

THE
FOOL'S PROSPERITY;

A SERMON

PREACHED AT COVENT GARDEN:

**PUBLISHED UPON OCCASION OF SOME OFFENCE AND
MISREPORTS.**

THE
FOOL'S PROSPERITY.

PROV. i. 32, 33.

For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me, shall be quiet from fear of evil.

THE bounteous offers and vehement exhortations of Christ, here in this chapter, were accompanied with a foresight and prediction of their rejection, by many: yet doth not that prevent the offers and exhortations; but occasion the prediction of the calamity of the refusers. God will not go out of his way, because the ungodly will not walk with him. He will do the part of a righteous Governor, though he foresee that men will not do the part of obedient subjects. But his primary end shall be attained upon the righteous, in the successes of his grace, as his secondary end shall be upon the disobedient, in the honour of his vindictive justice. This is the sense of the words which I have now read to you. Which, 1. Describe the ungodly. 1. By their present way of sin. 2. And by their future state of misery. Their sin is described by: 1. The occasion. 2. The act. 3. The habit. Prosperity and ease is the occasion: turning away from God, and rejecting his counsel, is the act; and folly, or simplicity, is part of the habit. Simplicity is here taken for sinful foolishness, and not, as it is often, for commendable sincerity. Whether you read it, the turning away, or the ease, of the simple, it is all one as to the scope and use that I shall now make of it, both being included as to the sense in the other words. Folly is mentioned both as the cause of their abuse of prosperity, and as the effect of prosperity so abused. Because they are fools, they turn God's mercies to their own destruction: and because they prosper, they are confirmed in their folly.

2. The words describe the godly. 1. By their obedience;

they "hearken unto Christ." 2. By their privilege or reward; they "shall dwell safely, and be quiet from fear of evil."

We shall begin with the first, and show you, 1. That it is so, that "the prosperity of fools destroyeth them." 2. How folly and prosperity concur to their destruction; or how prosperity befooleth and destroyeth them. 3. How we should all improve this truth to our best advantage.

I. Scripture and experience concur in proving the truth of the conclusion.

1. Though God tell us in his word of a difficulty that all must conquer that will be saved, yet it is a greater, extraordinary difficulty that he tells us of, as to the rich and prosperous in the world; such a difficulty as is pathetically expressed by this interrogation, (Luke xviii. 24;) "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Such a difficulty as is expressed by his proverbial comparison; (v. 25;) "For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Such a difficulty as cast the hearers into admiration, and made them ask, (v. 26,) "Who then can be saved?" Such a difficulty as is to man an impossibility, (v. 27,) and leaves only this hope that, "Things are possible to God, that are impossible to man."

2. And though it is said of men indefinitely that it is but few that shall be saved; yet is it noted of the rich and prosperous that it is few of them among those few, or few in comparison of other sorts of men, that shall be saved; (Job vii. 48;) "Have any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" (1 Cor. i. 26;) "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." And therefore Scripture speaketh in such general language, as if salvation had been almost appropriated to the poor, and the rich had been excluded, because of the rarity of their salvation; (Luke vi. 24, 25;) "But wo unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation: wo unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger: wo unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." (Jam.

ii. 5, 6.) "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" And therefore when Christ would describe a wicked, miserable man, he doeth it in these words, (Luke xvi. 19,) "There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." And, (Luke xii. 16, 19;) "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully," &c. And when he would describe a godly, happy man, he doeth it under the name of Lazarus. (Luke xvi. 20.) Judge now by the success, as it is discovered in the Scripture, what good prosperity doth to fools.

I might turn you to David's observations in Psalm xxxvii. and lxxiii. ; and mind you why it is that Christ himself went before us in a state of chosen poverty ; (2 Cor. viii. 9;) and why his disciples followed him in this tract ; and why he called them so much to deny and forsake the riches of the world, and tried them so oft by selling all, and following him in hopes of a heavenly reward. But the point is evident in what is said in my text, and these annexed testimonies.

2. But yet to make you more apprehensive of it, I shall adjoin the testimony of experience : and tell me whether prosperity be not the destruction of fools, when you have noted the fruits of it in these few observations.

1. Where do you find less serious care and labour for salvation than among the prosperous great ones of the world? What abundance of them are dead-hearted, senseless, disregards of everlasting things! What abundance of them are of no religion, but the custom of their country and the will of their superiors, which are their Bible, their law and gospel, and their creed! What abundance of them are addicted to that worship which Christ pronounceth vain, which is measured by the traditions of men, and consisteth merely in ceremonious shows! How few of them are acquainted with the spiritual worship of that God who, being a Spirit, can accept no worship but what is spiritual. Alas! poor souls, they drown their reason in sensuality, and are fed as for the slaughter, and think not seriously whither they are going till prosperity hath ceased to deceive them, and Satan is content to let them see that they have lost

and he hath won the game. They are of the religion described by the apostle, (1 Tim. vi. 5,) that taketh gain for godliness; but if godliness must go for gain, they will have none. To oppress their tenants, and devour widows' houses, and cloak it with a long pharisaical lip-service, or wipe their mouths with some customary complimentary prayers, and offer God to be a sharer in the prey, this is the commonest religion of the rich. But they cannot endure to be so pure as to devote themselves to God in that pure and undefiled religion which visiteth the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keepeth men unspotted from the world. (James i. 27.) What houses or company can you go into, where religion is more bitterly derided, more proudly vilified, more slanderously reproached, or more ingeniously abused and opposed, than among the rich and full-fed worldlings?

