

now thou hast chosen so low a dwelling, O be not strange to the heart that thou hast so freely chosen! O make it the daily residence of thy Spirit! Quicken it by thy grace; adorn it with thy gifts; employ it in thy love; delight it in its attendance on thee; refresh it with thy joys and the light of thy countenance; and destroy this carnality, selfishness, and unbelief: and let the world see that God will make a palace of the lowest heart, when he chooseth it for the place of his own abode."

Direct. VIII. 'When you come home review the mercy which you have received, and the duty which you have done, and the covenant you have made: and 1. Betake yourselves to God in praise and prayer, for the perfecting of his work. And 2. Take heed to your hearts that they grow not cold, and that worldly things or diverting trifles, do not blot out the sacred impressions which Christ hath made, and that they cool not quickly into their former dull and sleepy frame. 3. And see that your lives be actuated by the grace that you have here received, that even they that you converse with may perceive that you have been with God.' Especially when temptations would draw you again to sin; and when the injuries of friends or enemies would provoke you, and when you are called to testify your love to Christ, by any costly work or suffering; remember then what was so lately before your eyes, and upon your heart, and what you resolved on, and what a covenant you made with God. Yet judge not of the fruit of your receiving, so much by feeling, as by faith; for more is promised than you yet possess.

CHAPTER XXV.

Directions for Fearful, Troubled Christians that are perplexed with Doubts of their Sincerity and Justification.

HAVING directed families in the duties of their relations, and in the right worshipping of God, I shall speak something of the special duties of some Christians, who in regard of their state of soul and body, have special need of

help and counsel. As 1. The doubting, troubled Christian. 2. The declining, or backsliding Christian. 3. The poor. 4. The aged. 5. The sick. 6. And those that are about the sick and dying. Though these might seem to belong rather to the first Part^a, yet because I would have those directions lie here together, which the several sorts of persons in families most need, I have chosen to reserve them rather to this place. The special duties of the strong, the rich, and the young and healthful, I omit, because I find the book grow big, and you may gather them from what is said before, on several such subjects. And the Directions which I shall first give to doubting Christians, shall be but a few brief memorials, because I have done that work already, in my "Directions or Method for Peace of Conscience and Spiritual Comfort;" and much is here said before, in the Directions against Melancholy and Despair.

Direct. 1. 'Find out the special cause of your doubts and troubles, and bend most of your endeavours to remove that cause.' The same cure will not serve for every doubting soul, no, nor for every one that hath the very same doubts. For the causes may be various, though the doubts should be the same: and the doubts will be continued while the cause remaineth.

1. In some persons the chief cause is a timorous, weak, and passionate temper of body and mind; which in some (especially of the weaker sex) is so natural a disease, that there is no hope of a total cure; though yet we must direct and support such as we are able. These persons have so weak a head, and such powerful passions, that passion is their life; and according to passion they judge of themselves, and of all their duties. They are ordinarily very high or very low; full of joy, or sinking in despair; but usually fear is their predominant passion. And what an enemy to quietness and peace strong fear is, is easily observed in all that have it. Assuring evidence will not quiet such fearful minds, nor any reason satisfy them. The directions for these persons must be the same which I have before given against melancholy and despair. Especially that the preaching, and books, and means, which they make use of, be rather such as tend to inform the judgment, and

^a See Part i. Chap. 7. Tit. 10. Of Despair.

settle the will, and guide the life, than such as by the greatest fervency tend to awaken them to such passions or affections which they are unable to manage.

2. With others the causes of their troubles is melancholy, which I have long observed to be the commonest cause, with those godly people that remain in long and grievous doubts; where this is the cause, till it be removed, other remedies do but little: but of this I have spoken at large before.

3. In others the cause is a habit of discontent, and peevishness, and impatency; because of some wants or crosses in the world: because they have not what they would have, their minds grow ulcerated, like a body that is sick or sore, that carrieth about with them the pain and smart; and they are still complaining of the pain they feel; but not of that which maketh the sore, and causeth the pain. The cure of these is either in pleasing them that they may have their will in all things (as you rock children and give them that which they cry for to quiet them); or rather to help to cure their impatency, and settle their minds against their childish, sinful discontents (of which before).

4. In others the cause is error or great ignorance about the tenor of the covenant of grace, and the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, and the work of sanctification, and evidences thereof; they know not on what terms Christ dealeth with sinners in the pardoning of sin, nor what are the infallible signs of sanctification: it is sound teaching, and diligent learning that must be the cure of these.

5. In others the cause is a careless life or frequent sinning, and keeping the wounds of conscience still bleeding: they are still fretting the sore, and will not suffer it to skin: either they live in railing and contention, or malice, or some secret lust, or fraud, or some way stretch and wrong their consciences: and God will not give his peace and comfort to them till they reform. It is a mercy that they are disquieted and not given over to a seared conscience, which is past feeling.

6. In others the cause of their doubts is, placing their religion too much in humiliation, and in a continual poring on their hearts, and overlooking or neglecting the high and chiefest parts of religion, even the daily studies of the love

of God, and the riches of grace in Jesus Christ, and hereby stirring up the soul to love and delight in God. When they make this more of their religion and business, it will bring their souls into a sweeter relish.

7. In others the cause is such weakness of parts and confusion of thoughts, and darkness of mind, that they are not able to examine themselves, nor to know what is in them: when they ask themselves any question, about their repentance or love to God, or any grace, they are fain to answer like strangers, and say, they cannot tell whether they do it or not. These persons must make more use than others, of the judgment of some able, faithful guide.

8. But of all others, the commonest cause of uncertainty, is the weakness or littleness of grace; when it is so little as to be next to none at all, no wonder if it be hardly and seldom discerned: therefore

Direct. 11. 'Be not neglecters of self-examination, but labour for skill to manage aright so great a work; but yet let your care and diligence be much greater to get grace and use it, and increase it, than to try whether you have it already or not.' For in examination, when you have once taken a right course to be resolved, and yet are in doubt as much as before, your overmuch poring upon these trying questions, will do you but little good, and make you but little the better, but the time and labour may be almost lost: whereas all the labour which you bestow in getting, and using and increasing grace, is bestowed profitably to good purpose; and tendeth first to your safety and salvation, and next that, to your easier certainty and comfort. There is no such way in the world to be certain that you have grace, as to get so much as is easily discerned and will shew itself, and to exercise it much that it may come forth into observation: when you have a strong belief you will easily be sure that you believe: when you have a fervent love to Christ and holiness, and to the Word, and ways, and servants of God, you will easily be assured that you love them. When you strongly hate sin and live in universal, constant obedience, you will easily discern your repentance and obedience. But weak grace will have but weak assurance and little consolation.

Direct. 111. 'Set yourselves with all your skill and dili-

gence to destroy every sin of heart and life, and make it your principal care and business to do your duty, and please, and honour God in your place, and to do all the good you can in the world: and trust God with your souls, as long as you wait upon him in his way.' If you live in wilful sin and negligence, be not unwilling to be reprov'd and deliver'd! If you cherish your sensual, fleshly lusts, and set your hearts too eagerly on the world, or defend your unpeaceableness and passion, or neglect your own duty to God or man, and make no conscience of a true reformation, it is not any enquiries after signs of grace, that will help you to assurance. You may complain long enough before you have ease, while such a thorn is in your foot. Conscience must be better used before it will speak a word of sound, well-grounded peace to you. But when you set yourselves with all your care and skill to do your duties, and please your Lord, he will not let your labour be in vain: he will take care of your peace and comfort, while you take care of your duty: and in this way you may boldly trust him: only think not hardly and falsely of the goodness of that God whom you study to serve and please.

Direct. iv. 'Be sure whatever condition you are in, that you understand, and hold fast, and improve the general grounds of comfort, which are common to mankind, so far as they are made known to them: and they are three, which are the foundation of all our comfort. 1. The goodness and mercifulness of God in his very nature. 2. The sufficiency of the satisfaction or sacrifice of Christ. 3. The universality, and freeness, and sureness of the covenant or promise of pardon and salvation to all, that by final impenitence and unbelief do not continue obstinately to reject it:' (or to all that unfeignedly repent and believe.) (1.) Think not poorly and meanly of the infinite goodness of God^b: even to Moses he proclaimeth his name at the second delivery of the law, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin——" His mercy is over all his

^b Psalm ciii. 8. 11. 17. lxxxix. ii. lxxxvi. 5. 15. xxv. 10. cxix. 64. cxlvi. viii. cxvi. 5.

