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THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

SIR JOHN LUBBOCK'S HUNDRED BOOKS

59

THE

IMITATION OF CHRIST

BY

THOMAS À KEMPIS

TRANSLATED BY

GEORGE STANHOPE, D.D.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HENRY MORLEY

LL.D., PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON

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WESTERN SECTION.

INTRODUCTION

BY

THE RIGHT HON. SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, BART., M.P.
F.R.S., D.C.L., LL.D.

IN the year 1886 I gave an address on "Books and Reading" at the Working Men's College, which in the following year was printed as one of the chapters in my "Pleasures of Life."

In it I mentioned about one hundred names, and the list has been frequently referred to since as my list of "the hundred best books." That, however, is not quite a correct statement. If I were really to make a list of what are in my judgment the hundred greatest books, it would contain several—Newton's "Principia," for instance—which I did not include, and it would exclude several—the "Koran," for instance—which I inserted in deference to the judgment of others. Again, I excluded living authors, from some of whom—Ruskin and Tennyson, Huxley and Tyndall, for instance, to mention no others—I have myself derived the keenest enjoyment; and especially I expressly stated that I did not select the books on my own authority, but as being those most frequently mentioned with approval by those writers who have referred directly or indirectly to the pleasure of reading, rather than as suggestions of my own.

I have no doubt that on reading the list, various names of books which might well be added would occur to almost anyone. Indeed, various criticisms on the list have appeared, and many books have been mentioned which it is said ought to have been included. On the other hand no corresponding omissions have been suggested. I have referred to several of the criticisms, and find that, while 300 or 400 names have been proposed for addition, only half a dozen are suggested for omission. Moreover, it is remarkable that not a single book appears in all the lists, or even in half of them, and only about half a dozen in more than one.

But while, perhaps, no two persons would entirely concur as to all the books to be included in such a list, I believe no one would deny that those suggested are not only good, but among the best.

I am, however, ready, and indeed glad, to consider any suggestions, and very willing to make any changes which can be shown to be improvements. I have indeed made two changes in the list as it originally appeared, having inserted Kalidasa's "Sakoontala,

or The Ring," and Schiller's "William Tell"; omitting Lucretius which is perhaps rather too difficult, and Miss Austen, as English novelists were somewhat over-represented.

Another objection made has been that the books mentioned are known to every one, at any rate by name; that they are as household words. Every one, it has been said, knows about Herodotus and Homer, Shakespeare and Milton. There is, no doubt, some truth in this. But even Lord Iddesleigh, as Mr. Lang has pointed out in his "Life," had never read Marcus Aurelius, and I may add that he afterwards thanked me warmly for having suggested the "Meditations" to him.* If, then, even Lord Iddesleigh, "probably one of the last of English statesmen who knew the literature of Greece and Rome widely and well," had not read Marcus Aurelius, we may well suppose that others also may be in the same position. It is also a curious commentary on what was no doubt an unusually wide knowledge of classical literature that Mr. Lang should ascribe—and probably quite correctly—Lord Iddesleigh's never having had his attention called to one of the most beautiful and improving books in classical, or indeed in any other literature, to the fact that the emperor wrote in "crabbed and corrupt Greek."

Again, a popular writer in a recent work has observed that "why any one should select the best hundred, more than the best eleven, or the best thirty books, it is hard to conjecture." But this remark entirely misses the point. Eleven books, or even thirty, would be very few; but no doubt I might just as well have given 90, or 110. Indeed, if our arithmetical notation had been duodecimal instead of decimal, I should no doubt have made up the number to 120. I only chose 100 as being a round number.

Another objection has been that every one should be left to choose for himself. And so he must. No list can be more than a suggestion. But a great literary authority can hardly perhaps realize the difficulty of selection. An ordinary person turned into a library and sarcastically told to choose for himself, has to do so almost at haphazard. He may perhaps light upon a book with an attractive title, and after wasting on it much valuable time and patience, find that, instead of either pleasure or profit, he has weakened, or perhaps lost, his love of reading.

Messrs. George Routledge and Sons have conceived the idea of publishing the books contained in my list in a handy and cheap form, selecting themselves the editions which they prefer; and I believe that in doing so they will confer a benefit on many who have not funds or space to collect a large library.

JOHN LUBBOCK,

HIGH ELMS,
DOWN, KENT,
30 *March*, 1891.