And if there be here and there a person fearing God among them, he passeth for a rarity or wonder. And a little religion goes a great way, and is applauded and admired as eminent sanctity, in persons of the higher rank. If a poor man or woman dwell, as it were, in heaven, and walk with God, and think, and speak, and live by rule, it is scarce regarded; poverty, or want of a voluble tongue, or the mixtures of unavoidable frailties, or some imprudent passages that come from the want of a more polishing culture and education, doth make their piety but matter of jesting and reproach to the Dives of the world; but if a lord, or knight, or lady, have but half their piety, humility, and obedience to God, how excellent are they in their orb! Nay, if they do but countenance religion, and befriend the servants of the Lord, and observe a course of cold performances, with the mixture of such sins for which a poor man should be almost excommunicate, what excellent religious persons are they esteemed?

2. What families are worse ordered, and have less of serious piety, than the rich? If our splendid gallants should be desired to call their families constantly to prayer; to instruct them all in the matters of salvation; to teach them the word of God with that diligence as is commanded, Deut. vi. 11, and to help them all in their preparations for death and judgment; to catechise them, and take an account of their proficiency, to curb profaneness and excess; and to say, with Joshua, (xxiv. 15,) "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;" how strange and precise a course would it seem to them! Should

they purge their families of ungodly servants, and imitate David, (Psalm ci,) that would not let the wicked dwell in his sight; should they spend the Lord's days in as serious endeavours for the spiritual benefit of their families and themselves, as poor men do that fear the Lord, what wonders of piety would they seem!

3. In their entertainments, visitations, and converse, how rare is serious, holy conference among them! How seldom do you hear them remembering their guests and companions of the presence of the Holy God, of the necessity of renewing, confirming, and assisting grace; of the riches of Christ revealed in the gospel; of the endless life of joy or misery which is at hand. How seldom do you hear them seriously assisting each other in the examining of their hearts, and making their calling and election sure, and preparing for the day of death and judgment! A word or two in private with some zealous minister or friend, is almost all the pious conference that shall be heard from some of the better sort of them. Should they discourse as seriously of the life to come, and the preparation necessary thereto, as they do about the matters of this life, they would mar the mirth and damp the pleasure of the company, and be taken for self-conceited hypocrites, or men of an unnecessary strictness and austerity, inconsistent with the jocund lepidity and sensual kind of delight wherewith they expect to be entertained. The honest, heart-warming, heavenly discourse that is usual among poor serious Christians, would seem, at the tables of most of our great ones, but an unseasonable interruption of their more natural and acceptable kind of converse.

4. What men do more carelessly cast away their precious time than these Dives do? They think they have a license to be idle and unprofitable, because they are rich; that is, to abuse or hide their talents, because they have more than other men; forgetting that, to whom much is given, of them shall much be required. Because they have no poverty or family necessities to constrain them to a laborious life, they think they may lawfully take their ease, and live as drones on other men's labours, as if they owed nothing to God or the commonwealth, but all to their own flesh. Their morning hours, which are most seasonable for meditation, and holy addresses unto God, and the works of their calling, are, perhaps, consumed in excess of sleep: the next are wasted in long attiring and curious adorning of their flesh; from thence they pass to vain discourse, to needless recreations, to eating and drinking, and so to their vain talk and

recreations again, and thence to the replenishing of their bellies, and so to sleep : and thus the words of the fool, that Christ describeth in Luke xii. 19, are turned by them into deeds, and it is the language of their sensual lives ; "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Sleeping and sporting, and jesting, and idle talking, and eating and drinking, and dressing and undressing, with worldly cares and passions intermixed, are the very business and employment of their lives. Thus contemptuously do they waste their precious hours, while God stands by, and time makes haste, and death draws near, and their miserable souls are unprepared, and heaven or hell are hard at hand ; and this is all the time of preparation that ever shall be allowed them. O do but look on these distracted, piteous souls that have but a short, uncertain life to provide for a life that hath no end, and see how they forget or senselessly remember the matters of infinite concernment ! See how they trifle away that time that never will return ! How they sport and prate away those hours which shortly they would recal, were it possible, with the loudest cries, or recover with the dearest price ! When they know not but, in a laughter, or a merry jest, their breath may be stopped by an arrest from heaven ; or justice may surprise their miserable, unready souls with the cards in their hands, or the cup at their mouths, when they have not the least assurance of being out of hell an hour, and yet can sell this time for nothing, and basely cast it away on toys, which is all that ever they shall have to prevent everlasting misery, or to procure everlasting joy. Stand by a while, and hearken to the discourse of sensual gallants, and mark how days and weeks are spent, and then tell whether the prosperity of such fools be not made the occasion of befooling and destroying them ?