^c Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

works; it is great and reacheth to the heavens; it is firm and endureth for ever; "And he hath pleasure in those that hope in his mercy"^d. (2.) Extenuate not the merits and sacrifice of Christ; but know that never man was damned for want of a Christ to die and be a sacrifice for his sin, but only for want of repentance and faith in him^e. (3.) Deny not the universality of the conditional promise of pardon and salvation, to all that it is offered to, and will accept it on the offerer's terms. And if you do but feel these three foundations firm and stedfast under you, it will encourage every willing soul. The love of God was the cause of our redemption by Christ: redemption was the foundation of the promise or new covenant: and he that buildeth on this three-fold foundation is safe.

Direct. v. 'When you come to try your particular title to the blessings of the covenant, be sure that you well understand the condition of the covenant; and look for the performance of that condition in yourselves, as the infallible evidence of your title; and know that the condition is nothing but an unfeigned consent unto the covenant.' Or such a belief of the Gospel, as maketh you truly willing of all the mercies offered in the Gospel, and of the duties required in order to those mercies. And that nothing depriveth any man that heareth the Gospel of Christ, and pardon, and salvation, but obstinate unwillingness or refusal of the mercy, and the necessary annexed duties. Understand this well, and then peruse the covenant of grace (which is, but to take God for your God and happiness, your Father, your Saviour, and your Sanctifier): and then ask your hearts, whether any thing be here that you are unwilling of; and unwilling of in a prevailing degree, when it is greater than your willingness: and if truly you are willing to be in covenant with your God, and Saviour, and Sanctifier upon these terms, know that your consent, or willingness, or acceptance of the mercy offered you, is your true performance of the condition of your title, and consequently the infallible evidence of your title; even as marriage consent is a title-condition to the person and privileges: and therefore if you find this, your doubts are answered: you have found

^d Psalm cxlvii. 11. c. 5. xxxiii. 18. lvii. 10. cviii. 4.

^e John iii. 16.

as good an evidence as Scripture doth acquaint us with ; and if this will not quiet and satisfy you, you understand not the business ; nor is it reason or evidence that can satisfy you, till you are better prepared to understand them. But if really you are unwilling, and will not consent to the terms of the covenant, then instead of doubting, be past doubt that you are yet unsanctified : and your work is presently to consider better of the terms and benefits, and of those unreasonable reasons that make you unwilling : till you see that your happiness lieth upon the business, and that you have all the reason in the world to make you willing, and no true reason for the withholding of your consent : and when the light of these considerations hath prevailed for your consent, the match is made, and your evidence is sure.

Direct. vi. ‘ Judge not of your hearts and evidences upon every sudden glance or feeling, but upon a sober, deliberate examination, when your minds are in a clear, composed frame : and as then you find yourselves, record the judgment or discovery : and believe not every sudden, inconsiderate appearance, or passionate fear, against that record.’ Otherwise you will never be quiet or resolved ; but carried up and down by present sense. The case is weighty, and not to be decided by a sudden aspect, nor by a scattered or a discomposed mind ; if you call your unprovided or your distempered understandings suddenly to so great a work, no wonder if you are deceived. You must not judge of colours when your eye is blood-shotten, or when you look through a coloured glass, or when the object is far off. It is like casting up a long and difficult account, which must be done deliberately as a work of time ; and when it is so done, and the sums subscribed, if afterwards you will question that account again, you must take as full a time to do it, and that when you are as calm and vacant as before, and not unsettle an exact account upon a sudden view, or a thought of some one particular. Thus must you trust to no examinations and decisions about the state of your souls, but those that in long and calm deliberation, have brought it to an issue.

Direct. vii. ‘ And in doing this, neglect not to make use of the assistance of an able, faithful guide, so far as your

own weakness makes it necessary.' Your doubting sheweth that you are not sufficient to dispatch it satisfactorily yourselves: the question then is, what help a wiser man can give you? Why, he can more clearly open to you the true nature of grace, and the marks that are infallible, and the extent of the grace and tenor of the covenant; and he can help you how to trace your hearts, and observe the discoveries of good or evil in them; he can shew you your mistakes, and help you in the application, and tell you much of his own and others' experiences; and he can pass a strong conjecture upon your own case in particular, if he be one that knoweth the course of your lives, and is intimately acquainted with you; for sin and grace are both expressive, operative things, like life that ordinarily will stir, or fire that will be seen; though their judgment cannot be infallible of you, and though for a while hypocrisy may hide you from the knowledge of another, yet 'ficta non diu, &c.' ordinarily nature will be seen, and that which is within you will shew itself; so that your familiar acquaintance that see your lives in private and in public, may pass a very strong conjecture at your state, whether you set yourselves indeed to please in sincerity God or no. Therefore, if possible, choose such a man to help you, as is 1. Able. 2. Faithful; and 3. Well acquainted with you; and undervalue not his judgment.

Direct. VIII. 'When you cannot attain to a certainty of your case, undervalue not and neglect not the comforts which a bare probability may afford you.' I know that a certainty in so weighty a case, should be earnestly desired, and endeavoured to the uttermost. But yet it is no small comfort which a likelihood or hopefulness may yield you. Husband and wife are uncertain every day, whether one of them may kill the other; and yet they can live comfortably together, because it is an unlikely thing; and though it be possible, it is not much to be feared; all the comforts of Christians dependeth not on their assurance; it is but few Christians in the world that reach to clear assurance; for all the Papists, Lutherans, and Arminians are without any certainty of their salvation; because they think it cannot be had; and all those Jansenists, or Protestants that are of Augustine's judgment are without assurance of salvation,

though they may have assurance of their justification and sanctification ; because their judgment is that the justified and sanctified (though not the elect) may fall away. And of those that hold the doctrine of perseverance, how few do we find, that can say, they are certain of their sincerity and salvation. Alas, not one of very many. And yet many thousands of these do live in some peace of conscience, and quietness, and comfort, in the hopefulness, and probabilities to which they have attained.

Direct. ix. 'Resolve to be much in the great, delightful duties of thanksgiving and the praise of God ; and to spend a considerable part (ordinarily) of all your prayers herein ; especially to spend the Lord's day principally in these.' And thus you will have three great advantages ; 1. The very actings of love, and thanks, and joy, will help you to comfort in a nearer way, than arguments and self-examination will do ; even in a way of feeling, as the fire maketh you warm. 2. The custom of exercising those sweetest graces, will habituate your souls to it, and in time wear out the sadder impression. 3. God will most own you in those highest duties.

Direct x. 'Mark well how far your doubtings do help or hinder you in your sanctification : So far as they turn your heart from God, and from the love and sweetness of a holy life, and unfit you for thankfulness and cheerful obedience ; so far you may be sure, that satan is gratified by them, and God displeased, and therefore they should be resisted : but so far, as they keep you humble and obedient, and make you more tenderly afraid of sin, and quicken your desires of Christ and grace, so far God useth them for your benefit.' And therefore be not too impatient under them, but wait on God in the use of his means, and he will give his comforts in the fittest season. Many an one hath sweet assurance at his death, or in his sufferings for Christ when he needed it most, that was fain to live long before without it. Especially take care, 1. That you miss not of assurance, through your own neglect. 2. And that your doubtings work no ill effects, in turning away your hearts from God, or discouraging you in his service, and then you may take them as a trial of your patience, and they will certainly have a happy end.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Directions for Declining or Backsliding Christians: and about Perseverance.

THE case of Backsliders is so terrible, and yet the mistakes of many Christians so common in thinking unjustly, that they are backsliders, that this subject must be handled with the greater care. And when I have first given some Directions for the cure, I shall next give some to others for prevention, of so sad a state.

Direct. I. 'Understand well wherein backsliding doth consist, the sorts, and the degrees of it, that so you may the more certainly and exactly discern, whether it be indeed your case, or not.' To this end, I shall here open to you, I. The several sorts of backsliders. II. The several steps or degrees of backsliding. III. The signs of it.

I. There are in general three sorts of backsliders. 1. Such as decline from the truth by the error of their understanding. 2. Such as turn from the goodness of God and holiness, by the corruption of their will and affections. 3. Such as turn from the obedience of God, and an upright conversation, by the sinfulness of their lives.