* I have since had many other letters to the same effect.

INTRODUCTION.

THOMAS HAMMERKEN, born in the year 1380, twenty miles north-west of Düsseldorf, at Kempen in Rhenish Prussia, was the second son of Johann Hammerken, a peasant, and his wife Gertrude, who kept a dame school. Kempen is now a town with a citadel and five or six thousand inhabitants. When about twelve years old, Thomas was sent with his elder brother John to Deventer, a town in the Netherlands, in the province of Overyssel, which is still known for its schools. They went to a famous school in Deventer which had been founded recently by Gerhard Groot.

Gerhard Groot, born in 1340, was the son of Werner Groot, burgomaster at Deventer. At the age of eighteen Gerhard attained the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Paris. Then he taught philosophy and theology at Paris with so much enthusiasm that he was called Gerhard the Great, by a play upon his family name of Groot. He throve at first in worldly life with a couple of good livings, but gave them up on the persuasion of an old fellow-student who had become Prior of the Carthusians at Arnheim. He retired then for three years to a Carthusian House in Munichuysen, was ordained deacon, and, in simple habit, as one vowed to poverty, began to preach reformation of life in the chief towns of the diocese of Utrecht. His attacks upon familiar vices were so direct that he called forth active antagonism. "Let us go to the devil in peace," said a rich man to him at Zwoll. "That is just what I shall

not do," Groot answered mildly. He was at one with Johann Tauler, who had died in 1361, and with others known to the world as German mystics, who respected the whole system of theology, but sought only to lift the souls of men above dogmatic teaching to the spiritual heights of a true Christian life. In his home at Deventer Groot collected copyists, who were to diffuse the Scriptures and the writings of the early Fathers of the Church. He allowed his copyists to form themselves into a community supported by its earnings and based on the apostolical ideal; from this model sprang a hundred other little communities of the same kind. The Mendicant Orders then attacked these religious brotherhoods, because they lived by the work of their hands and this was against the decrees of the Popes. Groot defended the new brotherhoods, and in 1376 they were formally approved by Pope Gregory XI. In 1381 a visit to Ruysbroek suggested to Gerhard Groot the formation of a Religious House as centre to the whole life of the various brotherhoods formed on the model of his brotherhood of Bible copyists (there were in those days no printers). Three years afterwards, in 1384, Groot died of the plague, which he had caught in attendance upon a plague-stricken friend; but in 1386 a monastery of regular canons of his Order was founded at Windesheim, near Zwoll, which is about eighteen miles to the north of Deventer. Within the next seventy-five years there sprang up a hundred and fifty Houses, formed according to the rule of these regular canons of Windesheim.

One of the most earnest of the disciples of Gerhard Groot was Florentius Radewin, whom Gerhard named as his successor. He was born in 1350 at Leerdam, in South Holland, and had studied at Prague. Drawn to Deventer by interest in the work of Gerhard Groot, he became vicar of the church of St. Lebuin in Deventer. It was he who had persuaded Gerhard to the shaping of his "Brotherhood of the Common Life," or "Brotherhood of Good Will," that formed at last a chain of Houses, *Fratrum Domi*, extending from Cambray in the Netherlands across North Germany to Culm in West Prussia. Each House had usually four officiating priests, the rest were brethren, employed in handicrafts and copying, and students, as young

Thomas was, who, when he entered the House at Deventer, over which Florentius Radewin himself presided, was known among his companions as Thomas from Kempen—Thomas à Kempis. Gerhard's fundamental principle in teaching was, "Make the Gospels, first of all, the root of your studies and the mirror of your life, for they portrayed the character of Christ. Then you may add the Acts and Words of the Apostles, the Epistles of St. Paul, the lives and opinions of the Fathers and their devotional works." In Radewin's school at Deventer Thomas à Kempis said that he found all modelled upon the humility of the Apostles and forming a mirror of piety, all the brethren being of one heart and one mind, self-denying, devout, and full of mercy. The House founded at Windesheim was soon followed by another on Mount St. Agnes, near Zwoll; and because he desired calm health of mind, not sickly craziness or self-glorification in religion, Radewin put these three questions to those who desired to join his community: "Do you eat well?" "Do you sleep well?" "Do you obey readily?"

