

CHAPTER XI.

Special Directions to Escape the Guilt of Persecuting. Determining also the Case about Liberty in matters of Religion.

THOUGH this be a subject which the guilty cannot endure to hear of, yet the misery of persecutors, the blood and groans, and ruins of the church, and the lamentable divisions of professed Christians, do all command me not to pass it by in silence; but to tell them the truth, "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear;" though they were such as Ezek. iii. 7—9. 11.

Direct. 1. If you would escape this dreadful guilt, 'Understand well what persecution is.' Else you may either run into it ignorantly, or oppose a duty as if it were persecution.

The verb 'persequor' is often taken in a good sense, for no more than 'continuato motu vel ad extremum sequor;' and sometimes for the blameless prosecution of a delinquent: but we take it here as the English word 'persecute' is most commonly taken, for 'inimico affectu insequor;' a malicious or injurious hurting or persecuting another, and that for the sake of religion or righteousness. For it is not common injuries which we here intend to speak of. Three things then go to make up persecution. 1. That it be the hurting of another, in his body, liberty, relations, estate or reputation. 2. That it be done injuriously, to one who deserveth it not, in the particular which is the cause. 3. That it be for the cause of religion, or of righteousness, that is, for the truth of God which we hold or utter; or for the worship of God which we perform; or for obedience to the will of God revealed in his laws. This is the cause on the sufferer's part, whatever is intended by the persecutor.

There are divers sorts of persecutions. As to the principles of the persecutors. 1. There is a persecution which is openly professed to be for the cause of religion; as heathens and Mahometans persecute Christians as Christians. And there is an hypocritical persecution when the pretended cause is some odious crime, but the real cause is men's religion, or obedience to God. This is the common perse-

cution, which nominal Christians exercise on serious Christians, or on one another. They will not say that they persecute them, because they are godly or serious Christians, but that is the true cause: for if they will but set them above God, and obey them against God, they will abate their persecution. Many of the heathens thus persecuted the Christians too, under the name of ungodly, and evil-doers; but the true cause was, because they obeyed not their commands in the worshipping of their idol gods. So do the Papists persecute and murder men, not as professors of the truth, (which is the true cause), but under the name of heretics and schismatics, or rebels against the pope, or whatever their malice pleaseth to accuse them of. And profane, nominal Christians seldom persecute the serious and sincere directly by that name, but under some nickname which they set upon them, or under the name of hypocrites, or self-conceited, or factious persons, or such like. And if they live in a place, and age, where there are many civil wars or differences, they are sure to fetch some odious name or accusation thence: which side soever they are on; or if they meddle not on any side, they are sure by every party whom they please not, to hear religion loaded with such reproaches as the times will allow them to vent against it. Even the Papists who take this course with Protestants, it seems by Acosta are so used themselves, not by the heathens; but by one another, yea, by the multitude, yea, by their priests. For so saith he, speaking of the parish priests among the Indians, having reprov'd their dicing, carding, hunting, idleness. Lib. iv. cap. 15. pp. 404, 405. "*Itaque is cui pastoralis Indorum cura committitur, non solum contra diaboli machinas et naturæ incentiva pugnare debet; sed jam etiam confirmatæ hominum consuetudini et tempore et turba præpotenti sese objicere; et ad excipienda invidorum ac malevolorum tela forte pectus opponere; qui siquid a profano suo instituto abhorrentem viderint; proditorem, hypocritam, hostem clamant:*" that is, "He therefore to whom the pastoral care of the Indians is committed, must not only fight against the engines of the devil, and the incentives of nature; but also now must object or set himself against the confirmed custom of men, which is grown very powerful both by time, and by the multitude; and

must valiantly oppose his breast, to receive the darts of the envious and malevolent, who if they see anything contrary to their profane fashion (or breeding) cry out, A traitor, an hypocrite, an enemy." It seems then that this is a common course.

2. Persecution is either done in ignorance or knowledge. The commonest persecution is that which is done in ignorance and error; when men think a good cause to be bad, or a bad cause to be good, and so persecute truth, while they take it to be falsehood, or good while they take it to be evil, or obtrude by violence their errors for truths, and their evils as good and necessary things. Thus Peter testifieth of the Jews, who killed the Prince of life; "I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers^a." And Paul; "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory^b." And Christ himself saith, "These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me^c." And Paul saith of himself, "I thought verily with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did^d," &c. And, "that it was ignorantly in unbelief, that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious^e." And on the other side, some persecute truth and goodness, while they know it to be so. Not because it is truth or goodness, but because it is against their carnal, worldly interest and inclination. As the conscience of a worldling, a drunkard, a whoremonger, beareth witness against his sin while he goeth on in it; so oftentimes doth the conscience of the persecutor; and he hath secret convictions, that those whom he persecuteth, are better and happier than himself.

3. As to the cause, sometimes persecution is for Christianity and godliness in the gross, or for some great essential point; and sometimes it is only for some particular truth or duty, and that perhaps of a lower nature; so small or so dark, that it is become a great controversy, whether it be truth or error, duty or sin. In some respects it is more comfortable to the persecuted, and more heinous in the persecutor, that the suffering be for the greatest things.

^a Acts iii. 13, 14. 17.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 8.

^c John xvi. 3.

^d Acts xxvi. 9.

^e 1 Tim. i. 13.

For this leaveth no doubt in the mind, whether our cause be good or not; and this sheweth that the persecutor's mind is most alien to God and truth: but in some other respect, it is an aggravation of the sin of the persecutor, and of the comfort of the persecuted, when it is for smaller truths and duties. For it is a sign of great uncharitableness and cruelty, when men can find in their hearts to persecute others for little things: and it is a sign of a heart that is true to God, and very sincere, when we will rather suffer anything from man, than renounce the smallest truth of God, or commit the smallest sin against him, or omit the smallest duty, when it is a duty.

4. Sometimes persecution is directly for religion; that is, for matters of professed faith or worship: and sometimes it is for a civil or a common cause; yet still it is for our obedience to God (or else it is not the persecution which we speak of) though the matter of it be some common or civil thing: as if I were persecuted merely for giving to the poor, or helping the sick, or for being loyal to my prince, and to the laws, or for doing my duty to my parents, or because I will not bear false witness, or tell a lie, or subscribe a falsehood, or any such like; this is truly persecution, whatever the matter of it be, as long it is truly for obeying God, that we undergo the suffering.

I omit many other less considerable distributions: and also those afflictions which are but improperly called persecutions; (as when a man is punished for a fault in a greater measure than it deserveth. This is injustice but not persecution, (unless it be his religion and obedience to God, which is the secret cause of it.)

Direct. 11. 'Understand well the greatness of the sin of persecution, that you may be kept in a due fear of being tempted to it.' Here therefore I shall show you how great a sin it is.

1. Persecution is a fighting against God: so it is called Acts v. 39. And to fight against God, is odious malignity, and desperate folly. 1. It is venomous malignity, for a creature to fight against his Creator, and a sinner against his Redeemer who would save him; and for so blind a worm to rise up against the wisdom of the all-knowing God! And for so vile a sinner to oppose the Fountain of Love and

Goodness? 2. And what folly can be greater, than for a mole to reproach the sun for darkness? Or a lump of earth to take up arms against the Almighty, terrible God? Art thou able to make good thy cause against him? Or to stand before him when he is offended, and chargeth thee with sin? Hear a Pharisee, "And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found to fight against God^f." Or hear Christ himself, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks^g. With bare feet or hands to beat the thorns! How unmeet a match is man for God! He needeth not so much as a word to take away thy soul, and crush thee to the lowest hell. His will alone can lay thee under thy deserved pains. Canst thou conquer the Almighty God? Wilt thou assault the power which was never overcome, or storm Jehovah's throne or kingdom? First try to take down the sun, and moon, and stars from the firmament, and to stop the course of the rivers, or of the sea; and to rebuke the winds, and turn night into day, and winter into summer, and decrepid age into vigorous youth. Attempt not greater matters till thou hast performed these: it is a greater matter than any of these, to conquer God, whose cause thou fightest against. Hear him again; "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker: let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" Or thy work, "He hath no hands^h!" And Isaiah xlv. 2. "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together." Woe to the man that is not content to fight with men, but chooseth the most dreadful God to be his enemy! It had been better for thee, that all the world had been against thee!