The first sort containeth in it, 1. Such as decline to infidelity from faith; and doubt of the truth of the Word of God. 2. Such as decline only to error, about the meaning of the Scriptures, though they doubt not of the truth of them. This corrupted judgment will presently corrupt both heart and life.

The second sort (backsliders in heart) containeth, 1. Such as only lose their affections to good; their complacency and desire; and lose their averseness and zeal against sin. 2. And such as lose the very resolution of the will also, and grow unresolved what to do, if not resolved to do evil, and to omit that which is good.

The third sort (backsliders in life) comprehendeth, 1. Those that fall from duty, towards God or man. 2. And those that fall into positive sins, and turn to sensuality, in voluptuousness, worldliness, or pride.

II. Backsliders in judgment, do sometimes fall by slow degrees, and sometimes suddenly at once. Those that fall by degrees, do some of them begin in the failing of the understanding; but most of them, begin at the failing or falseness of the heart, and the corrupted will corrupteth the understanding.

1. Those that fall by degrees through the failing of the understanding, are those simple souls that never were well grounded in the truth: and some of them reason themselves into error or unbelief; and others of them (which is most usual) are led into it by the cunning and diligence of seducers. And for the degrees, they grow first to doubt of some arguments which formerly seemed valid to them; and then they doubt of the truth itself; or else they hear some argument from a seducer, which, through their own weakness, they are unable to answer; and then they yield to it, as thinking that it is right, because they see not what is to be said against it; and know not what others know to the contrary, nor how easily another can confute it. And when once they are brought into a suspicion of one point, which they formerly held, they quickly suspect all the rest; and grow into a suspicion and disaffection to the persons whom they did before most highly value. And then they grow into a high esteem of the persons and party that seduced them; and think that they that are wiser in one thing, are wiser in the rest: and so are prepared to receive all the errors which follow that one, which they first received: and next they embody with the sect that seduced them; and separate from the sober, united part of the church: and so they grow to a zealous importunity for the increase of their party, and to lose their charity to those that are against their way; and to corrupt their morals, in thinking all dishonesty lawful, which seemeth necessary to promote the interest of their sect, which they think is the interest of the truth and of God. And at last, it is like they will grow weary of that sect, and hearken to another, and another; till in the end, they come to one of these periods; either to settle in Popery, as the easiest religion: and being taken with their pretence of antiquity, stability, unity, and universality; or else to turn to atheism or infidelity, and take all religion for a mere deceit; or else, (if they retained an ho-

nest heart in their former wanderings) God sheweth them their folly, and bringeth them back to unity and charity, and maketh them see the vanity of those reasonings which before seduced them, and which once they thought were some spiritual, celestial light. This is the common course of error; when the understanding is the most notable cause. But sometimes a deceiver prevaieth with them on a sudden, by such false appearances of truth which they are unable to confute. But still an ill-prepared, unfurnished mind is the chiefest cause.

2. But those whose judgments are conquered by the perverse inclination of their wills, are usually carnal, worldly hypocrites, who never conquered the fleshly mind and interest, nor overcame the world, nor ever were acquainted with the heavenly nature and life, nor with the power of divine love; and these having made a change of their profession, through the mere conviction of their understandings, and benefit of education or government, or the advantages of religion in the country where they live, without a renewed, holy heart, the bias of their hearts doth easily prevail against the light of their understandings: and because they would fain have those doctrines to be true, which save them from sufferings, or give them liberty for a fleshly, ambitious, worldly life, therefore they do by degrees prevail with their understandings to receive them.

II. Backsliders in heart, do fall by divers degrees and means: for satan's methods are not always the same. Some of them fall through the corruption of their judgments; for every error hath much influence on the heart. Some are tempted suddenly into some gross or sensual sin; and so the errors of their lives call away their hearts from God. Not but that some sin of the heart or will, doth still go first, but yet the extraordinary declension and pravity of the heart, may sometimes be caused by the errors of the judgment, or the life. But sometimes the beginning and progress is almost observable in the appetite and will itself: and here the inclining to evil, (that is, to sensual or carnal good) and the declining from true, spiritual good, do almost always go together. And it is most usually by this method, and by these degrees.

1. The devil usually beginneth with the fantasy and ap-

petite, and representeth some worldly, fleshly thing, as very pleasant and desirable. 2. Next that, he causeth this complacency to entice the thoughts; so that they are much and oft in thinking on this pleasure. 3. Next that, the will is drawn into a liking of it, and he wisheth he might enjoy it (whether it be riches, or pleasant dwellings, or pleasant company, or pleasant meats or drinks, or fleshly accommodations, or apparel, or honour, or command, or ease, or lust, or sports and recreations, or whatever else). 4. Next that, the understanding is drawn into the design, and is casting and contriving how it may be obtained, and all lawful means are first considered of, that if possible, the business might be accomplished without the hazard of the soul. 5. Next to that, endeavours are used to that end, by such means as are supposed lawful, and the conscience quieted with the conceit of the harmlessness and security. 6. By this time the man is engaged in his carnal cause and course, and so the difficulty of returning is increased: and the inclination of the heart groweth stronger to the sensual pleasure than before. 7. And then he is drawn to prosecute his design by any means how sinful soever; if it be possible, making himself believe by some reasonings or other, that all is lawful still, or if the case be too palpable to be so cloaked, conscience, at last, is cast asleep, and seared, and stupified, that it may be silent under all; till either grace or vengeance awake the sinner, and make him amazed at his madness and stupidity. This is the most usual method of the heart's relapse to positive evil.

2. And by such degrees doth the heart decline from the love of God and goodness: as 1. The thoughts are diverted to some carnal vanity that is over-loved: and the thoughts of God are seldomer and shorter, than they were wont to be. 2. And at the same time, the thoughts of God do grow less serious and pleasing, and more dead and lifeless. 3. And then the means which should kindle love, are used with more dulness, and remissness, and indifferency. 4. And then conscience being galled with the guilt of wilful omissions and commissions (being acquainted with the fleshly designs of the heart), doth raise a secret fear of God's displeasure. And this being not strong enough to restrain the man from sin, doth make his sin greater, and maketh him very back-

ward to draw near to God, or seriously to think of him, or call upon him; and turneth love into terror and aversion. 5. And if God do not stop and recover the sinner, he will next grow quite weary of God, and out of love with a holy life, and change him for his worldly, fleshly pleasures. 6. And next that, he will entertain some infidel, or atheistical, or libertine doctrine, which may quiet him in his course of sin, by justifying it, and will conform his judgment to his heart. 7. And next that, he will hate God, and his ways, and servants, and turn a persecutor of them; till vengeance lay him in hell, where pain and desperation will increase his hatred; but his fleshly pleasure, and malicious persecution shall be for ever at an end.

III. Backsliders in life and practice, do receive the first infection at the heart; and the life declineth no further than the heart declineth: but yet I distinguish this sort from the other, as the effect from the cause; and the rather, because some few do much decline in heart, that yet seem to keep much blamelessness of life in the eye of men: and it is usually done by these degrees.

1. In the man's backsliding into positive sin (as sensuality or worldliness) the heart being prepared as before. 1. The judgment doth reason more remissly against sin, than it did before; and the will doth oppose it with less resolution, and with greater faintness and indifferency. 2. Then the sinner tasteth of the bait, and first draweth as near to sin as he dare, and embraceth the occasions and opportunities of sinning, while yet he thinketh to yield no further. And in this case, he is so long disputing with the tempter, and hearkening to him, and gazing on the bait, till at last he yieldeth; and having long been playing at the pit's brink, his violent lust or appetite doth thrust him in. 3. When he hath once sinned (against knowledge) he is troubled awhile, and this he taketh for true repentance: and when he is grown into some hope, that the first sin is forgiven him, he is the bolder to venture on the like again; and thinketh, that the second may be as well forgiven as the first. 4. In the same order he falleth into it again and again, till it come to a custom. 5. And by this time he loveth it more, and wisheth it were lawful, and there were no danger by it. 6. And then he thinketh himself concerned to prove

it lawful to quiet conscience, that it may not torment him; and therefore he gladly heareth what the justifiers of his sin can say for it, and he maketh himself believe that the reasons are of weight. 7. And then he sinneth without remorse.