Thomas à Kempis, whose mind was essentially contemplative, when he left Deventer was advised by Radewin to join the community on Mount St. Agnes under Radewin's brother John. Their convent was placed under the Augustinian rule, and the brothers there supported themselves as copyists. Thomas à Kempis copied much, and wrote various little books on the religious life. He became Sub-Prior, but had not experience enough of the outer world to be of much use as Prefect over the domestic arrangements of the House, and was set aside after short trial in that office. He lived to be ninety, and died in the year 1471. The "Imitation of Christ," perhaps the most famous devotional book in modern literature, was issued simply, without any author's name, when Thomas à Kempis was forty-five years old. Fontenelle called it "the finest work that has proceeded from the pen of man, the Gospel being of divine origin."

Until the end of the sixteenth century the authorship of the book was never doubted. In 1604 a Spanish student found the book quoted in what he supposed to be a sermon of Bonaventura, who died in 1273, and claimed for it accordingly a much earlier

origin. But that sermon was not by St. Bonaventura. It was written after the death of Thomas à Kempis. The controversy, however, went on. Authorship of the famous book was claimed for John Scotus Erigena, for St. Bernard, for Giovanni Gerso, for Pope Innocent III., for Scoto Giovanni, Thomas Gallus, David of Augsburg, Bonaventura, Ubertin of Cassalis, Peter de Corbaris, Ludolf of Saxony, Kalkar, Humbert, Martinus Carthus, Giovanni Michele, Joannes Paumerii, John Gerson, Chancellor of Paris; Walter Hilton, a monk of Sheen; John à Kempis, Thomas's elder brother; and John of Canabacho, wherever that may be. Few living books have given occasion for more extensive wanderings about the desert of dead learning.

The translation here given is by Dr. George Stanhope, who was Dean of Canterbury and Chaplain-in-Ordinary to the King. It was first published in 1696, and is the translation that has been commonly used in England. It went through seventeen editions from 1696 to 1809. Dr. Stanhope is not free from the usual objection to translators of religious books. He has endeavoured as a translator to expand his text by addition of words, clauses, and even sentences, that do not alter the purport and order of the thoughts, but give more time for dwelling upon each link in the chain. The pithy style of the original is thus lost in flowing sentences that pleased the readers of Queen Anne's reign. The book is a very good example of translation on this principle. Thomas à Kempis speaks through Dr. Stanhope in the language of a modern divine. And the whole voice is so true for every time that the spirit of the book suffers no change by interferences with petty details of the outward form that suffers alteration with the lapse of years.

H. M.

June 1886.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

Of the Contempt of the Vanities of the World.

"HE that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," says that Christ, who declares Himself "the light of the world." The true importance and design of which words is doubtless to instruct us that the way to be truly enlightened, and to deliver ourselves from a blindness of heart, is to make His holy life the object of our imitation, and to form our dispositions and actions upon the perfect model of that bright example. But how shall we follow a pattern which we but little think of? The first step therefore toward thus copying after Him, is the employing our thoughts, with great frequency and serious attention, upon the perfections of this divine original.

2. The doctrine taught by Christ excels all the instructions delivered to mankind, by all the holy men that ever lived. And every man, endued with a true Christian spirit, will not fail there to find a hidden manna, like that of old, fitted both to nourish and minister delight to his soul. The true account then why men hear the Gospel without any sensible relish, or eager desire, is, that they are not endued with the spirit of Christ. This is a treasure found of them

only who desire to find it; and a man must resolve and endeavour to form his whole conversation upon the principles of that doctrine, before he can attain to a full understanding of its excellence, and feel an inward satisfaction in the study of it.

3. And here indeed lies the true benefit of meditation and knowledge. For, without this, how poor and unprofitable a thing is speculation? What is a man the better for entering into the sublime mysteries of the Trinity, and being able to dispute nicely upon that adorable Union, if in the meanwhile he want that meekness and humility without which he must needs lie under the displeasure of the Trinity? 'Certain it is, that distinctions and notions, though ever so subtle or serviceable to the truth, do not make a man just and holy: but a careful and conscientious life recommends us to the favour and love of God. I had rather be affected with a true penitent sorrow for sin, than be able to resolve the most difficult cases about it. Suppose you had all the Bible faithfully treasured up in your memory, and a perfect comprehension of all the moral philosophy in the world; to what purpose serves this mighty stock of rules, if not drawn out into use by charity, and seconded by divine grace? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," said the Preacher; and his observation admits of that single exception, taken notice of in the conclusion of his book, "love God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole of man." He who would approve himself wise in good earnest, must first, by a just contempt of this world, raise himself up to the desires and endeavours after the kingdom of heaven.