2. Persecution opposeth the gracious design of our Redeemer, and hindereth his Gospel, and work of mercy to the world, and endeavoureth the ruin of his kingdom upon earth. Christ came to save men, and persecutors raise up their power against him, as if they envied salvation to the

^f Acts vi. 38, 39.

^g Acts ix. 4, 5.

^h Isaiah xlv. 9.

ⁱ Isaiah xxvii. 4.

world. And if God have made the work of man's redemption, the most wonderful of his works, which ever he revealed to the sons of men, you may easily conceive what thanks he will give them, that resist him in so high and glorious a design. If you could pull the stars out of the firmament, or hinder the motions of the heavens, or deny the rain to the thirsty earth, you might look for as good a reward for this, as for opposing the merciful Redeemer of the world, in the blessed work of man's salvation.

3. Persecution is a resisting or fighting against the Holy Ghost. Saith Stephen to the Jews, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears; ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye^k." If you silence the ministers who are the means by which the Spirit worketh, in the illuminating and sanctifying of souls^l. Or if you afflict men for those holy duties, which the Spirit of God hath taught them to perform, or would force men from that which the Spirit of Christ is sent to draw them to; this is to raise war against that Spirit, into whose name you were yourselves baptized.

4. Persecution endeavoureth the damnation of men's souls, either by depriving them of the preaching of the Gospel which should save them, or by forcing them upon that sin for which God will condemn them. Yea, the banishing or silencing of one faithful preacher, may conduce to the damnation of many hundreds! If it be said, that others who are set up in their stead, may save men's souls as well as they, I answer, 1. God seldom, if ever, did qualify supernumeraries for the work of the ministry! Many a nation hath had too few, but I never read of any nation that had too many, who were well qualified for that great and difficult work, no, not from the days of Christ till now! So that if they are all fit men, there are none of them to be spared; but all are too few, if they conjoin their greatest skill and diligence. Christ biddeth us pray the Lord of the harvest, to send forth more labourers into his harvest; but never biddeth us pray to send out fewer, or to call any in that were but tolerably fitted for the work. 2. Many persecutors banish all preachers of the Gospel, and set up no other to do the service which they were called to. And it is rarely

^k Acts vii. 51.^l Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

seen, that any who can find in their hearts to cast out any faithful ministers of Christ, have hearts to set up better, or any that are competent in their stead ; but it is ordinarily seen, that when the judgment is so far depraved, as to approve of the casting out of worthy men ; it is also so far depraved as to think an ignorant, unskilful, heartless or scandalous sort of ministers, to be as fit to save men's souls as they. And how many poor congregations in the eastern and western churches (nay, how many thousands) have ignorant, ungodly, sensual pastors, who are such unsavoury salt, as to be unfit for the land, or for the dunghill ? Whilst men are extinguishing the clearest lights, or thrusting them into obscurity^m. And there may be something of suitability between a pastor and the flock, which may give him advantage to be more profitable to their souls, than another man of equal parts. And, though God can work by the weakest means, yet ordinarily we see that his work upon men's souls is so far moral, as that he usually prospereth men, according to the fitness of their labours to the work ! And some men have far more success than others. He that should expel a dozen or twenty of the ablest physicians out of London, and say, There are enough left in their steads, who may save men's lives, as well as they ; might, notwithstanding that assertion, be found guilty of the blood of no small numbers. And as men have sometimes an aversion to one sort of food, (as good as any to another man,) and as this distemper is not laudable ; and yet he that would force them to eat nothing else, but that which they so abhor, were more like to kill them, than to cure them ; so is it with the souls of many. And there are few who have any spiritual discerning and relish, but have some special sense of what is helpful or hurtful to their souls, in sermons, books and conference, which a stander by is not so fit to judge of as themselves. So that it is clear, that persecution driveth men towards their damnation ! And, O how sad a case it is, to have the damnation of one soul to answer for ! (Which is worse than the murdering of many bodies.) Much more to be guilty of the perdition of a multitude !

5. Persecution is injustice, and oppression of the inno-

^m Matt. v. 13—15. Luke xiv. 35.

cent! And what a multitude of terrible threatenings against this sin, are found throughout the Holy Scriptures? Doth a man deserve to be cruelly used, for being faithful to his God, and for preferring him before man? And for being afraid to sin against him? Or for doing that which God commandeth him, and that upon pain of greater sufferings than man can inflict upon him? Is it not his Saviour that hath said, "Fear not them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear him who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you fear him." Though Christianity was once called, "A sect which every where was spoken againstⁿ." And Paul was accused as a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among the people^o. And Christ was crucified as a usurper of the crown; yet innocency shall be innocency still in spite of malice, and lying accusations; because God will be the final Judge, and will bring all secret things to light, and will justify those whom injustice hath condemned, and will not call them as slandering tongues have called them. Yea, the consciences of the persecutors are often forced to say, as they did of Daniel, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God^p." And therefore the net which they were fain to lay for him, was a law against his religion, or prayers to God; for a law against treason, sedition, swearing, drunkenness, fornication, &c. would have done them no service! And yet they would fain have aspersed him there^q. "Woe to him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness^r," &c. "Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled^s." "Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil^t." "In thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents^u." "Hands that shed innocent blood, the Lord doth hate^v," &c.

6. Persecution maketh men most like unto devils, and maketh them his most notable servants in the world^j. Ma-

ⁿ Acts xxviii. 22.

^o Acts xxiv. 5.

^p Dan. vi. 5.

^q Dan. vi. 4.

^r Jer. xxii. 13.

^s Isaiah xxxiii. 1.

^t Isaiah v. 20.

^u Jer. ii. 34.

^v Prov. vi. 16, 17.

^j *Dæmones ex hominibus fieri quidam opinati sunt, perpetua criminum licentia, &c. Quod ut forte tolerabiliter dictum sit, malarum voluntatum similitudo efficit, quæ homo malus atque in malis obstinatus pene dæmonem sequat.* Petrarch. de Injusto Domin.

ny wicked men may neglect that duty which they are convinced they should do. But to hate it, and malice men that do it, and seek their ruin; this, if any thing, is work more beseeming a devil, than a man. These are the commanders in the armies of the devil, against the cause and kingdom of the Lord^a! And accordingly shall they speed.

7. Persecution is an inhuman, disingenuous sin, and sheweth an extinction of the light of nature. A good-natured man, if he had no grace at all, would abhor to be cruel, and to oppress his brethren; and that merely, because they are true to their consciences, and obey their God, while they do no hurt to any others. If they had deserved execution, an ingenuous nature would not be forward to be their executioner; much more when they deserve encouragement and imitation: it is no honour to be numbered with blood-thirsty men.

8. It is a sin that hath so little of commodity, honour or pleasure to invite men to it, that maketh it utterly without excuse, and sheweth, that the serpentine nature is the cause^a. What get men by shedding the blood of innocents, or silencing the faithful preachers of the Gospel? What sweetness could they find in cruelty, if a malicious nature made it not sweet?