2. So in men's backsliding from the practice of religion. 1. The heart is alienated and undisposed as aforesaid. 2. And then the life of the duty doth decay, and it dwindleth towards a dead formality; like a body in a consumption, the vivid complexion, and strength, and activity decay. 3. Next this, he can frequently omit a duty, especially in secret where no man knoweth it; till by degrees he grow more seldom in it. 4. All this he taketh for a pardoned infirmity, which consisteth with a state of grace; and therefore he is little troubled about it. 5. Next this, he loseth all the life and comfort of religion, and misseth not any duty when he hath omitted it, but is glad that he escapeth it, and when it is at an end, as an ox is when he is out of the yoke. 6. Next, he beginneth to hearken to them that speak against so much ado in religion, as if it were a needless, unprofitable thing. 7. And if God forsake him, he next repenteth of his former diligence, and settleth himself, either in a dead course of such customary lip-service as doth cost him nothing, or else in utter worldliness and ungodliness, and perhaps at last in malignity and persecution.

III. Though the signs or symptoms of declining may be gathered from what is said already, I shall add some more.

1. You are declining when you grow bolder with sin, or with the occasions of it, and temptations to it, than you were in your more watchful state. 2. When you make a small matter of those inward corruptions and infirmities, which once seemed grievous to you, and almost intolerable. 3. When you settle in a course of profession or religiousness, that putteth your flesh to little cost, in labour, reproach, or suffering from the ungodly, but leave out the hard and costly part, and seem to be very religious in the rest. 4. When you are quiet and contented in the daily, customary use of ordinances, though you find no profit or increase in grace by it or communion with God. 5. When you grow strange to God and Jesus Christ, and have little

converse with him in the Spirit ; and your thoughts of him are few, and cold, and lifeless ; and your religion lieth all in conversing with good men, and good books, and outward duties. 6. When you grow neglecters of your hearts, and strangers to them, and find little work about them from day to day, either in trying them, or watching them, or stirring them up, or mortifying their corruptions ; but your business in religion is most abroad, and in outward exercises. 7. Yea, though your own hearts and duties be much of your care and thoughts, you are on the losing hand, if the wonders of love and grace in Christ have not more of your thoughts, or, if you set not yourselves more to the study of a crucified and glorified Christ, than of your own distempered hearts. 8. All is not well with you, when spiritual helps and advantages are less relished and valued, and you grow more indifferent to the sermons, and prayers, and sacraments, which once you could not live without ; and use them but as bare duties for necessity, and not as means, with any great hope of benefit and success. 9. When you grow too regardful of the eye of man, and too regardless of the eye of God ; and are much more careful about the words, and outside of your prayers and discourses, than the spirit and inward part and manner of them ; and dress yourselves accurately when you appear abroad, as those that would seem very good to men, but go at home in the most sordid garb of a cold and careless heart and life. 10. When you grow hottest about some controverted, smaller matters in religion, or studious of the interest of some private opinion and party which you have chosen, more than of the interest of the common truths and cause of Christ. 11. When in joining with others, you relish more the fineness of the speech, than the spirit, and weight, and excellency of the matter ; and are impatient of hearing of the most wholesome truths, if the speaker manifest any personal infirmity in the delivery of them ; and are weary and tired, if you be not drawn on with novelty, variety, or elegance of speech. 12. When you grow more indifferent for your company, and set less by the company of serious, godly Christians than you did, and are almost as well pleased with common company and discourse. 13. When you grow more impatient of reproof for sin, and love not to be told of any thing in you

that is amiss ; but love those best that most highly applaud you. 14. When the renewing of your repentance is grown a lifeless, cursory work ; when in preparation for the Lord's day, or Sacrament, or other occasions, you call yourselves to no considerable account, or make no greater a matter of the sins which you find on your account, than if you were almost reconciled to them. 15. When you grow more uncharitable and censorious to brethren that differ from you in tolerable points ; and less tender of the names or welfare of others, and love not your neighbours as yourselves, and do not as you would be done by. 16. When you grow less compassionate to the ungodly world, and less regardful of the common interest of the universal church, and of Jesus Christ throughout the earth, and grow more narrow, private spirited, and confine your care to yourselves, or to your party. 17. When the hopes of heaven, and the love of God, cannot content you, but you are thirsty after some worldly contentment, and grow eager in your desires, and the world groweth more sweet to you, and more amiable in your eyes. 18. When sense, and appetite, and fleshly pleasure are grown more powerful with you, and you make a great matter of them, and cannot deny them, without a great deal of striving and regret, as if you had done some great exploit, if you live not like a beast. 19. When you are more proud and impatient, and are less able to bear disesteem, and slighting, and injuries from men, or poverty, or sufferings for Christ ; and make a greater matter of your losses, and crosses, or wrongs, than beseemeth one that is dead to the flesh, and to the world. 20. Lastly, when you had rather dwell on earth than be in heaven ; and are more unwilling to think of death, or to prepare for it, end expect it, and are less in love with the coming of Christ, and are ready to say of this sinful life in flesh, it is good to be here. All these are signs of a declining state, though yet you are not come to apostacy.

But the signs of a mortal, damnable state indeed, are found in these following degrees : 1. When a man had rather have worldly prosperity, than the favour and fruition of God in heaven. 2. When the interest of the flesh can do more with him, than the interest of God and his soul, and doth more rule and dispose of his heart and life. 3.

When he had rather live in sensuality, than in holiness : and had rather have leave to live as he list, than have a Christ and Holy Spirit to sanctify and cure him ; or, at least, will not be cured on the terms proposed in the Gospel. 4. When he loveth not the means that would recover him (as such). The nearer you come to this, the more dangerous is your case.

And these following signs, are therefore of a very dangerous signification. 1. When the pleasure of sinful prosperity and delights, doth so far overtop the pleasures of holiness, that you are under trouble and weariness in holy duties, and at ease and mérry, when you have your sinful delights. 2. When no persuasion of a minister or a friend, can bring you so thoroughly to repent of your open, scandalous sins, as to take shame to yourselves in a free confession of them (even in the open assembly, if you are justly called to it), to condemn yourselves, and give warning to others, and glorify the most holy God : but you will not believe that any such disgraceful confession is your duty, because you will not do it. 3. When you cannot bring your hearts to a full resolution to let go your sin ; but though conscience worry and condemn you for it, you do but slightly purpose hereafter to amend, but will not presently resolve. 4. When you will not be persuaded to consent to the necessary, effectual means of your recovery ; as to abstain from the bait, and temptation, and occasion of sin. Many a drunkard hath told me, he was willing to be reformed ; but when I have desired them then to consent to drink no wine or ale, for so many months, and to keep out of the place, and to commit the government of themselves for so many months to their wives, or some other friend that liveth with them, and to drink nothing but what they give them ; they would not consent to any of this, and so shewed the hypocrisy of their professed willingness to amend. 5. When sin becometh easy, and the conscience groweth patient with it, and quiet under it. 6. When the judgment taketh part with it, and the tongue will plead for it, and justify or extenuate it, instead of repenting of it.

These are dangerous signs of an impenitent, unpardoned, miserable soul. And the man is in a dangerous way to this, 1. When he hath plunged himself into such engagements to

sin, that he cannot leave it, but it will cost him very dear : as it will be his shame to confess it, or his undoing in the world to forsake it, or a great deal of cost and labour must be lost, which his ambitious or covetous projects have cost him : it will be hard breaking over so great difficulties. 2. When God letteth him alone in sin, and prospereth him in it, or doth not much disturb him or afflict him. This also is a dangerous case.

By all this you may perceive, that those are no signs of a backsliding state, which some poor Christians are afraid are such. As, 1. When poverty necessitateth them to lay out more of their time, and thoughts, and words about the labours of their callings, than some richer persons do. 2. When age or sickness causeth their memories to decay ; so that they cannot remember a sermon as well as heretofore. 3. When age or sickness taketh off the quickness and vigour of their spirits ; so that they have not the lively affections in prayer, or holy conference, or meditation, or reading, or hearing, as formerly they had. But (though they are as much as ever resolved for God, against sin and vanity, yet) they are colder and duller, and have less zeal, and fervency, and delight in holy exercises. 4. When age, or weakness, or melancholy, hath decayed or confounded their imaginations, and ravelled their thoughts, so that they cannot order them, and command them, as formerly they could. 5. And when age or melancholy hath weakened their parts and gifts ; so that they are of slower understandings, and more unable in prayer, or preaching, or conference to express themselves than heretofore. All these are but bodily changes, and such hindrances of the soul as depend thereon, and not to be taken for signs of a soul that declineth in holiness, and is less accepted of God.