4. Vanity most certainly it is, with great solicitude to seek, and place our hope and confidence in riches, which are sure to perish. Vanity, to cherish our ambition, and strive, by all possible means, to attain a high and honourable station. Vanity, to indulge the desires of the flesh, and court those pleasures which draw after them grievous

and lasting pains. Vanity most exquisite, to be infinitely concerned for living long, and perfectly indifferent, or but coldly affected, concerning living well. Vanity most fatal and stupid, to determine our thoughts and cares to this life present, and never look forward to that which is to come: to dote upon things that fly swiftly from us, and cling fast about imaginary and transitory delights; while we suffer ourselves by these to be detained and diverted from the pursuit of substantial and eternal joys

5. Oh, turn this vehemence of desire upon the right object, and remember to how little purpose it is placed on that which cannot give content: since most true is that observation, which ought to make us wiser, "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." Use then thy utmost diligence to wean thy soul from "the love of the things that are seen, and set thy affections on things that are not seen." For be assured, that they who follow their own sensual appetites, do lose, not only their labour and expectation, but also their innocence and purity, the peace of their own conscience, and the favour of Almighty God.

CHAPTER II.

Modesty.

THE desire of knowledge is natural to every man, but what advantage is it to be knowing, if that knowledge be not seasoned with virtue and religion? The vilest peasant, and he whom we in scorn think least removed from a brute, if he serve God according to the best of his mean capacity, is yet a better and more valuable man than the proudest philosopher, who busies himself in considering the motions of the heavens, but bestows no reflection at all upon those of his own mind. The certain consequence of knowing a

man's self truly, is a mean opinion of himself, and not being exalted with the commendations of other people. And supposing my knowledge so vast and extensive, that nothing this world contains were hid from it; yet what would all this avail me in the sight of God, who, when He comes to judgment, will try me upon the issue, not of what I have known, but what I have done?

2. Restrain that extreme desire of increasing learning, which at the same time does but increase sorrow, by involving the mind in much perplexity and false delusion. For such are fond of being thought men of wisdom, and respected as such; and yet this boasted learning of theirs consists in many things which a man's mind is very little, if at all, the better for the knowledge of. And sure, whatever they may think of the matter, he who bestows his time and pains upon things that are of no service for promoting the happiness of his soul, ought by no means to be esteemed a wise man. Words and notions give no inward satisfaction; but a virtuous life never fails to comfort and refresh the mind, and to minister the best antidote against all manner of difficulties; for such is a good conscience, and a well-grounded "confidence towards God," which is its inseparable attendant.

3. The more a man knows, and the better those subjects are upon which his studies have been employed, the heavier shall his account be, unless his piety and virtue be proportionably eminent and exemplary. So little reason have we to be exalted with our attainments; and not rather to fear more, as we improve more in knowledge. And what improvements indeed can possibly be so great, as to justify our being proud of them? For no man can ever want this mortification of his vanity, that what he knows is but a very little, in comparison of what he still continues ignorant of. Consider this, and, instead of boasting of thy knowledge of a few things, confess and be out of countenance for the many more which thou dost not understand. And

why so forward to prefer thyself before others, when there are so many persons whose learning and skill in the rules of living give them an undoubted right to be preferred before you? If you would attain to useful learning indeed, learn to conceal your attainments, and be content that the world should think meanly of you. For lowliness of mind, and not thinking of a man's self "more highly than he ought to think," is the most difficult, but withal the most profitable, lesson; and the preferring others before ourselves, is a point of true wisdom and high perfection. Nor ought our opinions of this kind to be changed, though we should see another guilty of some egregious folly, or very grievous wickedness, since we ourselves are men of like passions and frailties; nor can we tell how long our own virtue may continue unshaken. Remember then, that infirmities are common to all mankind; and so remember it, as to persuade yourself, or at least to suspect, that these are dealt to thee in as plentiful a measure as to any other person whatsoever.

CHAPTER III.

The Doctrine of Truth.