9. It is a sin which men have as terrible warnings against from God, as any sin in the world, that I can remember. 1. In God's threatenings. 2. In sad examples, and judgments in this life, even on posterity. 3. And in the infamy that followeth the names of persecutors, when they are dead.

1. How terrible are those words of Christ, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a milstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea^b." How terrible is that character which Paul giveth of the Jews; "Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us: and they please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved to fill up their sins always; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost^c."

^a John viii. 42. 44.

^b Gen. iii. 13.

^c Matt. xviii. 6.

^c 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

Such terrors against persecutors are so common through the Scriptures, that it would be tedious to recite them.

2. And for examples, the captivity first, and afterwards the casting off of the Jews, may serve instead of many. "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy^d." And of the casting off, see Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how oft would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chicken together under her wings, and ye would not; behold your house is left unto you desolate— And Verse 34—36. "Behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them ye shall scourge in the synagogues, and persecute from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come on this generation." To give you the particular examples of God's judgments against persecutors, and their posterity after them, would be a voluminous work: you may find them in the Hol Scriptures, and the Church's Martyrologies.

3. And by a marvellous providence, God doth so overrule the tongue of fame, and the pens of historians, and the thoughts of men, that commonly the names of persecutors stink when they are dead; yea, though they were never so much honoured and flattered when they were alive! What odious names are the names of Pharaoh, Ahab, Pilate, Herod, Nero, Domitian, Dioclesian! &c. What a name hath the French massacre left on Charles the ninth! And the English persecution on Queen Mary! And so of others throughout the world. Yea, what a blot leaveth it on Asa, Amaziah, or any that do but hurt a prophet of the Lord! The eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, and all the Martyrologies that are written to preserve the name of the witnesses of Christ, are all the records of the impiety, and the perpetual shame of those, by whom they suffered. Even

^d 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

learning, and wisdom, and common virtue, have got that estimation in the nature of man, that he that persecuteth but a Seneca, a Cicero, a Demosthenes, or a Socrates, hath irrecoverably wounded his reputation to posterity, and left his name to the hatred of all succeeding ages. "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot."

4. The persecution of godliness as such in ministers or private Christians, is one of the most visible undoubted marks of one that is yet unsanctified, and in a state of sin and condemnation; for it sheweth most clearly the predominancy of the serpentine nature in the persecutor. Though Asa in a peevish fit may imprison the prophet, and those Christians that are engaged in a sect or a party, may in a sinful zeal be injurious to those of the contrary party; and yet there may remain some roots of uprightness within; yet he that shall set himself to hinder the Gospel, and the serious practice of godliness in the world, and to that end, hinder or persecute the preachers, and professors, and practisers of it, hath the plainest mark of a child of the devil, and the most visible brand of the wrath of God upon his soul, of any sort of men on earth. If there might be any hope, of grace in him, that at present doth but neglect or disobey the Gospel, and doth not himself live a godly life (as indeed there is not), yet there can be no possibility that he should have grace at that present, who hateth and opposeth it; and that he should be justified by the Gospel who persecuteth it, and that he should be a godly man, who setteth himself against the godly, and seeketh to destroy them.

10. And it is a far more heinous sin in a professed Christian, than in an infidel or heathen. For these do according to the darkness of their education, and the interest of their party, and the principles of their own profession. But for a professed Christian to persecute Christianity, and one that professeth to believe the Gospel, to persecute the preachers and serious practisers of the doctrine of the Gospel; this is so near that sin which is commonly said to be the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, that it is not easy to perceive a difference; and if I did consent to that description of the unpardonable sin, I should have little hope

of the conversion of any one of these. But however they make up such a mixture of hypocrisy, and impiety, and cruelty, as sheweth them to exceed all ordinary sinners, in malignity and misery. They are a self-condemned sort of men ; out of their own mouths will God condemn them. They profess themselves to believe in God, and yet they persecute those that serve him ; they dare not speak against the preaching and practising of the doctrine of godliness, directly, and in plain expressions ; and yet they persecute them, and cannot endure them ! They fight against the interest and law of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, when they have in baptism vowed themselves unto his service. Of all men on earth, these men will have less to say for their sin, or against their condemnation.

11. Lastly, Remember that Christ taketh all that is done by persecutors against his servants for his cause, to be done as to himself, and will accordingly in judgment charge it on them. So speaketh he to Saul, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me—— I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest^f." And Matt. xxv. 41—46. Even to them that did not feed, and clothe, and visit, and relieve them, he saith, "Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." What then will he say to them that impoverished and imprisoned them? Remember, that it is Christ reputatively, whom thou dost hate, deride and persecute.

Direct. 111. 'If you would escape the guilt of persecution, the cause and interest of Christ in the world must be truly understood.' He that knoweth not that holiness is Christ's end, and Scripture is his Word and law, and that the preachers of the Gospel are his messengers, and that preaching is his appointed means, and that sanctified believers are his members, and the whole number of them are his mystical body ; and all that profess to be such, are his visible body, or kingdom in the world ; and that sin is the thing which he came to destroy, and the devil, the world, and the flesh, are the enemies which he causeth us to conquer, I say, he that knoweth not this, doth not know what Christianity or godliness is ; and therefore may easily persecute it in his ignorance. If you know not, or believe not, that serⁿ

^f Acts ix. 5, 6.

ous godliness in heart and life, and serious preaching and discipline to promote it, are Christ's great cause and interest in the world, you may fight against him in the dark, whilst ignorantly you call yourselves his followers. If the devil can but make you think that ignorance is as good as knowledge, and pharisaical formality, and hypocritical shows, are as good as spiritual worship, and rational service of God; and that seeming and lip-service is as good as seriousness in religion; and that the strict and serious obeying of God, and living as we profess, according to the principles of our religion, is but hypocrisy, pride or faction, (that is, that all are hypocrites who will not be hypocrites, but seriously religious): I say, if satan can bring you once to such erroneous, malignant thoughts as these, no wonder if he make you persecutors. O value the great blessing of a sound understanding! for if error blind you (either impious error, or factious error), there is no wickedness so great, but you may promote it, and nothing so good and holy, but you may persecute it, and think all the while that you are doing well. "They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service." What prophet so great, or saint so holy, that did not suffer by such hands? Yea, Christ himself was persecuted as a sinner, that never sinned.

Direct. iv. 'And (if you would escape the guilt of persecution) the cause and interest of Christ, must be highest in your esteem, and preferred before all worldly, carnal interests of your own.' Otherwise the devil will be still persuading you, that your own interest requireth you, to suppress the interest of Christ; for the truth is, the Gospel of Christ is quite against the interest of carnality and concupiscence; it doth condemn ambition, covetousness and lust; it forbiddeth those sins on pain of damnation, which the proud, and covetous, and sensual love, and will not part with; and therefore it is no more wonder to have a proud man, or a covetous man, or a lustful, voluptuous man to be a persecutor, than for a dog to fly in his face who takes his bone from him. If you love your pride, and lust, and pleasures, better than the Gospel, and a holy life, no

† John xvi. 2.

marvel if you be persecutors ; for these will not well agree together : and though sometimes the providence of God may so contrive things, that an ambitious hypocrite may think that his worldly interest requireth him to seem religious, and promote the preaching and practice of godliness ; this is but seldom, and usually not long. For he cannot choose but quickly find that Christ is no patron of his sin, and that holiness is contrary to his worldly lusts. Therefore if you cannot value the cause of godliness, above your lusts and carnal interests, I cannot tell you how to avoid the guilt of persecution, nor the wrath and vengeance of Almighty God.