5. What men in the world do live so sensual a life as rich and prosperous worldlings live ? the difference between the sanctified and the unsanctified, the children of God and of the devil, is, that one of them liveth after the Spirit, and the other liveth after the flesh, as in Romans viii. to ver. 14, you may read at large. And how few of these Dives do think the damning sin of flesh-pleasing to be any sin in them at all ? If they do not eat till they are sick, or drink till they are drunk, their consciences scarce control them in their voluptuousness : they never well understood the meaning of such passages as these ; (Rom. xiii. 14 ;) "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the (desires or) lusts thereof." (Rom. viii. 13.) "If ye live after the

flesh ye shall die." (1 Cor. ix. 27.) "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection," &c. They understand not how far the flesh is their enemy; or else (as they have verbally renounced it) they would use it as an enemy.

6. In their prosperity these fools have not the wit to love or bear the means of their preservation or recovery. They have the sorest maladies, and are most impatient of the remedies. They are in the stream of temptations, and have greater need of help than others; and yet there is none that reject it with more contempt and pride. Plain-dealing preachers, which honest humble souls delight in, do seem intolerable saucy fellows to these sons of pride. If we tell them but of the sin that God hath most plainly condemned in his word, or of the judgment which he hath there denounced, and make the most prudent and modest application of it unto them, we seem to wrong them, and stir up their pride and enmity against us, and provoke them to slanderous recriminations, or revenge. It troubles them not to commit it, or to keep it, but to hear of it; and they take us to be more faulty for admonishing them of it, than themselves for being guilty of it. Though we are by office the messengers of Christ, that will tell them of it shortly to their faces, and fear not the proudest son of Belial, yet are they too stout to be admonished by such as we, but reject our message with hatred and disdain. And, indeed, it is a wonder of mercy that the prevalency of this impatient guilt and malice hath not, ere this, turned plain and faithful preaching into some toothless formalities, or homilies, and silenced the preachers for the security of the offenders; and expelled the physicians lest they displease the sick. The Lord still prevent it. If we tell them with the greatest caution but of the necessary truths, without which a sinful soul is never like to be humbled or saved, we are taken to be turbulent, and injurious to the ease or honour of these auditors. They must hear of the necessity of regeneration and holiness, and of the weight and worth of things eternal, and yet they cannot bear to hear it. They must have heart-searching and heart-breaking truths, in a searching, awakening manner, brought home to them, if ever they will be saved by them; but they cannot endure it. The surgeon is intolerable that would search their sores; and yet there is no other way to heal them. Alas! the heart of man is so hard, that all the skill and industry of the preacher can scarce sufficiently sharpen and set home the truth that it may enter; but nothing that is sharp can be endured by these tender souls. Such language as Christ

and his prophets and apostles used, doth seem too rough for silken ears. Their honour must not be blotted with the mention of their odious sins, and deplorable misery. To be a glutton, or a drunkard, or a wanton, or a filthy fornicator, or a malicious Cain, they can endure; but to be told, "Thou art the man," though it be in secret, and with love and tenderness, they cannot bear. The minister is thought to wrong them that shall secretly and faithfully admonish them, and tell them truly what will be the end: but Christ will execute all his threatenings, and make them feel what now they hear, and yet constrain them to confess that he doth not wrong them. We wrong them now, if we tell a gentleman of his impiety, and sensuality, and pride, and of his vilifying precious time, and casting it away on cards, and idleness, and unprofitable talk; yea, though he be so far forsaken of common grace and reason, as to hate and deride the serious practice of his own profession, and the way that the God of heaven hath prescribed as flatly necessary to salvation, yet cannot he endure to hear of his enmity against the Lord, nor to be told that he beareth the image of the devil, while he is against the image and laws of Christ. Should we but privately read a text to them that condemneth them, they are as angry with us as if we made the Scripture which we read; and it were not the word of God, but ours. If we tell them that "Without holiness none shall see God," (Heb. xii. 14,) and that "Except they be regenerated, converted, and become as little children (in humility beginning the world anew) they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. xviii. 3; John iii. 3, 5, 6,) that "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, the same is none of his," (Rom. viii. 6,) or that "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," (Heb. xiii. 4,) and that "The unrighteous, the fornicators, effeminate, covetous, extortioners, drunkards, or revilers, shall not inherit the kingdom of God," (1 Cor. vi. 9—11; Eph. v. 3—6,) they think we talk too precisely or presumptuously to them. You would think by their proud contempt of his threatenings, and their boldness and carelessness in sin, that these silk-worms did imagine that they had conquered heaven, and the Righteous God were afraid to meddle with them; or that he would reverse his laws, and pervert his judgment for fear of dishonouring or offending them. Little do they think how many Dives are now in hell. But methinks they might easily believe, that their honourable flesh is rotten, and turned to common earth; and