BLESSED is the man whom truth condescends to teach; not by dark figures, and words quickly forgotten, but by a full and familiar communication of itself. Happy should we be, could we but see things as they are, free from the errors of our fond opinions, and the false estimates we form from thence. How high a value do we set upon the knack of distinguishing and disputing nicely, in matters hid from common apprehensions; but matters, too, which to know nothing of will not render a man's case one whit the worse at the day of judgment? Egregious and elaborate folly! which overlooks useful and necessary points, as

things not worthy our regard, and bends our industry to find out those, which either turn to no account, or what is worse than none. Thus taking pains to be ignorant at last, and verifying in our own selves the prophet's description of the heathen idols, which "have eyes, and yet see not."

Why should we then, with such eager toil, strive to be masters of logical definitions? Or what do our abstracted speculations profit us? He, whom the Divine Word instructs, takes a much shorter cut to truth: for from this world alone all saving knowledge is derived, and without this no man understands or judges aright. But he who reduces all his studies to, and governs himself by, this rule, may establish his mind in perfect peace, and rest himself securely upon God. O Thou whose very essence is truth, unite me to Thyself in perfect love! The variety of other subjects tires and distracts my soul; in Thee alone I find the sum of all my wishes and desires. Should all our teachers be for ever dumb, and this great volume of the creatures continue shut to us, we might dispense with all the rest, if Thou wouldst vouchsafe Thy own information, and teach us by Thyself.

The better acquainted any man is with himself, the more he converses with and retires into his own breast; and the less he wanders abroad and dwells upon things without him, the more extensive and sublime is his knowledge, and the more easily attained. Because this man receives and is directed by a ray darted from heaven into his soul. A mind sincere and pure and firm, is not diverted by multiplicity of objects. For the honour of God is its constant aim; and, having but one end to pursue, it is in perfect peace and unity with itself, and does not divide its thoughts in vanity and self-love. For what can be a greater hindrance than our own ambitious and ungoverned passion? A truly good and pious man first orders and disposes all his business regularly, before he enters upon the execution of any design; he suffers no vicious inclination to divert him, but makes every undertaking submit to the dictates of reason and religion.

The sharpest as well as noblest conflict is that wherein we to gain a conquest over ourselves; and this should be our principal and constant care, to get ground every day, by bringing our passions more and more under, and becoming more masterly proficients in virtue and goodness.

Nor may we suppose any degree of virtue so exalted that it should cease to be a state of proficiency; for such is the condition of mortals, that their utmost possible perfection in this life, is ever embased with an alloy of imperfection; and their brightest notions are clouded with some confusion and obscurity. But in the study of ourselves we are best capable of avoiding mistakes. Therefore a true sense of what we are, and that humility which cannot but proceed from such a sense, is a surer way of bringing us to God than the most laborious and profound inquiries after knowledge. Not that learning is in its own nature blamable; for the understanding of anything whatsoever, considered simply and as it really is, ought to be acknowledged commendable and good; the gift and ordinance of God. But the danger is, when we give this the precedence in our esteem, before things abundantly better: I mean a good conscience, and a virtuous conversation. The true reason then why, in an age where learning is had in universal admiration, so little profit is made, and both error and vice do notwithstanding so wretchedly abound, is, in truth, no other than that men generally mistake their main business and proper excellence. They had rather cultivate their parts than their manners, and account it a greater accomplishment to know much than to live well.

Oh! would men but bestow half the pains in rooting out vice and planting virtue in its stead, which they are content to throw away upon captious and unprofitable questions, and the "opposition of science," falsely so called, what a blessed reformation should we see? Then would not the vulgar and meaner sort abandon themselves to such scandalous, brutish, and abominable wickedness. Nor

would the men of sense and learning and quality continue so profligate and dissolute in their manners, and blemish, as they do, their honour and attainments with shameless and licentious impurities. Surely this could not be, did men but consider at all that a day of judgment there will come, wherein measures will be taken very different from ours; when the inquiry, upon which our affairs must all turn, will be, not how much we have heard or read, but how much we have done; not how eloquent our expressions, but how pure and devout our lives; how much our manners, not our capacity or breeding, our wit or rhetoric, distinguished us from common men. But, if the credit and honour of the thing were the only consideration, yet even thus, where is the fruit of all this mighty toil? What is become of all the eminent divines, philosophers, lawyers, orators, persons celebrated far and near just at the time when they lived and flourished; but now somebody else enjoys the gains of all that learning and fatigue; and 'tis odds whether he that lives upon their labours even so much as sends one thought after them. These men, so eminent in their respective professions, no doubt thought themselves considerable in their own time; but now that time is gone, and they are lost in universal silence. Their very names are buried as deep as their bodies; and the one was scarce sooner out of sight than the other out of all mention and remembrance.