Direct. 11. 'When you know the marks of a backslider, come into the light, and be willing to know yourselves, whether this be your condition, or not, and do not foolishly cover your disease.' Inquire whether it be with you as in former times, when the light of God did shine upon you, and you delighted in his ways : when you hated sin, and loved holiness ; and were glad of the company of the heirs of life : when the Word of God was pleasant to you ; and when you poured out your souls to him in prayer and

thanksgivings : when you were glad of the Lord's day, and were quickened and confirmed under the teaching and exhortation of his ministers : when you took worldly wealth and pleasures, as childish toys and fooleries, in comparison of the content of holy souls : when you hungered and thirsted after Christ and righteousness ; and had rather have been in heaven to enjoy your God, and be free from sinning, than to enjoy all the pleasures and prosperity of this world. And when it was your daily business to prepare for death, and to live in expectation of the everlasting rest, which Christ hath promised. If this were once your case, inquire whether it be so still ? Or, what alterations are made upon your hearts and lives ?

Direct. 111. ' If you find yourselves in a backsliding case, by all means endeavour the awakening of your souls, by the serious consideration of the danger and misery of such a state.' To which end I shall here set some such awakening thoughts before you (for security is your greatest danger).

1. Consider that to fall back from God, was the sin of the devils. " They are angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitations, and are now reserved in chains under darkness, to the judgment of the great day *." And shall they entice you into their own condemnation ?

2. It was the sin of our first parents Adam and Eve, to revolt from God, and lose their holiness. And is there any sin that we should more carefully avoid, than that which all the world hath so much suffered by ? Every one of the creatures that you look on, and every pain and misery you feel, doth mind you of that sin, and call to you to take heed by the warning of your first parents, that you suffer not your hearts to be drawn from God.

3. It is a part of hell that you are choosing upon earth. " Depart from me ye cursed ^b," is the sentence on the damned. And will you damn yourselves by departing from God, and that when he calleth you and obligeth you to him ? To be separated from God, is one half of the misery of the damned.

4. You are drawing back towards the case that you were in, in the days of your unconverted state. And what a state

* Jude 6.

^b Matt. xxv. 41. vii. 23.

of darkness, and folly, and delusion, and sin, and misery, was that? If it were good or tolerable, why turned you from it? And, why did you so lament it? And, why did you so earnestly cry out for deliverance? But if it were as bad as you then apprehended it to be, why do you again turn towards it? Would you be again in the case you were? Would you perish in it? Or, would you have all those heart-breakings and terrors to pass through again? May I not say to you, as Paul to the Galatians? "O foolish sinners! who hath bewitched you, that you are so soon turned back? Who have seen that of sin, and of God, and of Christ, and of heaven, and of hell, as you have done?"

5. Yea, it is a far more doleful state that you are drawing towards, than that which you were in before. For the guilt of an apostate is much greater than if he had never known the truth. And his recovery is more difficult, and of smaller hope: because he is "twice dead and plucked up by the root^d." "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning: for it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire^e." "For if we sin wilfully (by apostacy) after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries^f." I know this speaketh only of total apostacy from Christ (such being worthy "of far sorer punishment, than he that despiseth Moses's law^g"). But it is a terrible thing to draw towards so desperate a state. A habit is easier introduced upon a negation than a privation; in him that never had it, than in him that hath totally lost it.

6. What abundance of experience do you sin against in your backsliding? You have had experience of the evil of sin, and of the smart of repentance, and of the deceitfulness

^c Gal. iii. 1—4.

^d Jude 12.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 20—22.

^f Heb. x. 26, 27.

^g Ver. 28, 29.

of all that can be said of sinning; and of the goodness of God, and of the safety and sweetness of religion: and will you sin against so great experience? If your horse fall once into a quicksand, he will scarce be forced into it again. And will you be less wise?

7. What abundance of promises and covenants, which you have made to God, do you violate in your backsliding? How often in your fears, and dangers, and sicknesses, at sacraments and days of humiliation, have you bound yourselves afresh to God! And will you forget all these, and sin against them?

8. By what a multitude of mercies hath God obliged you? Mercies before your repentance, and mercies that drew you to repent, and mercies since? How mercifully hath he kept you out of hell? How mercifully hath he borne with you in all your sins? and maintained you while you provoked him? and pardoned all that you have done against him (if you were truly penitent believers)^h! How mercifully hath he taught you, and sanctified you, and comforted you; and plentifully provided for you? And yet do you forsake him, and return to folly? For which of all his mercies is it that you thus unworthily requite him? Can you remember how he hath dealt with you, and not be ashamed of your backslidings? Doth it not melt your heart to look back on his love, and to think of your ungrateful dealing?

9. Nay what a multitude of present mercies dost thou run away from? Doth not thy conscience tell thee, that it is safer and better for thee to be true to Christ, than to return to sin? Wilt thou take thy leave of thy God, and thy Redeemer, and thy Comforter? Wilt thou quit thy title to pardon and protection, and all the promises of grace? Wilt thou bid farewell to all the comforts of a saint? Dost thou not tremble to think of such a day? Thou forsakest all these when thou forsakest God.

10. Yea look before thee man, and consider what greater things are promised thee, than yet thou ever didst enjoy. Christ is conducting thee to eternal happiness, in the sight of God. And wilt thou forsake thy guide, and break away from him, and quit all thy hopes of everlasting life?

11. Consider for what it is, that thou art about to run

^h Mic. vi. 5—7.

so great a hazard? Is it not for some worldly gain or honour, or some fleshly pleasure, sport, or ease? And hast thou not known long ago what all these are? What have they done for thee? or what will they ever do? Can any thing in the world be more causeless and unreasonable, than thy forsaking God, and turning back from the way of holiness? Will the world or sin give more for thee, than God will? Or be better to thee here and hereafter? What wouldst thou have in God, or in thy Saviour, that thou thinkest wanting in him? Is it any thing that the world can make up? Which hath nothing itself but what is from him? What wrong hath God, or his service done thee, that thou shouldst now forsake him, and turn back? For thy soul's sake, man, think of some reasonable answer to such questions, before thou venture thyself upon a course, which thou hast found so bad and perilous heretofore! Let all the malice of earth or hell, say the worst it can against God and holiness, it shall never justify thy revolt!

12. Consider what abundance of labour and suffering, is all lost, if thou fall away from Christ. Is all thy hearing, and meditation, and prayer, come to this? Is all thy self-denial, and sufferings for Christ, and godliness, come to this? "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.—Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward¹." You should have let Christ alone, if you would not follow him to the end: he is less foolish that sitteth still, than he that first tireth himself, and then turneth again. The idle beggar is not so foolish, as the husbandman that will plough and sow, and at last lose his crop for the want of the labour to reap it, and carry it home. Shall all thy pains and sufferings, be lost at last, for nothing?

13. God is not so forward to cast you off, who hath just cause: and why then should you be forward to turn from him? If he had, what had become of you long ago? Yea what abundant occasion have you given him, when he never gave you any at all? Thy sins have testified and cried

¹ Heb. x. 32—34.

against thee! Abused mercies have witnessed against thee! And yet he hath not cast thee off! Satan hath stood up before God to accuse thee; and glad he would be to see thee utterly forsaken of God, and yet he hath not utterly forsaken thee! Even while thou art forsaking him, he is protecting and supporting thee, and providing for thee! Did he forsake thee when thou wast in sickness, want, and danger? If he had, thou hadst not now been here. And wilt thou begin, and run away from him? What if Christ should offer thee a bill of divorce, and say, 'Seeing thou hast so little mind of me, or of my service, take thy course, and seek another master, I discharge thee from all thy relations to me; follow thy own way, and take what thou gettest by it.' Would this be welcome tidings to thee? Or durst thou accept of it, and be gone?

14. If thou do turn back for the pleasures of the flesh, or the preferments or profits of the world, thou wilt have less pleasure in them now, than thou hadst heretofore, or than the unconverted have. For they that sin in the dark, do not know their danger, and therefore sin not with so much terror, as thou wilt hereafter. Thou hast known the danger, thou hast confessed the folly; the reasons of God's Word will never be forgotten, nor thy conviction ever totally blotted out: thou wilt be remembering the ancient kindnesses of Christ, and thy former purposes, and promises, and ways; and thou wilt be thinking both of the days that are past, and the days that are to come, and foreseeing thy terrible account: so that thou wilt sin in such terrors, that thou wilt have a taste of hell in the very exercise of thy sin, and be tormented before the time. And will the world and sin, be worth the enjoying on such terms as these ^k?