death will make bold to tell them, also, when their turn is come, that they have been pampering but a piece of clay; and that it was not worth the loss of heaven, not the suffering of hell, to spend so much time, and care, and cost, to feed up a carcass for the worms. We must now submissively ask their leave, to tell them what God hath said against them. But God will not ask them leave to make it good upon the highest, the proudest, and most secure of them all; "For God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses." (Psalm lxxviii. 21.) "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with him. The foolish shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity." (Psalm v. 3, 4.) The ungodly (that delight not in the law of the Lord) are like the chaff that the wind driveth away; they shall sit not in judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." (Psalm i.) "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." (Psalm ix. 17.) Cannot you endure to hear and consider of these things? How then will you endure to feel them? God will not flatter you. If all your greatness enable you not to repulse the assaults of death, nor to chide away the gout or stone; and all your honour and wealth will not cure a fever, or ease you of the toothach; how little will it do to save you from the everlasting wrath of God! or to avert his sentence which must shortly pass on all that are impenitent! And yet prosperity so befooleth sensual men, that they must hear of none of this; at least not with any close and personal application. If you speak as Christ did to the Pharisees, (Matt. xxi. 45,) that they perceived that he spake of them, they take you for their enemy for telling them the truth, (Gal. iv. 16,) and meet our doctrine as Ahab did Elijah, (2 Kings xxi. 20,) "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!" and, (1 Kings xviii. 17,) "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" or as the same Ahab of Micaiah, (1 Kings xxii. 8,) "There is one man (Micaiah) of whom we may inquire of the Lord; But I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Or as Amaziah the priest said of Amos to King Jeroboam, "He hath conspired against thee; the land is not able to bear all his words." (Amos vii. 10, 13.) "Prophesy not again any more at Bethel; for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." They behave themselves to faithful ministers as if it were a part of their inviolable honour and privilege, to be mortally sick without the trouble of a physician, and to have

nobody tell them that they are out of their way, till it be too late or that they are in misery till there be no remedy; and that none should remember them of heaven till they have lost it; nor trouble them in the way to hell, and seek to save them, lest he should but torment them before the time. And thus prosperity makes them willingly deaf and blind, and "turn away their ears from the hearing of the law," and then their prayers for mercy in their distress are rejected as abominable by the Lord. (Prov. i. 24—33; xxviii. 9.)

7. Yea, if there be any persecution raised against the church of Christ, who are the chief actors in it, but the prosperous, blinded, sensual great ones of the world? The princes make it their petition against Jeremiah to the king; "We beseech thee let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war—and the hands of all the people in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of his people but the hurt." (Jer. xxxviii. 4.) It was the presidents and princes that said of Daniel, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." (Dan. vi. 5.) Were it not lest some malicious hearer should misapply it, and think I sought to diminish the reputation of magistrates, while I show the effects of the prosperity of fools, I should give you abundance of such lamentable instances, and tell you how commonly the great ones of the world have in all ages set themselves, and taken counsel, against the Lord and against Christ. (Psal. ii.) And stumbled upon the corner-stone, and taken no warning by those that have been thus broken in pieces before them. How ready is Herod to gratify a wanton dancer with a prophet's head! In a word, as Satan is called the prince of this world, no wonder if he rule the men of the world, that have their portion in this life. (Psal. xvii. 14.) "And to command his armies, and engage them against the servants of the Most High that run not with them to the same excess of riot. (1 Pet. iv. 4.) And as James saith (as before cited) "Do not the rich oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do they not blaspheme that worthy Name by which you are called?" (Jam. ii. 6, 7.)

8. And in all this sin and misery how senseless and secure are the prosperous fools! As merry within a year, or month, or week of hell, as if no harm were near. How wonderful hard it is to convince them of their misery! The most learned, wise, or godly man, or the dearest friend they have in the world, shall

not persuade them that their case is such as to need a conversion and supernatural change. They cannot abide to take off their minds from their sensual delights and vanities, and to trouble themselves about the things of life eternal, come on it what will ; they are resolved to venture, and please their flesh, and enjoy what the world will afford them while they may, till suddenly God surpriseth them with his dreadful call, "Thou fool ! this night shall thy soul be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?" (Luke xii. 20.) "So is he that layeth up riches for himself, and is not rich towards God." (v. 21.)

II. I shall next show you how it is that prosperity thus destroyeth fools. Briefly, 1. By the pleasing of their sensitive appetite and fancy, and so overcoming the power of reason. "Perit omne judicium cum res transit in affectum." Violent affections hearken not to reason. The beast is made too headstrong for the rider. (Deut. xxxii. 15.) "Jerusalem waxed fat, and kicked—then he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation."

2. "The friendship of the world is enmity to God : and if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him." (Jam. iv. 4 ; 1 John ii. 15.) And undoubtedly, the more amiable the world appears, the more strongly it doth allure the soul to love it. And to the prosperous it appeareth in the most enticing dress.