Direct. v. ‘ Yea, though you do prefer Christ’s interest in the main, you must carefully take heed of stepping into any forbidden way, and espousing any interest of your own or others, which is contrary to the laws or interest of Christ.’ Otherwise in the defence or prosecution of your cause, you will be carried into a seeming necessity of persecuting before you are aware. This hath been the ruin of multitudes of the great ones in the world. When Ahab had set himself in a way of sin, the prophet must reprove him ; and then he hateth and persecuteth the prophet, because he prophesied not good of him, but evil^b. When Jeroboam thought that his interest required him to set up calves at Dan and Bethel, and to make priests for them of the basest of the people, the prophet must speak against this sin ; and then he stretcheth out his hand against him, and saith, “ Lay hold on him.” If Asa sin, and the prophet tell him of it, his rage may proceed to imprison his reprov^r. If Amaziah sin with the idolaters, the prophet must reprove him, and he will silence him or smite him. And silenced he is, and what must follow ? “ The king said to him, Art thou made of the king’s counsel ? Forbear ; why shouldst thou be smitten ? (This seemeth to be gentle dealing.) Then the prophet forbore and said, I know that Góð hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel^b.” If Pilate do but hear, “ If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s friend¹,” he thinketh it is his interest to crucify Christ : as

^b 1 Kings xii. 8. 27. xiii. 2. 4.

^b 2 Chron. xv. 16.

¹ 2 Chron. xvi. 10.

¹ John xix. 12.

Herod thought it his interest to kill him, and therefore to kill so many other infants, when he heard of the birth of a king of the Jews. Because of an Herodias, and the honour of his word, Herod will not hesitate to behead John the baptist; and another Herod will kill James with the sword, and imprison Peter, because he seeth that it pleaseth the Jews^m. Instances of this desperate sin are innumerable. There is no way so common, by which satan hath engaged the rulers of the world against the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and against the preachers of his Gospel, and the people that obey him, than by persuading them as Haman did Ahasuerus; "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them, if it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyedⁿ." When once the devil hath got men, by error or sensuality, to espouse an interest that Christ is against, he hath half done his work: for then he knoweth, that Christ or his servants will never bend to the wills of sinners, nor be reconciled to their wicked ways, nor take part with them in a sinful cause. And then it is easy for satan to persuade such men, that these precise preachers and people are their enemies, and are against their interest and honour, and that they are a turbulent, seditious sort of people, unfit to be governed, (because they will not be false to God, nor take part with the devil, nor be friends to sin). When once Nebuchadnezzar hath set up his golden image, he thinks he is obliged in honor to persecute them that will not bow down, as refractory persons that obey not the king. When Jeroboam is once engaged to set up his calves, he is presently engaged against those that are against them; and that is against God, and all his servants. Therefore as rulers love their souls, let them take heed what cause and interest they espouse.

Direct. vi. 'To love your neighbours as yourselves, and do as you would be done by,' is the infallible means to avoid the guilt of persecution. "For charity suffereth long, and is kind, it envieth not, it is not easily provoked, it thinketh

^m Matt. ii. 16—18. xiv. 6—9. Mark vi. 19. 21, 22. Acts xii. 2—4.

ⁿ Esther iii. 8, 9.

no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; it beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things^o." "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law^p." And if it fulfil the law, it wrongeth no man. When did you see a man persecute himself? imprison, banish, defame, slander, revile, or put to death himself, (if he were well in his wits)? Never fear persecution from a man that "loveth his neighbour as himself, and doth as he would be done by," and is not selfish and uncharitable.

Direct. VII. 'Pride also must be subdued, if you would not be persecutors.' For a proud man cannot endure to have his word disobeyed, though it contradict the Word of God: nor can he endure to be reprovèd by the preachers of the Gospel; but will do as Herod with John the baptist, or as Asa, or Amaziah, by the prophets! Till the soul be humbled, it will not bear the sharp remedies which our Saviour hath prescribed, but will persecute him that would administer them.

Direct. VIII. 'Passion must be subdued, and the mind kept calm, if you would avoid the guilt of persecution.' Asa was in a rage when he imprisoned the prophet; (a fit work for a raging man). And Nebuchadnezzar was in a rage and fury when he commanded the punishment of the three witnesses^q. "The wrath of man worketh not the will of God^r." The nature of wrathfulness tendeth to hurting those you are angry with. And wrath is impatient, and unjust, and will not hear what men can say, but rashly passeth unrighteous sentence. And it blindeth reason, so that it cannot see the truth.

Direct. IX. 'And hearkening to malicious backbiters and slanderers, and favouring the enemies of godliness in their calumnies, will engage men in persecutions ere they are aware.' For when the wicked are in the favor, and at the ear of rulers, they have opportunity to vent those false reports, which they never want a will to vent! And any thing may be said of men behind their backs, with an appearance of truth, when there is none to contradict it. If Haman may be heard, the Jews shall be destroyed, as not

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^q Dan. iii. 13.

^p Rom. xiii. 10.

^r James i. 20.

being for the king's profit, nor obedient to his laws. If Sanballat and Tobiah may be heard, the building of the walls of Jerusalem shall signify no better than an intended rebellion. They are true words, though to some ungrateful, which are spoken by the Holy Ghost, "If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked," (for they will soon accommodate themselves to so vicious a humour). "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." If the devil might be believed, Job was one that served God for gain, and might have been made to curse him to his face. And if his servants may be believed, there is nothing so vile which the best men are not guilty of.

Direct. x. 'Take heed of engaging yourselves in a sect or faction.' For when once you depart from catholic charity, there groweth up instead of it, a partial respect to the interest of that sect to which you join; and you will think that whatsoever doth promote that sect, doth promote Christianity; and whatever is against that sect, is against the church or cause of God. A narrow, sectarian, separating mind, will make all the truths of God give place to the opinions of his party; and will measure the prosperity of the Gospel in the world, by the prosperity of his party, as if he had forgot that there are any more men on the face of the earth, or thought God regarded none but them. He will not stick to persecute all the rest of the church of Christ, if the interest of his sect require it. When once men incorporate themselves into a party, it possesseth them with another spirit, even with a strange uncharitableness, injustice, cruelty, and partiality! What hath the Christian world suffered by one sect's persecuting another, and faction rising up in fury to maintain its own interest, as if it had been to maintain the being of all religion! The blood-thirsty Papists, whose inquisition, massacres, and manifold murders, have filled the earth with the blood of innocents, is a sufficient testimony of this. And still here among us, they seem as thirsty of blood as ever, and tell us to our faces, that they would soon make an end of us, if we were in their power: as if the two hundred thousand lately murdered in

¹ Prov. xxix. 12.

¹ Prov. xxv. 4, 5.

so short a time in Ireland, had rather irritated than quenched their thirst. And all faction naturally tendeth to persecution. Own not therefore any dividing opinions or names; maintain the unity of the body of Christ; (not of the body of the pope!) Let Christian and catholic, be all your titles, as to your religion. "Mark those that cause divisions and offences, and avoid them."

Direct. xi. To this end, 'Overvalue not any private or singular opinions of your own or others.' For if once spiritual pride and ignorance of your own weakness, hath made you espouse some particular opinion as peculiarly your own; you will dote on the brats of your own brains, and will think your conceits to be far more illuminating and necessary than indeed they are; as if men's sincerity lay in the embracing of them, and their salvation on the receiving of them! And then you will make a party for your opinion, and will think all that are against it deserve to be cast out, as enemies to reformation, or to the truth of God, or to the church. And perhaps twenty years after, experience may bring you to your wits, and make you see either the falsehood or the smallness of all these points, which you made so great a matter of; and then what comfort will you have in your persecutions?