15. Either thou hopest to recover from thy backsliding by a second repentance, or else thou purposest to go on.

^k In the Vandals' persecution, Epidophorus an apostate, was the most cruel persecutor; at last it came to his turn to torment Mirita, that had baptized him, who spread before them all the linens in which he was baptized, saying, 'Hæc te accusabant dum majestas venerit judicantis. Custodientur diligentia mea ad testimonium tuæ perditionis, ad mergendum te in abyssum putei sulphurantis. Hæc te acrius persequantur flammantem gehennam cum cæteris possidentem——. Quid facturus es miser cum servi patris familias ad cœnam regiam congregare cœperint invitatos? Ligat eum manibus pedibusque, &c. Hæc et alia Merita dicente, igne conscientiæ ante ignem æternum obmutescens Epidophorus torrebatur. Victor Utic. p. 466.

If thou shouldst be so happy, as to be recovered, dost thou know with how much pain and terror it is like to be accomplished? When thou thinkest of thy backslidings, and what thou hast done in revolting after such convictions, and promises, and mercies, and experiences, thou wilt be very hardly kept from desperation. Thou wilt read such passages, as Heb. vi. 4—6. x. 26—29. with so much horror, that thou wilt hardly be persuaded that there is any hope: thou wilt be ready to think that thou hast sinned against the Holy Ghost, and that thou hast trampled under foot the blood of the covenant, and done despite to the Spirit of Grace. And thou wilt think, that there is no being twice born again! Or, if thou be restored to life, thou wilt hardly ever be restored to thy comforts here; if thy backsliding should be very great. But indeed, the danger is exceeding great, lest thou never be recovered at all, if once thou be “twice dead, and plucked up by the roots”¹. And lest God do finally forsake thee! And then how desperate will be thy case?

16. Is not the example of Backsliders very terrible, which God hath set up for the warning of his servants, as monuments of his wrath? Remember Lot’s wife; saith Christ^m, to them that are about to lose their estates, or goods, or lives, by saving them? How frightful is the remembrance of a Cain, a Judas, a Saul, a Joash², a Julian? How sad is it to hear but such a one as Spira, especially at his death, crying out of his backsliding in the horror of his soul? and to see such ready to make away with themselves?

17. Consider, that there is none that so much dishonour-eth God as a backslider; others are supposed to sin in ignorance. But you do by your lives as bad as speak such blasphemy as this against the Lord: as if you should say, ‘I thought once that God had been the best master, and his servants the wisest and happiest men; and godliness the best and safest life: but now I have tried both, and I find by experience that the devil is a better master, and his servants are the happiest men, and the world and the flesh do give the truest contentment to the mind.’ This is the plain blasphemy of your lives. And bethink thee how God should bear with this?

¹ Jude 6.² Luke xvii. 32.³ 2 Chron. xxiv. 2.

18. There is none that so much hardeneth the wicked in his sin, and furthereth the damnation of souls, as the backslider: if you would but drive your sheep or cattle into a house, those that go in first, do draw the rest after them; but those that run out again, make all the rest afraid, and run away: one apostate that hath been noted for religion, and afterwards turneth off again, doth discourage many that would come in: for he doth, as it were, say to them by his practice, 'Keep off, and meddle not with a religious life; for I have tried it, and found that a life of worldliness and fleshliness, is better.' And people will think with themselves, 'Such a man hath tried a religious life, and he hath forsaken it again; and therefore he had some reason for it, and knew what he did.' "Woe to the world, because of offences; and woe to him, by whom the offence shall come." How dreadful a thing is it to think that men's souls should lie in hell, and you be the cause of it? "It were good for that man, that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea^p."

19. There is none that are so great a terror to weak Christians, as these backsliders. For they are thinking how far such went before they fell away; and those that think that true grace may be lost, are saying, 'Alas, how shall I stand, when such that were better and stronger than I have fallen away.' And those that think that true grace cannot be lost, are as much perplexed, and say, 'How far may an hypocrite go, that after falleth away! How piously did this man live! How sorrowfully did he repent! How blamelessly did he walk? How fervently and constantly did he pray! How savourily did he speak! How charitably and usefully did he live! And I that come far short of him, as far as I can discern, can have no assurance that I am sincere, till I am sure that I go further, than ever he did.' Woe to thee, that thus perplexest the consciences of the weak, and hinderest the comforts of believers.

20. Thou art the greatest grief to the faithful ministers of Christ. Thou canst not conceive what a wound it giveth to the heart and comforts of a minister, when he hath taken a great deal of pains for thy conversion, and after that rejoiced when he saw thee come to the flock of Christ; and after

^o Matt. xviii. 17.

^p Matt. xviii. 6, 7.

that, laboured many a year to build thee up, and suffered many a frown from the ungodly, for thy sake; to see all his labour at last come to nought, and all his glorying of thee, turned to his shame, and all his hopes of thee disappointed? I tell thee, this is more doleful to his heart, than any outward loss or cross that could have befallen him: it is not persecution that is his greatest grief, as long as it hindereth not the good of souls: it is such as thou that are his sorest persecutors, that frustrate his labours, and rob him of his joys; and his sorrows shall one day cost thee dear. The life and comforts of your faithful pastors, is much in your hands. "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord^q."

21. Thou art more treacherous to Christ, than thou wouldst be to a common friend. Wouldst thou forsake thy friend without a cause? especially an old and tried friend? And especially, when in forsaking him, thou dost forsake thyself? "Thy own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not^r." "A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity^s." If thy friend were in distress, wouldst thou forsake him? And wilt thou forsake thy God, that needeth thee not, but supplieth thy needs? Ruth was more faithful to Naomi, that resolved, "Whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: where thou diest, I will die^t—." And hath God deserved worse of thee?

22. Nay, thou dealest worse with God, than the devil's servants do with him: alas, they are too constant to him. Reason will not change them, nor the commands of God, nor the offers of everlasting life, nor the fears of hell; nothing will change them, till the Spirit of God do it. And wilt thou be less constant to thy God?

23. Consider also that thy end is so near, that thou hadst but a little while longer to have held out; and thou mightst have known that thou couldst keep thy worldly pleasures but a little while. And it is a pitiful thing to see a man that hath borne the sorest brunt of the battle, and run till he is almost at the end of the race, to lose all for the want of a little more; and to see a man sell his God, and soul, and heaven for fleshly pleasure, when perhaps he hath not a year or a month, or for aught he knoweth a day

^q 2 Cor. vii. 3. ¹ Thes. iii. 8.

^r Prov. xxvii. 10.

^s Prov. xvii. 17.

^t Ruth i. 16, 17.

more to enjoy it. For a man to be weary and give over prayer, just when the mercy is at hand! and to be weary and give over a holy life, when his labour and sufferings are almost at an end! How sad will this day be to thee, if death this night be sent to fetch away thy soul! Then whose will all those pleasures be, that thou soldest thy soul for? If thou knewest that thou hadst but a month or year to live, wouldst thou not have held out that one year? Thou knowest not that it shall be one week. This is like the sad story of a student at one of our Universities, who wanting money, and his father delaying to send it him, he staid so long, till at last he resolved to stay no longer, but steal for it rather than be without: and so went out, and robbed, and murdered the first man he met, who proved to be his father's messenger, that was bringing him the money that he robbed and killed him for: which when he perceived by a letter which he found in his pocket, he confessed it through remorse of conscience, and was hanged. When a few hours' patience more might have saved his innocency, and his life. And so is it with many a backsliding wretch, that is cut off, if not like Zimri and Cozbi in the act of their sin, yet quickly after; and enjoy the pleasure which they forsook their God for; but a little while.

Direct. iv. 'When you are awakened to see the terrible-ness of a relapsed state, presently return and fly to Christ, to reconcile your guilty souls to God, and make a stop and go not one step further in your sin, nor make any delays in returning to your fidelity.' It is too sad a case to be continued in. If thou darest delay yet longer, and wilfully sin again, thou art yet impénitent, and thy heart is hardened; and if the Lord have not mercy on thee, to recal thee speedily, thou art lost for ever.

