bloody warrant signed for their execution ? 2. Strangely, by saving in that very way in which we think he will destroy : God works sometimes by contraries. He raiseth his church, by bringing it low. The blood of the martyrs hath watered the church, and made it more fruitful, Exod. i. 12. The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied : the church is like that plant Gregory Nazianzen speaks of, it lives by dying, and grows by cutting. 3. Strangely, in that he makes the enemy to do his work : when the people of Ammon and Moab, and

mount Sier came againſt Judah, God ſet the enemy one againſt another, 2 Chron. xx. 23. 'The children of Ammon and Moab ſtood up againſt them of mount Sier to ſlay them; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Sier, every one helped to deſtroy another.' In the powder-treaſon he made the traitors to be their own betrayers: God can do his work by the enemy's hand. God made the Egyptians ſend away the people of Iſrael laden with jewels, Exod. xii. 36. The church is the apple of God's eye, and the eye-lid of his providence doth daily cover and defend it.

5. Let the merciful providence of God cauſe thankfulneſs: we are kept alive by a wonderful working providence. Providence makes our clothes warm us, our meat nourish us. We are fed every day out of the alms-basket of God's providence, That we are in health; that we have an eſtate; it is not our diligence, but God's providence, Deut. viii. 18. 'Thou ſhalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that gives thee power to get wealth.' Eſpecially if we go a ſtep higher, we may ſee cauſe of thankfulneſs: that we ſhould be born and bred in a goſpel climate; that we ſhould live in ſuch a place where the Sun of righteouſneſs ſhines; this is a ſignal providence: why might we not have been born in ſuch places where Paganism prevails? That Chriſt ſhould make himſelf known to us, and touch our hearts with his Spirit, when he paſſeth by others: whence is this, but from the miraculous providence of God, which is the effect of his free grace?

*Uſe 3.* See here, that which may make us long for that time when the great mystery of God's providence ſhall be fully unfolded to us. Now we ſcarce know what to make of God's providence, therefore are ready to cenſure what we do not underſtand; but in heaven we ſhall ſee how all God's providences (ſickneſs, loſſes, ſufferings) carried on our ſalvation. Here we ſee but ſome dark pieces of God's providence, and it is impoſſible to judge of God's works by pieces; but when we come to heaven, and ſee the full body and pourtaiture of God's providence drawn out into its lively colours, it will be a glorious ſight to behold: then we ſhall ſee how all God's providences helped to fulfil his promiſes. Never a providence but we ſhall ſee had either a wonder or a mercy in it.

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## THE COVENANT OF WORKS.

Q. XII. I. Proceed to the next queſtion, *What ſpecial providence did God exerciſe towards man in the eſtate wherein he was created?*