Ah, wretched men! How have you been deluded? How short and withering a good does that fame and reputation prove, which you vainly promised yourselves would be eternal; always fresh and flourishing, always precious in the mouths and memories of posterity? But this, and no better, is the condition of all worldly honour. Oh! had you but been equally careful to improve in piety, and rendered your virtues as eminent as your learning, your studies then had not been fruitless; but followed with a recompense, which would not thus have forsaken you. But this is the fatal error of our age, that infinite numbers are destroyed by

unprofitable knowledge. They lay themselves out upon subtilties and curiosities, which turn to no account; and the only thing which can make them amends at last, religion and the service of God, that they gave themselves no manner of trouble about, but slight, as not worth their care or thought. The great occasion of the fantastical opinions and dangerous corruptions with which the world is pestered is certainly this, that men propose no end to their studies but to be great, and to have other people think as highly of them as they do of themselves. And, because of all things they detest humility and a submission to truth, God gives them the due reward of their vanity, and suffers them to be seduced by their own absurdities and "imaginations." If then we would be great, let us take the proper course for it: for none is truly so but he that abounds in the love of God and in good works; none is truly so, but he who thinks modestly of himself, and is got above the temptations of ambition and vainglory. The man who is wise to purpose, counts all that this world can boast of but "dross and dung, that he may win Christ." And he is an expert and learned man indeed who hath learnt to give the preference to God's will before his own; who resolutely complies with His commands, and as resolutely denies his own inclinations.

CHAPTER IV.

Prudence in our Behaviour.

"BE not too hasty in believing every word," nor the suggestions of "every spirit;" but consider coolly and leisurely, and make a conscience of giving your credit with due caution. Men are much more prone (the greater is the pity) both to speak and believe ill than well of their neigh-

bours. This is our infirmity and unhappiness; but a good man will consider and make allowances for it. And the effect of this consideration will be, the suspending his assent, and neither believing all he hears nor officiously reporting all he believes.

It is an argument of great wisdom to do nothing rashly, nor to be obstinate and inflexible in our opinions. And the cautiousness I just now recommended, in crediting and spreading reports, is a necessary branch of the same perfection. Advise in your affairs with wise and good men; and think it more for your reputation to be instructed by those who understand better, than to act upon your own head. A virtuous life makes a man prudent in God's esteem, and gives true conduct and experience. The more humble and observant we are to His directions, the better we shall behave ourselves, and the greater satisfaction and peace of mind we shall find resulting from all we do.

CHAPTER V.

Of Reading the Holy Scriptures.

we should propose to ourselves in this study, is the discerning and discovery of truth, not the observing quaintness and propriety of expression. The Book of God indeed should be perused with the same spirit and temper by which it was dictated. And as the Holy Ghost intended the profit of mankind more than niceness of words and phrases, so should we aim at growing better livers, rather than wiser or more accurate speakers, by what He hath delivered. To persons thus disposed, the plainest and most pious parts of Scripture will minister a delight equal to those which are more mysterious and sublime. The

authority and skill of the penman should be of little weight with us. Nor matters it whether he were one of great or mean attainments; for the love and desire of truth is the proper motive to study; and the substance of what is spoken, not the person who speaks, ought principally to be considered. "All flesh is grass, but the word of the Lord abideth for ever;" and this Word speaks to us in different manners, without any partial respect of persons.

One great inconvenience in reading the Scriptures, is our own vain curiosity. We lose much of the benefit which might otherwise be gathered from them, by pretending to nice disquisitions of difficult points, and labouring to bring to the standard of our own imperfect reason what we should be content to receive with the simplicity of a humble obedience, and place to the account of divine faith. If you would read them, and profit by that reading, you must do it with a submissive and humble, a sincere and teachable, disposition of mind; and account it a greater excellence to believe what God hath said, than to affect the reputation of learning, by singularity of opinions, and a bold attempt to bring down all He says to your own comprehension. If in some things you find occasion to doubt or distrust your own judgment, consult wise and holy persons, and submit patiently to hear and be informed by them. Nor let a vain conceit of your own abilities produce contempt of the aphorisms and parables of the ancients. For, be well assured, they were not uttered at all adventures; but they who delivered these proverbial sentences, knew them to be the result of long and judicious observation.