Direct. v. 'Make haste away from the occasions of thy sin, and the company which ensnareth thee in it.' If thou knewest that they were robbers that intended to murder thee, thou wouldst be gone: if thou knewest that they had plague-sores running on them, thou wouldst be gone. And wilt thou not be gone, when thou knowest that they are the servants of the devil, that would infect thee with sin, and cheat thee of thy salvation? Say not, Is not this company lawful, and that pleasure lawful? &c. If it be like to en-

tice thy heart to sin, it is unlawful to thee, whatever it is to others; it is not lawful to undo thy soul.

Direct. vi. 'Come off by sound and deep repentance, and shame thyself by free confession, and mince not the matter, and deal not gently with thy sin, and be not tender of thy fleshly interest, and skin not over the sore, but go to the bottom, and deceive not thyself with a seeming cure'. Many a one is undone, by repenting by the halves, and refusing to take shame to themselves by a free confession, and to engage themselves to a thorough reformation by an openly professed resolution. Favouring themselves and sparing the flesh, when the sore should be lanced and searched to the bottom, doth cause many to perish, while they supposed that they had been cured.

Direct. vii. 'Command thy senses, and at least forbear the outward acts of sin, while thy conscience considereth further of the matter.' The drunkard cannot say, that he hath not power to shut his mouth; let the forbidden cup alone; no one compelleth you; you can forbear it if you will. The same I may say of other such sins of sensuality. Command thy hand, thy mouth, thy eye, and guard these entrances and instruments of sin.

Direct. viii. 'Engage some faithful friend to assist thee in thy watch.' Open all thy case to some one, that is fit to be thy guide or helper; and resolve that whenever thou art tempted to the sin, thou wilt go presently and tell them before thou do commit it; and entreat them to deal plainly with you; and give them power to use any advantages that may be for your good.

Direct. ix. 'Do your first works, and set yourselves seriously to all the duties of a holy life: and incorporate yourselves into the society of the saints:' for holy employment and holy company, are very great preservatives against every sin.

Direct. x. 'Go presently to your companions in sin, and lament that you have joined with them, and earnestly warn and entreat them to repent; and if they will not, renounce their course and company, and tell them what God hath shewed you of the sin and danger.' If really you will re-

* Jam. v. 16. Neh. ix. 2, 3. Matt. iii. 6. Acts xix. 18.

† Matt. xxvi. 75. Luke xxii. 62.

turn, as with Peter you have fallen, so with Peter, go out and weep bitterly; and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren, and help to recover those that you have sinned with^a.

I have suited most of these Directions to those that relapse into sins of sensuality, rather than to them that fall into atheism, infidelity, or heresy; because I have spoken against these sins already; and the Directions there given, shew the way for the recovery of such.

Tit. 2. Directions for preventing Backsliding, or for Perseverance.

Apostacy and backsliding is a state that is more easily prevented than cured: and therefore I shall desire those that stand, to use these following Directions, lest they fall.

Direct. 1. 'Be well grounded in the nature and reasons of your religion.' For it is not the highest zeal and resolution that will cause you to persevere, if your judgments be not furnished with sufficient reasons, to confute gainsayers, and evidence the truth, and tell you why you should persevere. I speak that with grief and shame which cannot be concealed: the number of Christians is so small that are well seen in the reasons and methods of Christianity, and are able to prove what they hold to be true, and to confute opposers, that it greatly afflicteth me to think, what work the atheists and infidels would make, if they once openly play their game, and be turned loose to do their worst! If they deride and oppose the immortality of the soul, and the life to come, and the truth of the Scriptures, and the work of redemption, and office of Christ; alas, how few are able to withstand them, by giving any sufficient reason of their hope? We have learnt of the Papists, that he hath the strongest faith that believeth with least reason; and we have been (truly) taught that to deny our foundations, is the horrid crime of infidelity: and therefore because it is so horrid a crime to deny or question them, we thought we need not study to prove them: and so most have taken their foundation upon trust (and indeed are scarce able to bear

^a Luke xxii. 32.

the trial of it), and have spent their days about the superstructure, and in learning to prove the controverted, less necessary points. Insomuch, that I fear there are more that are able to prove the points which an Antinomian, or an Anabaptist do deny, than to prove the immortality of the soul, or the truth of Scripture, or Christianity; and to dispute about a ceremony, or form of prayer, or church government, than to dispute for Christ against an infidel. So that their work is prepared to their hands, and it is no great victory to overcome such raw, unsettled souls.

Direct. II. 'Get every sacred truth which you believe, into your very hearts and lives; and see that all be digested into holy love and practice.' When your food is turned into vital nutriment, into flesh and blood, it is not cast up by every thing that maketh you sick, and turneth your stomachs; as it may be before it is concocted, distributed and incorporated. Truth that is but barely known, is but like meat that is undigested in the stomach: but truth, which is turned into the love of God, and of a holy life, is turned into a new nature; and will not so easily be let go.

Direct. III. 'Take heed of doctrines of presumption and security, and take heed lest you fall away, by thinking it so impossible to fall away, that you are past all danger*.' The covenant of grace doth sufficiently encourage you to obey and hope, against temptations to despair and casting off the means: but it encourageth no man to presume or sin, or to cast off means as needless things. Remember that if ever you will stand, the fear of falling must help you to stand: and if ever you will persevere, it must be by seeing the danger of backsliding, so far as to make you afraid, and quicken you in the means which are necessary to prevent it. It is no more certain that you shall persevere, than it is certain that you shall use the means of persevering: and one means is, by seeing your danger, to be stirred up to fear and caution to escape it. Because it is my meaning in this Direction, to save men from perishing by security upon the abuse of the doctrine of perseverance, I hope none will be offended that I lay down these antidotes.

* *Virtutem Chrysippus amitti posse, Cleanthes vero non posse ait: ille posse amitti per ebrietatem et atram bilem; ille non posse ob firmas ac stabiles comprehensiones, &c.* See Diog. Laert. lib. vii. sect. 89.

1. Consider, that the doctrine of perseverance hath nothing in it to encourage security. The very controversies about it, may cause you to conclude, that a certain sin is not to be built upon a controverted doctrine. Till Augustine's time, it is hard to find any ancient writers, that clearly asserted the certain perseverance of any at all. Augustine and Prosper maintain the certain perseverance of all the elect, but deny the certain perseverance of all that are regenerated, justified, or sanctified: for they thought that more were regenerate and justified than were elect, of whom some stood (even all the elect) and the rest fell away: so that I confess, I never read one ancient Father, or Christian writer, that ever maintained the certainty of the perseverance of all the justified, of many hundred, if not a thousand years after Christ. And a doctrine, that to the church was so long unknown, hath not that certainty, or that necessity, as to encourage you to any presumption or security. The churches were saved many hundred years without believing it.

2. The doctrine of perseverance is against security, because it uniteth together the end and the means: for they that teach, that the justified shall never totally fall from grace, do also teach, that they shall never totally fall into security, or into any reigning sin. For this is to fall away from grace. And they teach that they shall never totally fall from the use of the necessary means of their preservation; nor from the cautious avoiding of the danger of their souls: God doth not simply decree that you shall persevere; but that you shall be kept in perseverance by the fear of your danger, and the careful use of means; and that you shall persevere in these, as well as in other graces. Therefore if you fall to security and sin, you fall away from grace, and shew that God never decreed or promised, that you should never fall away.

3. Consider how far many have gone that have fallen away: the instances of our times are much higher than any I can name to you out of history. Men that have seemed to walk humbly and holily, fearing all sin, blameless in their lives, zealous in religion, twenty or thirty years together, have fallen to deny the truth, or certainty of the Scriptures, the Godhead of Christ, if not Christianity itself. And many

that have not quite fallen away, have yet fallen into such grievous sins, as make them a terrible warning to us all, to take heed of presumption and carnal security.

4. Grace is not in the nature of it, a thing that cannot perish or be lost. For, 1. It is a separable quality. 2. Adam did lose it. 3. We lose a great degree of it too oft; and the remaining degrees are of the same nature. It is not only possible in itself to lose it, but too easy; and not possible without co-operating grace to keep it.

5. Grace is not natural to us; to love our ease, and honour, and friends, is natural; but to love Christ, and his holy ways and servants, is not natural to us: indeed when we do it, it is our natural powers that do it; but not as naturally disposed to it, but as inclined by the cure of supernatural grace. Eating, and drinking, and sleeping we forget not, because nature itself remembereth us of them; but learning and acquired habits may be lost, if not very deeply radical; and it is commonly concluded as to the nature of them, that 'Habitus infusi habent se ad modum acquisitorum:' 'Infused habits are like to acquired ones.'