Direct. xii. 'Obey not the solicitations of selfish, passionate disputers.' Bishops and divines falling out among themselves, and then drawing princes to own their quarrels, when they find their arguments will not serve, hath been the distraction, division and ruin of the Christian world. And he that falleth in with one of the parties, to bear out that by the ruin of the other, is lost himself in their contentions. Would rulers let wrangling bishops and disputers alone, and never lend them their swords to end their differences, unless the substance of religion be endangered, they would be weary of quarrelling, and would chide themselves friends, and no such tragical consequents would follow, as do when the sword interposeth to suppress the discountenanced party, and to end their syllogisms and wranglings in blood.

Direct. xiii. 'Take heed lest an uncharitable, hurting spirit do prevail, under the name of holy zeal.' As it did

* Rom. xvi. 17.

with James and John, when they would have fire from heaven to have revenged the contempt of their ministry: to whom Christ saith, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." The difference between a Christian zeal, and an envious, contentious, censorious, hurtful zeal, is excellently described by the apostle James, chap. iii. throughout. "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work. The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality and hypocrisy."

Direct. xiv. 'The catholic church, and particular churches, and our communion with each, must be distinguished; and a man must not be cast out of our catholic communion, because by some tolerable difference he is incapable of communion with some particular church.' If a man be impenitent in any heresy or sin, which is contrary to the common nature of Christianity or godliness, and so unfit for catholic communion, he is to be cast out of Christian communion: but if some particular church do impose any unnecessary doctrine or practice, and he dare not approve it, or join in it, (be it right or wrong;) yea, or if he withdraw himself from one church, through the badness of the minister, or through any falling out between them, and join to another that hath a minister more suitable to his case; these are not crimes to be punished with ejection from catholic communion. He that is not fit for communion with some one particular church, may be fit for communion with many others, that give him no such occasion of difference or distaste. Without catholic principles persecution will not be avoided.

Direct. xv. 'Let church union and communion be laid upon none but catholic terms, which are possible and fit for all to be agreed in.*' Common reason will tell any impartial man, that there can be no more effectual engine to divide the churches, and raise contentions and persecutions, than to make laws for church communion, requiring such conditions as it is certain the members cannot consent to. If any man knew that my opinion is against the doctrine of transubstantiation, or of the Dominican's predetermination, and he would make a law, that no man shall have commu-

* See my "Treatise of a True Catholic, and Catholic Church."

nion with that church who subscribeth not to these, he unavoidably excludeth me, (unless I be such a beast, as to believe nothing soundly, and therefore to say any thing). If ever the churches agree, and Christians be reconciled, it must be by leaving out all dividing impositions, and requiring nothing as necessary to communion, which all may not rationally be expected to consent in. Now these catholic principles of communion must be such as these.

1. Such points of faith only as constitute Christianity, and which every upright Christian holdeth; and therefore only such as are contained in our baptismal covenant or profession, which maketh us Christians; and not those other which only some stronger Christians believe or understand; because the weak are not to be cast out of the family of Christ.

2. Such points as the primitive churches did agree in, and not innovations, which they never practised or agreed in: for they are our pattern, and were better than we; and no more can be necessary to our concord and communion, than was to theirs⁷.

3. Such points as all the church hath sometime or other at least agreed in: for what reason can we have to think that the churches should now agree in that, which they never hitherto agreed in.

4. Such points as all the true Christians in the world are now agreed in: for otherwise we shall exclude some true Christians from our Christian communion.

5. No points of worship, much less of modes and circumstances, which are not necessary, and more necessary to the church's good, than is the communion of those persons, who by dissenting are like to be separated or cast out, and whose omission would not do more hurt, than this separation and division is like to do.

6. Especially no such things must be made necessary to communion, as the most conscientious are ordinarily fearful of and averse to, and may be forborn without any great detriment to godliness.

Object. 'But,' it will be said, 'that catholic communion indeed requireth no more than you say; but particular churches may require more of their members, for that may

⁷ See Vincent. Lirinens.

be necessary or fit for a member of this particular church, which is not so to all.'

Answ. Catholic communion is that which all Christians and churches have with one another, and the terms of it are such as all Christians may agree in. Catholic communion is principally existent and exercised in particular churches, (as there is no existent Christianity or faith, which existeth not in individual Christians). Therefore if one particular church may so narrow the door of its communion, then another and another, and every one may do so; if not by the same particular impositions, yet by some other of the like nature; for what power one church hath herein, others have; and then catholic communion will be scarce found existent externally in the world: but a mere catholic Christian would be denied communion in every particular church he cometh to. And how do you hold catholic communion, when you will admit no mere catholic Christian as such to your communion, but only such as supererogate according to your private church terms?

2. But grant that every church may impose more upon its members, it must be only that which is necessary to those common things which all agree in; and then the necessity will be discernible to all sober-minded persons, and will prevent divisions; as it is necessary that he that will communicate with our churches, do join with them in the same translation of Scripture, and version of the Psalms, and under the same pastor, as the rest of the church doth: for here the church cannot use variety of pastors, translations, versions; &c. to fit the variety of men's humours; there is an evident necessity, that if they will be one society, they must agree in the same, in each of these. Therefore when the church hath united in one, if any man refuse that one person or way which the church is necessarily united in, he refuseth communion with that church, and the church doth not excommunicate him! But if that church agree on things hurtful or unnecessary, as necessary to its communion, it must bear the blame of the separations itself!

3. And grant yet that some churches cannot admit such scrupulous persons to her communion as dare not join in every punctilio, circumstance, or mode; it doth not follow that those persons must therefore be excommunicated, or for-

bidden to worship God among themselves, without that which they scruple; or to join in, or with a congregation which imposeth no such things upon them. Persecution will unavoidably come in, upon such domineering, narrow terms as those. The man is a Christian still, though he scruple one of our modes or ceremonies, and is capable of catholic communion. And if private and little inconveniences shall be thought a sufficient cause, to forbid all such the public worshipping of God, on pretence that in one nation, there must not be variety of modes, this is a dividing principle, and not catholic, and plungeth men into the guilt of persecution. It was not so in the churches of the Roman empire. In the days of Basil, his church, and that at Neocæsarea differed; and ordinarily, several bishops used several forms of prayer and worship, in their several churches, without offence. And further,

Direct. xvi. 'Different faults must have different penalties: and excommunications or forbidding men all public worship of God, must not be the penalty of every dissent.' Is there no smaller penalty sufficient, if a doubtful subscription or ceremony be scrupled, than to silence ministers therefore from preaching the Gospel, or excommunicating men, and forbidding them to worship God at all except they can do this? This is the highest ecclesiastical penalty that can be laid on men for the greatest heresy or crime. Doubtless there are lesser punishments that may suffice for lesser faults.