3. And hereby it taketh off the soul from God. We cannot love and serve God and Mammon. The heart is gone another way when God should have it. It is so full of love, and desire, and care, and pleasure about the creatures, that there is no room for God. How can they love him with all their hearts who have let out those hearts to vanity before ?

4. And the very noise and bustle of these worldly things diverts their mind, and hindereth them from being serious, and from that sober consideration that requireth some retirement and vacancy from distracting objects.

5. And the sense of present ease and sweetness doth make them forget the change that is near. Little do they think what is necessary to comfort a departing soul, when they are in the heat of pride and lust, or taken up with their business and delights. In the midst of bravery and plenty, feasting and sporting, and such other entertainments of the senses, it is hard to hold communion with God, and study the life to come in such

a college or library as this. Prosperity and pleasure make men drunk; and the tickled fancy sports itself in abusing the captivated mind. And these frisking lambs, and fattened beasts forget the slaughter; they think in summer there will be no winter; and their May will continue all the year. Little do they feel the piercing, griping, tearing thoughts, that at death or judgment must succeed their security and mirth. O how hard do the best men find it, in the midst of health and all prosperity, to have such serious thoughts of heaven, and of the change that death will shortly make, as they have in sickness and adversity, when death seems near, and deluding things are vanished and gone! The words of God have not that force on a sleepy soul in the hour of prosperity, as they have when distress hath opened their ears. The same truths that now seem common, lifeless, inconsiderable things, will then pierce deep, and divide between the joints and marrow, and work as if they were not the same that once were laughed at and disregarded. (Eccles. vii. 2, 3, 4.) "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting;" (do you believe this?) "For that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." I beseech you take patiently your character and name here from the word of God.

6. Moreover these fools are by prosperity so lifted up with pride, that God abhors them, and is as it were engaged to abase them. For "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud. (Prov. xv. 25.) Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." (Prov. xvi. 5.) "He scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts: He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree: He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away." (Luke i. 51, 52, 53.) "In the things wherein they deal proudly, he is above them." (Exod. xviii. 11.) "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xviii. 14.) "For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." (1 Pet. v. 5.)

7. But no way doth their prosperity so desperately precipitate them, and make them the scorn of heaven, and the football of divine contempt, as by engaging them in opposition to the word, and ways, and servants of the Lord. When it hath

drawn them to those sins which God condemneth, and his ministers must reprove, and hath puffed them up with pride, which makes them impatient of his reproofs, and hath increased their worldly interest and treasure, and fleshly provision, which he commandeth them to deny, this presently involveth them in a controversy with Christ before they are aware, and casteth them into the temptation of Herod when he was contradicted in his lust; and they think they are necessitated to stop the mouths that dare reprove them, and to keep under the people, and doctrine, and discipline of Christ, that are so contrary to them, and cross them, and dishonour them in their sin; and to pluck away this thorn out of their foot, and cast it from them. And thus their prosperity and carnal wisdom that is employed to secure it, engageth the earth-worms in a war with Christ; and then you may conjecture how long they can endure to kick against the pricks, and irritate the justice and jealousy of the Almighty, and presume to abuse the apple of his eye; and who will have the better in the end? The stubble is more able to resist the flames, and a fly to conquer all the world, than these daring lumps of walking clay to conquer God, or escape his vengeance. (Isa. xxvii. 4.) "Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together." (Isa. xlv. 9.) "Wo to him that striveth with his Maker! let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth." (Job ix. 4.) "Who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered?" "They all imagine a vain thing, that set themselves and take counsel together against the Lord, and his anointed, to break his bonds, and cast away his cords from them. He that sitteth in heaven will laugh; the Lord will hold them in derision: then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.—He shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings! be instructed, ye judges of the earth: serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling: kiss the son lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him." (Psal. ii.) "They think it is but a few contemptible or hateful men that they set themselves against; forgetting Acts ix. 4, 5; Luke x. 16; 1 Thes. iv. 8, that tell them all is done to Christ: and Matt. xviii. 6; "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. xxi.

44.) "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever this stone shall fall, it will grind him to powder." I will conclude this with Amaziah's case, (2 Chron. xxv. 16.) "Art thou made of the king's counsel? Forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened," &c.

III. Before I tell you what use to make of the doctrine of this text, I shall first tell you, by way of caution, what use you should not make of it.

1. Though the prosperity of fools destroy them, do not hence accuse God that giveth them prosperity. 2. Nor do not think to excuse yourselves. 3. Nor do not think that riches are evil: for the things are good, and the mercies in themselves, and being rightly used, may further their felicity. But it is the folly and corruption of their hearts that thus abuse them, and make good an occasion of evil. I may allude to Paul's words concerning the law, (Rom. vii. 7, 13,) Are they sin? or is that which is good made death to them? "God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death by that which is good." Because they are carnally sold under sin.