6. Grace is, as it were, a stranger, or new comer in us. It hath been there but a little while; and therefore we are but raw, and too unacquainted with the right usage and improvement of it; and are the apter to forget our duty, or to neglect it, or ignorantly to do that which tendeth to its destruction.

7. Grace dwelleth in a heart, which is not wholly dispossessed of those objects which are against its work, nor delivered from those principles which have an enmity against it. The love of the world and flesh was in the heart, before the love of God and holiness: and ignorance was before knowledge, and pride before humility, and selfishness before self-denial. And these are not wholly rooted out; we have dealt so gently with them, (as the Israelites with the Canaanites, Jebusites and other inhabitants of the land) that they are left to try us, and to be thorns in our sides. And the garrison is not free from danger, that hath an enemy always lodged within: our enemies are in the house with us; they lie down and rise up with us, and are as near as our flesh and bones: we can never be where they are not, nor leave them behind us, whithersoever we go, or whatever we do.

No marvel, if brother be against brother, and the father against the son; when we are so much against ourselves^b. And are we yet secure?

8. And the number of snares that are still before us, and of the subtle, malicious enemies of our souls may easily convince us that we are not wholly free from danger. How subtle and diligent is the devil? How much do his servants imitate him? Every creature or person that we have to do with, and every common mercy which we receive, hath matter of danger in it, which calleth us to fear and watch.

9. Perseverance is nothing else but our continuance in the grace which we received: and this grace consisteth in act as well as in habit: and the habit is for action; and the act is it that increaseth and continueth the habit. And the fear of God, and the belief of his threatenings, and repentance, and watchfulness, and diligent obedience, are a great part of this grace. And the acts are ours, performed by ourselves, by the helps of God: God doth not believe, and repent, and obey in us, but causeth us ourselves to do it. Therefore to grow cold, and secure, and sinful, upon pretence that we are sure to persevere, this is to cease persevering, and to fall away, because we are sure to persevere, and ~~not~~ to fall away: which is a mere contradiction.

10. Lastly, Bethink you well what is the meaning of all these texts of Scripture, and the reason that the Holy Ghost doth speak to us in this manner. "And you—hath he reconciled,—to present you holy:—if ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel^c." "Abide in me, and I in you. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withered. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will^d." "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it^e." "Keep yourselves in the love of God^f." "They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ; but with many of them God was not well pleased: wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall^g." "Be not highminded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural

^b Matt. xiii. 12. x. 21.

^c Col. i. 21—25.

^d John xv. 4—7.

^e Heb. iv. 1.

^f Jude 21.

^g 1 Cor. x. 4, 5. 12.

branches, take heed lest he spare not thee^h." "Ye are fallen from grace^l." "He that endureth to the end shall be saved^k." "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. For we are partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end^l." "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief^m." "Hold fast till I comeⁿ." "And he that overcometh and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations^o."

Take heed therefore of that doctrine which telleth you, that sins to come are all pardoned to you before they are committed, and that you are justified from them, and that it is unlawful to be afraid of falling away, because it is impossible, &c. For no sin is pardoned before it is committed, (though the remedy be provided:) for it is then no sin: and you are justified from no sin, any further than it is pardoned. Suppose God either to decree, or but to foreknow the freest, most contingent act, and there will be a logical impossibility in order of consequence, that it should be otherwise than he so decreeth or foreseeeth. But that inferreth no natural impossibility in the thing itself: for God doth not decree or foresee that such a man's fall shall be impossible, but only 'non futurum.'

Direct. iv. 'In a special manner take heed of the company and doctrine of deceivers; yea, though they seem most religious men, and are themselves first deceived, and think they are in the right. And take heed of falling into a dividing party, which separateth from the generality of the truly wise and godly people^p.' For this hath been an ordinary introduction to backsliding; false doctrine hath a mighty power on the heart. And he that can separate one of the sheep from the rest of the flock, hath a fair advantage to carry him away^q.

Direct. v. 'Be very watchful against the sin of pride, especially pride of gifts, or knowledge, or holiness, which some call spiritual pride;' for God is engaged to cast down

^h Rom. xi. 20, 21.

^l Gal. v. 4.

^k Matt. x. 22.

^l Heb. iii. 6, 14.

^m Heb. iv. 11.

ⁿ Rev. ii. 25, 26.

^o Rev. iii. 2, 3. ii. 4.

^p Eph. iv. 14. 1 Thes. v. 12, 13.

^q See Rom. xvi. 16, 17.

the proud. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall^r." Satan assaulted our first parents by that way that he fell himself; and his success encourageth him to try the same way with their posterity. And, alas, how greatly hath he succeeded through all ages of the world till now!

Direct. VI. 'Take heed of a divided, hypocritical heart, which never was firmly resolved for God, upon expectation of the worst, and upon terms of self-denial, nor was ever well loosed from the love of this present world, nor firmly believed the life to come.' For it is no wonder that he fall-eth from grace, who never had any grace but common, which never renewed his soul. It is no wonder that false-hearted friends forsake us, when their interest requireth it; nor that the seed which never had depth of earth, doth bring forth no fruit, but what will wither when persecution shall arise, or that which is sown among thorns be choked^s. Sit down and count what it will cost you to be Christians, and receive not Christ upon mistakes, or with reserves.

Direct. VII. 'Take heed lest the world, or any thing in it, steal again into your hearts, and seem too sweet to you.' If your friends, or dwellings, or lands and wealth, or honours, begin to grow too pleasant, and be overloved, your thoughts will presently be carried after them, and turned away from God, and all holy affection will be damped and decay, and grace will fall into a consumption. It is the love of money that is the root of all evil; and the love of this world which is the mortal enemy of the love of God. Keep the world from your hearts, if you would keep your graces.

Direct. VIII. 'Keep a strict government and watch over your fleshly appetite and sense^t.' For the loosing of the reins to carnal lusts, and yielding to the importunity of sensual desires, is the most ordinary way of wasting grace, and falling off from God.

Direct. IX. 'Keep as far as you can from temptations, and all occasions and opportunities of sinning.' Trust not to your own strength; and be not so foolhardy as to thrust yourselves into needless danger. No man is long safe that

^r Prov. xvi. 18.

^s Matt. xiii. Luke xiv. 26. 29. 33.

^t Rom. viii. 13. xiii. 13, 14.

standeth at the brink of ruin ; if the fire and straw be long near together, some spark is like to catch at last.

Direct. x. ‘ Incorporate yourselves into the communion of saints, and go along with them that go towards heaven, and engage yourselves in the constant use of all those means which God hath appointed you to use for your perseverance ; especially take heed of an idle, slothful, unprofitable life : and keep your graces in the most lively exercise ; for the slothful is brother to the waster ;’ and idleness consumeth or corrupteth our spiritual health and strength, as well as our bodily. Set yourselves diligently to work while it is day, and do all the good in your places, that you are able : for it is acts that preserve and increase the habits ; and a religion which consisteth only in doing no hurt, is so lifeless and corrupt, that it will quickly perish.

Direct. xi. ‘ Keep always in thine eye the doleful case of a backslider’ (which I opened before). O what horror is waiting to seize on their consciences ! How many of them have we known, that on their deathbeds have lain roaring in the anguish of their souls, crying out, “ I am utterly forsaken of God, because I have forsaken him ! There is no mercy for such an apostate wretch : O that I had never been born, or had been any thing rather than a man ! Cursed be the day that ever I hearkened to the counsel of the wicked, and that ever I pleased this corruptible flesh, to the utter undoing of my soul ! O that it were all to do again ! Take warning by a mad, besotted sinner, that have lost my soul for that which I knew would never make me satisfaction, and have turned from God when I had found him to be good and gracious.” O prepare not for such pangs as these, or worse than these in endless desperation.

Direct. xii. ‘ Make not a small matter of the beginnings of your backsliding.’ There are very few that fall quite away at once, the misery creepeth on by insensible degrees. You think it a small matter to cut short one duty, and omit another, and be negligent at another ; and to entertain some pleasing thoughts of the world ; or first to look on the forbidden fruit, and then to touch it, and then to taste it ; but this is the way to that which is not small. A thought, or a look, or a taste, or a delight hath begun that with many, which never stopt, till it had shamed them here, and damned them for ever.