Direct. xvii. 'Every friend of Christ and the church, must choose such penalties for ministers and private Christians, who offend, as are least to the hindrance of the Gospel, or hurtful to the people's souls.' Therefore silencing ministers is not a fit punishment for every fault which they commit! The providence of God (as I said before) hath furnished the world with so few that are fit for that high and sacred work, that no man can pretend that they are supernumeraries, or unnecessary, and that others may be substituted to the church's profit: for the number is so small, that all are much too few; and so many as are silenced, so many churches (either the same or others) must be unsupplied or ill supplied. And God working ordinarily by means, we may conclude, that silencing of such preachers,

doth as plainly tend to men's damnation, as the prohibiting of physicians doth to their death, and more. And it is not the part of a friend, either of God or men, to endeavour the damnation of one soul, much less of multitudes, because a minister hath displeased him. If one man must pay for another man's sins, let it be a pecuniary mulct, or the loss of a member, rather than the loss of his soul. It is more merciful every time a minister offendeth, to cut off a hand, or an arm of some of his flock, than to say to him, "Teach them no more the way to salvation, that so they may be damned." If a father offend, and his children must needs pay for all his faults, it is better beat the children, or maim them, than forbid him to feed them, when there is none else to do it, and so to famish them. What reason is there that men's souls should be untaught, because a minister hath offended? I know still, those men that care not for their own souls and therefore care as little for others, will say, What if the people have but a reader, or a weak, ignorant, lifeless preacher? Doth it follow that therefore the people must be damned? I answer, No: no more than it followeth that the city that hath none but women physicians must die of their sicknesses, or that they that live only upon grass and roots must famish. Nature may do more to overcome a disease without a physician in one than in another. Some perhaps are converted already, and have the law written in their hearts, and are taught of God, and can make shift to live without a teacher: but for the rest, whose diseases need a skilful, diligent physician, whose ignorance and impenitence extremely needeth a skilful, diligent, lively teacher, he that depriveth them of such, doth take the probable course to damn them! And it is the same course which the devil himself would take; and he partly knoweth what tendeth to men's damnation! He that knoweth what a case the heathen, infidel, Mahometan world is in for want of teachers; and what a case the Greek church, the Muscovites, the Abassines, Syrians, Armenians, Papists, and most of the Christians of the world are in, for want of able, skilful, godly pastors, will lay his hand on his mouth, and meddle with such reasonings as these no more.

Object. 'But by this device you will have the clergy lawless, or as the Papists, exempt them from the magistrate's

punishments, for fear of depriving the people of instruction.'

Ans. No such matter: it is the contrary that I am advising; I would have them punished more severely than other men, as their sins are more aggravated than other men's. Yea, and I would have them silenced when it is meet, and that is in two cases: viz. If they commit such capital crimes, as God and man would have punished with death, it is fit they die, (and then they are silenced :) for in this case it is supposed that their lives, (by their impunity,) are like to do more hurt than good. 2. If their heresy, insufficiency, scandal, or any fault whatever, do make them more hurtful than profitable to the church, it is fit that they be cast out. If their ministry be not like to do more good, than their faults do harm, let them be silenced! But if it be otherwise, then let them be punished in their bodies or purses; rather than the people's souls should suffer. The laws have variety of penalties for other men! Will none of those suffice for ministers?

But alas! what talk I of their faults? Search all church history, and observe whether in all ages ministers have not been silenced rather for their duties, than their faults; or, for not subscribing to some unnecessary opinion or imposition of a prevailing party; or about some wrangling controversies which church-disturbers set afoot! There is many a poor minister would work in Bridewell, or be tied to shovel the streets all the rest of the week, if he might but have liberty to preach the Gospel! And would not such a penalty be sufficient for a dissent in some unnecessary point? As it is not every fault that a magistrate is deposed for by the sovereign, but such as make him unfit for the place, so is it also with the ministers.

Direct. xviii. 'Malignity and profaneness must not be gratified or encouraged.' It must be considered, "How the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to his law, nor can be:" and that enmity is put between the woman's and the serpent's seed*;" and that the whole business of the world, is but the prosecution of a war between the armies of Christ and satan; and that malignity inclineth the ungodly world to slander and reproach the

* Rom. viii. 7, 8. Gen. iii. 15.

servants of the Lord; and they are glad of any opportunity to make them odious, or to exasperate magistrates against them: and that their silencing and fall, is the joy of the ungodly. And if there be any civil differences or sidings, the ungodly rabble will take that side, be it right or wrong, which they think will do most to the downfall of the godly, whom they hate. Therefore besides the merits of the particular cause, a ruler that regardeth the interest of the Gospel, and men's salvation, must have some care that the course which he taketh against the godly ministers and people, when they displease him, be such as doth not strengthen the hands of evil doers, nor harden them, nor increase them, or make them glad. I do not say, that a ruler must be against whatever the ungodly part is for; or that he must be for that which the major part of godly men are for; (I know this is a deceitful rule). But yet that which pleaseth the malignant rabble, and displeaseth or hurteth the generality of godly men, is so seldom pleasing to God, that it is much to be suspected.

Direct. xix. 'The substance of faith, and the practice of godliness must be valued above all opinions, and parties, and worldly interests; and godly men accounted, as they are, ('cæteris paribus') the best members both of church and state.' If rulers once knew the difference between a saint and a sensualist, "a vile person would be contemned in their eyes, and they would honour them that fear the Lord." And if they honoured them as God commandeth them, they would not persecute them; and if the promoting of practical godliness were their design, there were little danger of their oppressing those that must be the instruments of propagating it, if ever it prosper in the world.

Direct. xx. To this end, 'Remember the near and dear relation which every true believer standeth in to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.' They are called by God, "His peculiar treasure,—his jewels,—his children,—members of Christ,—the temples of the Holy Ghost;—God dwelleth in them by love, and Christ by faith, and the Spirit by his sanctifying gifts." If this were well believed, men would more reverence them on God's account, than cause-

^a Exod. xix. 5. 1 Pet. ii. 9. Tit. ii. 14. 2 Cor. vi. 16—18. Mal. iii. 17, 18. Eph. iii. 17. 1 Cor. iii. 17. 2 Tim. i. 14. 1 John iv. 15, 16.

lessly to persecute them. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of my eye^b."

Direct. XXI. 'Look not so much on men's infirmities, as to overlook or make light of all that is good in them.' But look as much at the good as at the evil; and then you will see reason for lenity, as well as for severity; and for love and tenderness, rather than for hatred and persecution: and you will discern that those may be serviceable to the church, in whom blinded malice can see nothing worthy of honour or respect.

Direct. XXII. 'Estimate and use all lesser matters, as means to spiritual worship and practical holiness.' If there be any thing of worth in controversies, and ceremonies, and such other matters of inferior rank, it is as they are a means to the power of godliness, which is their end. And if once they be no otherwise esteemed, they will not be made use of against the interest of godliness, to the silencing of the preachers, and persecuting the professors of it.

Direct. XXIII. 'Remember that the understanding is not free, (save only participative, as it is subject to the will).' It acteth of itself 'per modum naturæ,' and is necessitated by its object, (further than as it is under the power of the will). A man cannot hold what opinion he would himself, nor be against what he would not have to be true; much less can he believe as another man commandeth him. My understanding is not at my own command; I cannot be of every man's belief that is uppermost. Evidence, and not force, is the natural means to compel the mind; even as goodness and not force, is the natural means to win men's love. It is as wise a thing to say, "Love me, or I will kill thee;" as to say, "Believe me, or I will kill thee."

Direct. XXIV. 'Consider that it is essential to religion, to be above the authority of man, (unless as they subserve the authority of God).' He that worshippeth a God that is subject to any man, must subject his authority to that man. (But this is no religion, because it is no God whom he worshippeth.) But if the God whom I serve, be above all men, my religion or service of him, must needs be also above the will of men.

^b Zech. ii. 8.

Direct. xxv. ‘ Consider that an obedient disposition towards God’s law, and a tender conscience which feareth in the smallest matter to offend him, is a substantial part of holiness, and of great necessity to salvation.’ It is part of the excellency of the soul, and therefore to be greatly encouraged by governors. To drive this out of the world, is to drive out godliness, and make men rebels against their Maker. And nothing is more certain, than that the violent imposing of unnecessary, disputable things in the worship of God, doth unavoidably tend either to debauch the conscience, and drive men from their obedience to God, or to destroy them, or undo them in the world : for it is not possible, that all conscionable persons should discern the lawfulness of all such disputable things.