4. Nor must you cast away your riches, or refuse them when offered by God. But take them as a faithful steward doth his master's stock, not desiring to be overburdened or endangered with the charge, but bearing what is imposed on you, resolving to improve it all for God. Not loving nor desiring wealth, authority, or honour, nor yet so lazy, timorous, or distrustful as not to accept the burden and charge, when God may be served by it. To cast away or hide your talents, is the part of an unprofitable servant.

5. Take heed lest, under pretence of contemning riches and prosperity, you be tempted to condemn your governors, or to speak evil of dignities, or diminish the honour of those that are set over us, whose honour is necessary to the ends of government, and therefore to the people's good. Though James reproves the church for partiality in over-honouring a man for a gold ring, or gay apparel, yet doth he not go about to abate the honour of authority. Magistracy and riches must be here distinguished.

6. Take heed lest, while you declaim of the misery of the rich, you think to be saved merely for being poor; for, poor or rich, if you be ungodly, you must turn, or die. God doth

not condemn men for their riches, but their sin; nor save any for their poverty, but their faith and piety, through Christ.

But the uses you should make of the text are these:—

1. Grudge not at the prosperity of ungodly men, but compassionate them in their danger and misery.

2. Be not afraid of the prosperity of the wicked. (Psalm xlix. 16—19.) It is they that should be afraid that have so low to fall.

3. Take heed that you desire not riches or prosperity, unless you desire that the way to heaven should be made harder to you, that is so hard already. Be contented with food and raiment. Desire but your daily bread, unless as it is needful for your Master's service, and the relief of others.

4. Honour those ever, with a double honour, that are great and godly, that are rich and religious; not because they are rich, but because they are so strong and excellent in grace as to overcome such great temptations; and to be heavenly in the midst of earthly plenty, and to be faithful stewards of so much. Religious, faithful princes, and magistrates, cannot easily be valued and honoured too much. What wonders are they in the most part of the earth! What a blessing to the people that are ruled by them! Were they not strong in faith, they could not stand fast in such a stormy place. Where is there in the world a more lively resemblance of God than a holy prince or governor, that liveth no more to the flesh than the poorest, for all his abundance of fleshly accommodations, and that devoteth and improveth all his power, and honour, and interest, to the promoting of holiness, love, and concord?

5. Let great men have a double interest in your prayers. They have a double need of grace and help; and we have a double need that they should be gracious. Oh! think how hard it is to save their faith, their innocency, and their souls, and to save the gospel and the public peace in the midst of so many and great temptations; and, therefore, pray hard where prayer is so needful.

And, O that I were now able to speak such enlightening and awakening words to you, as might show you at once your worldly prosperity and the heavenly glory in their proper value! and that God would now open your eyes and hearts accordingly, to esteem and seek them. Gentlemen, will you give this once an impartial hearing, to one that envieth not your wealth, but foreseeth the end of it; and how it will forsake you, and in

how deplorable a case you will then be found, if you have not laid up a treasure in heaven, and secured the everlasting riches. I grudge you not your prosperity, for God doth not grudge it you : yea, the devil himself can afford it you for a time, while you serve him by it, and are captivated to his will in these golden fetters. And say not that it is I that call such fools : you see here it is God, that knoweth what he saith, and feareth not to speak it. But let me, with due submission, propound to your sober consideration these questions which your consciences are concerned to resolve.

Quest. 1. Can any thing prove him truly wise that directly contradicteth the wisdom of the Lord, and valueth most the things that are most vilified by the doctrine and example of Christ and his apostles, and vilifieth that which Christ extolleteth ?

Quest. 2. Can any thing prove that man to be wise that is not wise enough to be saved ? Surely it altereth the case but little, whether Satan be served in English, or in Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, in Spanish, Italian, or French : or whether you go towards everlasting wo in leather or in silk ; and a miserable unsanctified soul do dwell in a comely or deformed body ; and in a stately building or a smoky cottage ; and be titled a lord, a knight, or a ploughman ; and whether he feed on the most delightful or the coarsest food. Alas ! all this will soon be nothing. "The belly for meats, and meats for the belly ; but God will destroy both it and them." (1 Cor. vi. 13.) It is the endless life that puts the estimate upon all things here.

Quest. 3. Is he wise that preferreth a feather to a kingdom ; an hour to eternity ; earth to heaven ? If you say you do not so, let your thoughts, your desires, your delights, your cares, and your labour and diligence, be the witnesses, and conscience and God shall finally judge. A man of reason should never make such a matter of nothing, as if there were so great a difference between riches and poverty, honour and dishonour, and a man's life or happiness consisted in his abundance. As it is usually the badge of empty, childish, brain-sick women, to value a curiosity of attire, and to have mind and time for so many toys, and to make ostentation of their pride and folly, by their curled, spotted, gaudy vanity, as if they were afraid lest they should be unacquainted with it, and should think them wise ; so is it but a more plausible deliration in those that are more taken up with names, and titles, and commands, with houses and

lands, and pompous attendance; and yet more brutish, where lust, and sports, and meats, and drinks, are taken for felicity, while God and heaven stand by neglected, and men forget that they are called Christians, and that they are men.