Direct. xxvi. ‘ Remember that such violence in doubtful matters, is the way to set up the most debauched atheists, and consequently to undo church and commonwealth.’ For whatever oaths or subscriptions you require, he that believeth not that there is a God or a devil, a heaven or a hell, will yield to all, and make no more of perjury or a lie, than to eat a bit of bread ! If you cast out all ministers that will not swear or subscribe this or that form about things doubtful, you will cast out never an atheist or debauched infidel by it. All that have no conscience, will be kept in ; and all that are true to God and their conscience, if they think it is sin which you require of them, will be cast out. And whither this tendeth, you may easily foresee.

Direct. xxvii. ‘ Remember that if by force you do prevail with a man to go against his conscience, you do but make him dissemble and lie.’ And if hypocrites be not hateful to you, why do you cry out so much against hypocrites, (where you cannot prove your accusation ?) But if they be so hateful, why do you so eagerly make men hypocrites ? Whatever their tongues may say, you can scarce believe yourselves, that prisons or fire will change men’s judgments in matters of faith, and duty to God.

Direct. xxviii. ‘ Consider not only whether the thing which you impose be sin in itself, but also what it is to him that thinketh it a sin.’ His own doubting conscience may make that a sin to him, which is no sin to another. “ And he that doubteth, (whether such or such a meat be lawful,)

is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin^c." And is it like to be damnation to him that doth it against his conscience? And will you drive on any man towards damnation? "Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died^d."

If it be objected, 'That then there will be no government, if every man must be left to his own conscience.' I answer, That the Holy Ghost did not fear such objectors, when he laid down this doctrine here expressed. 1. It is easy to distinguish between things necessary, and things unnecessary. 2. And between great penalties and small. And first, It followeth not that a man must be left to his own conscience in every thing, because he must be so in some things. In things necessary, as it is a sin to do them doubtingly, so it may be a greater sin to leave them undone; (as for a man to maintain his family, or defend his king, or hear the Word of God, &c.) He that can say, "My conscience is against it," must not be excused from a necessary duty: and he that can say, "My conscience bids me do it," must not be excused in a sin. But yet the apostle knew what he said, when he (that was a greater church-governor than you) determined the case of mutual forbearance, as in Rom. xiv. and xv., and 1 Cor. viii. Secondly, And he is not wholly left to himself, who is punished with a small penalty for a small offence: for if a man must be still punished more, as long as he obeyeth God and his conscience, before men, an honest man must not be suffered to live. For he will certainly do it to the death.

Direct. xxix. 'Remember the wonderful variety of men's apprehensions, which must be supposed in all laws!' Men's faces are scarce more various and unlike, than their understandings are: for besides that nature hath diversified intellects as well as faces, the diversity and unlikeness is much increased, by variety of educations, company, representations, accidents, cogitations, and many other causes. It is wiser to make laws, that all men shall take the same physic, or eat only the same meat, or that all shoes shall be of a size, and all clothes of the same bigness; upon supposition, that all men's health, or appetite, or feet, or bodies, are alike; than to make laws that all men shall agree (or

^c Rom. xiv. 23.

^d Rom. xiv. 15. 1 Cor. viii. 11.

say that they agree) in every opinion, circumstance, or ceremony, in matters of religion.

Direct. xxx. 'Remember especially, that most Christians are ignorant, and of weak understandings, and not able to make use of all the distinctions and subtleties which are needful, to bring them over to your mind in doubtful and unnecessary things.' Therefore the laws which will be the means of peace, must suppose this weakness and ignorance of most subjects! And how convenient it is, to say to a poor, ignorant Christian, "Know this, or profess this or that, which the ablest, godly pastors themselves are not agreed in, or else thou shalt be imprisoned or banished;" I leave to equal men to judge.

Direct. xxxi. 'Human infirmities must be supposed in the best and strongest Christians.' All have their errors and their faults; divines themselves as well as others. Therefore either some errors and faults must be accounted tolerable, or else no two persons must tolerate one another in the world, but kill on till the strongest only shall survive. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And if the strong must be born with themselves, "Then they that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please themselves; but every one to please his neighbour for good to edification; for even Christ pleased not himself." "And him that is weak in the faith we must receive; but not to doubtful disputations."

Direct. xxxii. 'The pastors must not be impatient under the abuses which they receive from weak or distempered brethren.' We must excel others in patience, and meekness, and forbearance, as much as we do in knowledge, and in other graces. If the nurse or mother will take every word or action of the child, as if it were the injury of an enemy, there will be no preservation of the family in peace! If children cry, or fight, or chide, or make any foul or troublesome work, the mother will not therefore turn them out of doors, or use them like strangers, but remember that it is her place and duty to bear with that weakness which she cannot

* Gal. vi. 1, 2.

† Rom. xv. 1—3.

‡ Rom. xiv. 1.

cure. The proud impatience of the pastors hath frequently brought them into the guilt of persecution, to the alienating of the people's hearts, and the distraction and division of the churches: when poor, distempered persons are offended with them, and it may be revile them, and call them seducers, or antichristian, or superstitious, or what their pride and passion shall suggest: or if some weak ones raise up some erroneous opinions, alas! many pastors have no more wit, or grace, or pity, than presently to be rough with them, and revile them again, and seek to right themselves by ways of force, and club down every error and contention; when they should overcome them by evidence of truth, and by meekness, patience, and love. (Though there be place also for severity, with turbulent, implacable, impenitent heretics.)

Direct. xxxiii. 'Time of learning and overcoming their mistakes, must be allowed to those that are misinformed.' We must not turn those of the lower forms out of Christ's school, because they learn not as much as those of the higher forms in a few weeks or years. The Holy Ghost teacheth those who for the time might have been teachers of others, and yet had need to be taught the first principles^s. He doth not turn them out of the church for their non-proficiency. And where there is ignorance, there will be error.

Direct. xxxiv. 'Some inconveniences must be expected and tolerated, and no perfect order and concord expected here on earth.' It is not good reasoning to say, If we suffer these men, they will cause this or that disorder or inconvenience: but you must also consider whither you must drive it, if you suffer them not; and what will be the consequents. He that will follow his conscience to a prison, will be likely to follow it to death. And if nothing but death, or prison, or banishment can restrain them from what they take to be their duty, it must be considered how many must be so used; and whether (if they were truly faulty) they deserve so much: and if they do, yet whether the evils of the toleration or of the punishment are like to be the greater. Peace and concord will never be perfect, till knowledge and holiness be perfect.

Direct. xxxv. 'You may go farther in restraining than

^s Heb. v. 11, 12.

in constraining; in forbidding men to preach against approved doctrines or practices of the church, than in forcing them to preach for them, or to subscribe or speak their approbation or assent: if they be not points or practices of great necessity, a man may be fit for the ministry and church communion, who meddleth not with them, but preacheth the wholesome truths of the Gospel, and lets them alone. And, because no duty is at all times a duty, a sober man's judgment will allow him to be silent at many an error, when he dare not subscribe to or approve the least. But if here any proud and cruel pastors, shall come in with their lesser, selfish incommodities, and say, if they do not approve of what we say and do, they will secretly foment a faction against us; I should answer them, that as good men will foment no faction, so if such proud, impatient, turbulent men, will endure none that subscribe not to all their opinions, or differ from them in a circumstance or ceremony, they shall raise a greater faction (if they will call it so) against themselves, and make the people look on them as tyrants and not as pastors, and they shall see in the end, when they have bought their wit by dear experience, that they have but torn the church in pieces, by preventing divisions by carnal means, and that they have lost themselves, by being over zealous for themselves; and that Doctrine and Love are the instruments of a wise shepherd, that loveth the flock, and understands his work.

Direct. xxxvi. 'Distinguish between the making of new laws or articles of belief, and the punishing of men for the laws already made.' And think not that we must have new laws or canons, every time the old ones are broken: or that any law can be made which can keep itself from being broken. Perverseness in this error hath brought the church to the misery which it endureth. God hath made an universal law sufficient for the universal church, in matters of faith and holy practice; leaving it to men to determine of necessary circumstances which were unfit for an universal law: and if the sufficiency of God's law, were acknowledged in men's practices, the churches would have had more peace: but when particular countries have their particular volumes of articles, confessions, liturgies, and I know not what else to be subscribed to, and none must preach that

will not say or swear, 'That he believeth all this to be true and good, and nothing in it to be against the Word of God,' this engine racks the limbs of the churches all to pieces; and then what is the pretence for this epidemical calamity? Why no better than this, 'Every heretic will subscribe to the Scriptures, and take it in his own sense:' and what followeth? Must we needs therefore have new laws which heretics will not subscribe to, or which they cannot break? It is the commendation of God's law, as fit to be the means of unity, that all are so easily agreed to it in terms, and therefore would agree in the sense if they understood it. But they will not do so by the laws of men; all or many heretics in the primitive times, would profess assent to the church's creed; no doubt in a corrupt and private sense; but the churches therefore did not make new creeds; till about three hundred years after Christ, they began to put in some particular words to obviate heretics, which Hilary complained of as the cause of their divisions! And what if heretics will subscribe to all you bid them, and take it in their own corrupted sense? Must you therefore be still making new laws and articles, till you meet with some which they cannot misunderstand, or dare not thus abuse? What if men will misinterpret and break the laws of the land? Must they be made new till none can misexpound or violate them? Sure there is a wiser way than this: God's Word containeth in sufficient expressions, all that is necessary to be subscribed to; require none therefore to subscribe to any more, (in matters of faith or holy practice;) but if you think any articles need a special interpretation, let the church give her sense of those articles; and if any man preach against that sense, and corrupt the Word of God which he hath subscribed, let his fault be proved, and let him be admonished and censured as it deserves: censured, I say, not for not subscribing more than Scripture, but for corrupting the Scriptures to which he hath subscribed, or breaking God's laws which he promised to observe.

Direct. XXXVII. 'The good of men, and not their ruin must be intended in all the discipline of the church:' or the good of the church, when we have but little hope of theirs. If this were done, it would easily be perceived, that persecution is an unlikely means to do good by.

Direct. xxxviii. 'Neither unlimited liberty in matters of religion must be allowed, nor unnecessary force and rigour used, but tolerable differences and parties must be tolerated, and intolerable ones by the wisest means suppressed.' And to this end, by the counsel of the most prudent, peaceable divines, the tolerable and the intolerable must be stately distinguished! And those that are only tolerated must be under a law for their toleration, prescribing them their terms of good behaviour; and those that are approved, must moreover have countenance and maintenance of the magistrate: and if this were done, 1. The advantage of the said encouragement from governors, 2. With the regulation of the toleration, and the magistrates' careful government of the tolerated, would prevent both persecution, and most of the divisions and calamities of the church. Thus did the ancient Christian emperors and bishops: (and was their experience nothing?) The Novatians (as good and orthodox men) were allowed their own churches and bishops even in Constantinople, at the emperor's nose. Especially if it be made the work of some justices, 1. To judge of persons to be tolerated, and grant them patents, 2. And to overrule them and punish them when they deserve it; no other way would avoid so many inconveniences.

Direct. xxxix. 'The things intolerable are these two: 1. (Not the believing, but) the preaching and propagating of principles contrary to the essentials of godliness or Christianity, or government, justice, charity or peace. 2. The turbulent, unpeaceable management of those opinions which in themselves are tolerable. If any would preach against the articles of the creed, the petitions of the Lord's prayer, or any of the ten commandments, he is not to be suffered; and if any that are orthodox do in their separated meetings, make it their business to revile at others, and destroy men's charity, or to stir men up to rebellion or sedition, or contempt of magistracy; none of this should be endured.

As for those libertines that under the name of liberty of conscience do plead for a liberty of such vicious practices, and in order thereto would prove that the magistrate hath nothing to do in matters of religion, I have preached and wrote so much against them, whilst that error reigned, and I find it so unseasonable, now the constitution of things

looks another way, that I will not weary myself and the reader with so unnecessary a task as to confute them. Only I shall say; that Rom. xiii. telleth us that rulers are a terror to them that do evil; and that heretics and turbulent firebrands do evil; therefore rulers should be a terror to them; and that if all things are to be done to the glory of God, and his interest is to be set highest in the world, then magistrates and government are for the same end; and if no action which we do, is of so base a nature, as ultimately to be terminated in the concernments of the flesh, much less is government so vile a thing, when rulers are in Scripture called Gods, as being the officers of God.

Direct. XL. 'Remember death, and live together as men that are near dying, and must live together in another world.' The foolish expectation of prosperity and long life, is it which setteth men together by the ears; when Ridley and Hooper were both in prison, and preparing for the flames, their contentions were soon ended, and Ridley repented of his persecuting way. If the persecutors and persecuted were shut up together in one house that hath the plague, in the time of this lamentable contagion, it is two to one but they would be reconciled. When men see that they are going into another world, it takes off the edge of their bitterness and violence, and the apprehensions of the righteous judgment of God, doth awe them into a patience and forbearance with each other; can you persecute that man on earth, with whom you look to dwell in heaven? (But, to restrain a man from damning souls, by heresy or turbulency, or any such course, my conscience would not forbid it me if I were dying.)

Direct. XLI. 'Let the proud themselves who will regard no higher motives, remember how fame and history will represent them to posterity when they are dead.' There is no man that desireth his name should stink and be odious to future generations: there is nothing that an ambitious man desireth more, than a great surviving name. And will you knowingly and wilfully then expose it to perpetual contempt and hatred? Read over what history you please, and find out the name of one persecutor if you can, that is not now a word of ignominy, and doth not rot, as God hath threatened? If you say, that it is only in the esteem of such as

I, or the persecuted party; neither your opinion shall be judge nor mine; but the opinion and language of historians, and of the wisest men, who are the masters of fame. Certainly that report of Holy Scripture and history which hath prevailed, will still prevail; and while there are wise, and good, and merciful men in the world, the names and manners of the foolish, and wicked, and cruel will be odious, as they continue at this day.

I have wrote these Directions to discharge my duty, for those that are willing to escape the guilt of so desperate a sin; but not with any expectation at all, that it should do much good with any considerable number of persecutors; for they will not read such things as these; and God seldom giveth professed Christians over to this sin, till they have grievously blinded their minds, and hardened their hearts, and by malignity and obstinacy are prepared for his sorest judgments; and I know that whoever will live godly in Christ Jesus (it is not said, "who professeth to believe in Christ Jesus," but, "to live godly") shall suffer persecution, and that the cross must still be the passage to the crown^h.

CHAPTER XII.

Directions against Scandal as given.

SCANDAL being a murdering of souls, is a violation of the general law of charity, and of the sixth commandment in particular. In handling this subject, I shall 1. Shew you what is true scandal given to another. 2. What things go under the name of scandal, which are not it, but are falsely so named. 3. What are the particular ways and sorts of scandal. 4. The greatness of this sin. 5. Directions to avoid it.

I. I shall not need to stand upon the etymology of the word 'scandal;' whether it come from 'σκάλω,' 'claudico,' as Erasmus thought, or from 'σκάμβον,' 'curvum,' &c. Martinus, Stephanus, Lyserus, &c. have sufficiently done it, whither I refer you; as for the sense of the word it is past doubt, that the ordinary use of it in Scripture is for a stum-

^h 2 Tim. iii. 11, 12. Matt. v. 11, 12. Luke xiv. 26. 33.