Quest. 4. Is it wisdom to esteem men by their prosperity and pomp, and to admire a gilded post or an ignorant, adorned wanton; and yet to overlook the divine and heavenly nature of the sanctified, and the beauty of holiness, and the image of God upon an humble, gracious soul, when that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God? (Luke xvi. 15.)

Quest. 5. Is it wisdom to be feasting, and playing, and dancing, while the soul is under the wrath of God, and in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of its iniquity? and by the noise, and business, and pleasures of the world, to be diverted and hindered from the speedy settling and securing your everlasting state? Should not a man of reason, without delay, the first thing he doeth, make sure of his title to eternal happiness, when he is not sure of another hour; and if he miscarry in this, he is undone for ever? Should that time be laughed and played away that hasteth so fast, and is all so short for so great a work as the securing our salvation? Should men and women be courting, and complimenting, and fooling away their precious time, when the work is undone for which they were born into the world, and for which they have their lives, and all their mercies?

Quest. 6. Should all this be done by those that sin against their knowledge, and confess all this while that the world is vanity, and know it will leave them, and that all this is true?

Oh! Sirs, it must needs be the grief of a foreseeing man to think, when you forget it, what a change is coming, and what a sad preparation you are making, and how little a while the music, the feast, the cards and dice, the filthy lusts and wanton dalliance, will continue! and what a lump of self-tormenting desperation will seize upon those careless scornful hearts that now will not be awakened and warmed, nor understand any further than they see or feel! In compassion to those that are passing hence to another world, I beseech you, sometime withdraw yourselves from sensual divertisements, and soberly bethink you whether this be the place and company that you must be with for ever; how long this merry life will last; and whether this be the work that the God of heaven did send you

about into the world; and whether it would be more comfortable to your review when time is gone, to think of your days of sensual delight, or of a holy, and humble, and heavenly conversation; and to hear with Dives, (Luke xvi. 25,) "Son, remember that thou, in thy lifetime, receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." O then you would wish that you had never heard those airy titles, and never possessed those sumptuous houses, nor never tasted those delicious feasts, nor never worn that gay attire, nor never known that deceiving company, nor been polluted and brutified with those beastly lusts! Then conscience will force the now befooled Dives to cry out, 'O that I had been the most despised man on earth while honour did befool me! O that I had lain in medicinal poverty and rags when I took this mortal surfeit of prosperity! O that I had lain in tears and sorrow, when I was infatuated by fleshly mirth and pleasure, and that I had been among the saints that foresaw and provided for this day, when I drowned the voice of Christ and conscience with the laughter of a fool and the noise of worldly business and delights! O then, how revengefully will you befool yourselves, that you had time and knew no better how to use it! and how sensibly will you justify the wisdom of believers who bent their care for things eternal! I am ashamed of my heart that melts not in compassion in the foresight of your wo; and that I beg not of you with tears and importunity to prevent it, and to have mercy on yourselves. Paul had a better heart than I, that ceased not to warn every one, day and night, with tears, (Acts xx. 31,) and speaketh thus of such as you; (Phil. iii. 18, 19;) "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." When the conversation of believers is in heaven, from whence they look for the Lord their Saviour.

I suppose you are afraid of the austerities of religion; and the devil would persuade you that it is but a self-tormenting or hypocritical life that we commend to you under the name of godliness, especially when you see the sadness of some honest souls that are abused by Satan through the advantages of melancholy: but I must profess it is sorrow that I call you from, and would prevent: it is no unnecessary grief that I would persuade you to, but to a life of heavenly peace and joy. If Satan

have abused any servants of Christ, by darkening, and troubling, and discomforting their minds, which is his ordinary endeavour when he can no longer keep men quiet, and careless, and presumptuous in their misery. This is clean contrary to the nature of religion and the commands of Christ, that chargeth them always to rejoice. Do you think that I cannot have more solid joy with my daily bread, in the apprehensions of the love of God, and the belief of his promises of eternal life, than foolish mirth comes to, that is likened to the crackling of thorns in the fire? (Eccles. vii. 6.) You are for mirth, and we are for mirth; but it is a hearty, solid, spiritual, grounded, lasting mirth that we invite you to; and it is a beastly, sensual pleasure that ungodly men desire. For my part, it is almost half my work to promote the joys of true believers, and to dissuade them from such causeless despondencies and troubles as would rob them of their comforts, and God of their love, and thanks, and praise. Had you but tasted once the difference between this inward feast and yours, I should need no more words with you to persuade you that godliness is a life of joy. Dare any of you say, and stand to it, that there is not greater matter for joy in the love of Christ than in the love of a harlot? in the assurance of salvation than in lands and lordships? in the foresight of heaven than in the company of light-headed, voluptuous people, that have not wit enough to be serious, nor faith enough to foresee that which will so sadly and speedily spoil the sport? To be foolishly merry in the midst of misery, doth but make you the objects of greater compassion. Be as merry as you can, so it be grounded, and durable, and caused by that which God, and faith, and solid reason will approve, and doth not tend to greater sorrows. Bethink you well whether Christ and his apostles lived not a more comfortable life than you: and imitate them in their way of mirth and spare not.

But if you are unsanctified, sensual, worldly men, lay by your mirth till you are fitter for it, and take your portion from the apostle James, (v. 1—3, 5,) "Go to now ye rich men; weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten; your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Ye have lived in pleasure on earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter."

What pity is it to see men destroy themselves with the mercies of the Lord! What pity is it to see them so eager for prosperity, and so regardless of the proper use and benefit of it? O be not like the bee that is drowned in her own honey! And do not so greedily desire a greater burden than you can bear; and to have more to answer for, when you have been so unfaithful in a little. And if you believe Christ, who tells you how hardly rich men come to heaven, and how few of them are saved, long not for your danger, and grudge not if you have not these exceeding difficulties to overcome. You would be afraid to dwell in that air where few men escape infection; or to feed on that diet that most are killed by. It is evident by the effects that prosperity befooleth and undoeth the most; we find you on your sick beds in a more tractable frame.

1. Then a man may speak to you about the case of your immortal souls, with less contempt than now we meet with. You look not then for laced speeches, but will more patiently hear our plain discourses of eternal life. 2. Then you will seem serious yourselves, and speak almost like those that you called precisians and puritans, for remembering you of these things in your prosperity. 3. Then you have some better relish of truth and duty; and judge better of the matter and manner of exhortation and prayer than you do now. 4. Then you have more charity and moderation to others; and are not enraged to the destroying of those that are not of your opinions in all your formalities. 5. You would then shake the head at him that should offer you cards, or dice, or fleshly vanities; and you would tell others that it is wiser to be delighted in the law of God, and meditate in it day and night. 6. Then you will speak as contemptuously of the honour, and pleasures, and profits of the world, and of pleasing men before the Lord, as we do now. 7. And then you will confess the preciousness of time; the folly of misspending it; and that one thing is necessary, for which we can never (regularly) do too much. And why are you not now of the mind that you will be at death or judgment, but that your folly doth turn your prosperity to your bane? Once more I beseech you, for the Lord's sake, retire from the deceiving world to God; and if you care where you live to all eternity, choose your abode; and now set your heart upon it, and seek it as your happiness. If all these warnings are refused, conscience shall tell you when you would not hear it, that you were warned.

Had time allowed it, I should next have delivered my message to the humble, upright souls. All you "that hearken to the Lord, shall dwell in safety, and be quiet from the fear of evil." (Isaiah iii. 10.) "Say to the righteous, it shall be well with him.—Wo to the wicked; it shall be ill with him." (Eccles. viii. 12.) "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know it shall be well with them that fear God." (Psalm lxxiii. 1.) "Truly God is good to Israel; even to such as are of a clean heart." (Psalm xxxvii. 5, 28, 34, 37.) "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust in him and he shall bring it to pass. For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints: they are preserved for ever—wait on the Lord and keep his way—and when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

If you say, 'How are they safe that are so tossed by sufferings?' I answer, 1. Is he not safe that hath the promise of God for his security, and is related to him as his child, and hath Christ for his head and Saviour? 2. Is he not safe that is delivered from the wrath of God and the flames of hell, and dare look before him to eternity with hope and comfort? And shall live with Christ in joy for ever? 3. Is he not safe that hath no enemy, but what is in his Father's power. 4. And that hath no hurt but what shall certainly procure his good? 5. Nor any but what we may rejoice in; and is sure shall be the matter of his thanks when it is past? That shall lose nothing but what he hath already forsaken, and esteemeth but as dross and dung? How often have we told God in our prayers, that we had rather have the light of his countenance in adversity, than be strange to him in prosperity? And that he would not refuse that state of suffering, that should be blest to the destruction of our sins, and the furthering our communion with God, and our assurance of salvation, and in which we might most serve and honour him in the world. Did we live by sense, we should misjudge of our estate: but seeing we live by faith, and in the way can see the end, we can say that we are safe in the thickest of our enemies, and will not fear what man can do, while the Almighty is our rock and fortress: well may we be quiet from that fear of evil, when we are saved from the great everlasting evil! No evil shall follow us into heaven: no malice shall there defame us; nor virulent tongue blaspheme our holy profession or our Lord; for the mists of hellish blasphemies shall never ascend to

blot the glory of Christ or of his saints. Who then shall take us out of his hands? Who shall condemn us? It is he that justifieth us; not only against the calumnies of malice, but also against the accusations of Satan for our sin. How safe and quiet are those millions of souls, that are now with Christ? How little are they annoyed, or their joy or melody interrupted, by all the rage of earth or hell! The glory of the sun may sooner be darkened or blemished by obloquy, than their celestial glory; for they are glorified with the glory of their Lord; and rejoice with his joy, and live because he liveth. Be of good cheer, Christians! the haven is within the sight of faith; we are almost there; adversity is our speediest and surest passage: and then let sin, and rage, and malice, do their worst.