CHAPTER VI.

Of Inordinate Affections.

THE moment a man cherishes any immoderate desire, he feels a tempest rising in his soul. Pride and covetousness never suffer us to rest; but the poor and lowly in heart, the humble and the contented, enjoy themselves in a profound and perpetual calm. He that is still in conflict with his passions, and hath not yet attained a complete victory over them, is easily tempted, and often finds himself overborne by things not worth his concern. For the remains of a carnal spirit, and the strong tendencies to pleasures of sense, will not suffer a man, without great difficulty, to draw his mind off from worldly affections. And therefore, while he is endeavouring to do this, he endeavours it with sore travail and pain; commits a violence upon himself, and is provoked to anger and indignation against all that opposes him in so laborious an undertaking.

But if he indulge those desires, and succeed in them, the consequence is worse this way than the other. For then he is stung with remorse for his guilty compliance, and discontented to find that the gratifying his inclination does not yield the satisfaction he promised himself from it. This convinces him by sad experience that true peace and content is never to be had by obeying his appetites, but by an obstinate resistance of them. And such peace cannot be expected in the breast of any sensual man; for it is the peculiar portion and happiness of a soul raised above the world, a zealous and devout, a mortified and refined, and heavenly disposition of spirit.

CHAPTER VII.

Directions for avoiding Pride and vain Confidences.

To put our trust in man, or in any other creature, is most egregious vanity. Think it not below you to submit to the meanest good offices for the service of your brethren and the sake of Jesus Christ; nor count it any shame to be thought poor and mean in this world. Do your own endeavour honestly and faithfully; and never doubt of God's assistance. Depend not upon your own wisdom, and place not any confidence in the greatest man living; but let your whole trust rest entirely upon the favour of God, who bringeth down and "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble, and exalteth those who are content to abase themselves."

Boast not of riches, because they are in your present possession; nor of friends, because they have power and interest; but if you will glory, glory in God, who is able to give all things, and willing to give that which is better than all, even Himself. And why should the strength and beauty of your person puff you up with pride, when it is in the power of a very little sickness to bring upon you extreme weakness and odious deformity? If you be inclined to value your wit and address above due measure, remember from what hand these come, and do not provoke the Giver by abusing the gift.

Fancy not yourself better than your neighbours, for fear that God, who knows what is in every man, think the worse of you upon that account. Nay, value not yourself even for what you have done well, for God judgeth not as man judgeth; and what we often are highly satisfied with, He sometimes thinks not fit so much as to approve. If you be conscious of anything good in yourself, think that the same, or better, qualities may likewise be found in others; for

while you allow their excellences, it will be no difficult matter to preserve a modest opinion of your own. There can come no harm of supposing every other man better than yourself; but the supposing any man worse than yourself may be attended with very ill consequences. "The meek," says the Scripture, "is refreshed in the multitude of peace;" but the proud in spirit is "like a troubled sea," perpetually tossed and driven by the fierce commotions of anger and emulation and envy and disdain, which never suffer him to be easy and composed.

CHAPTER VIII.

Against too general an Acquaintance and inconvenient Freedoms in Conversation.

"OPEN not thine heart to every man," but make choice of prudent and religious persons to disclose thy affairs to. Frequent not the company of young men and strangers; flatter not the rich, neither affect to be seen in the presence of great men: but associate thyself with the devout, the virtuous, the humble; and contrive that thy discourse be profitable. Desire not the intimate acquaintance of women; but, instead of thy conversation, let them have thy prayers; and recommend the preservation and the reward of their virtue to God. Converse as much as may be with God, with His holy angels, with thy own conscience; and complain not for want of company, nor think it an unhappiness to have but few acquaintance when thou hast so good company as this always at hand.

Our charity indeed should be universal, and extend to all mankind; but it is by no means convenient our friendships and familiarities should do so too. We often find that a person, altogether unknown to us, comes recommended by

a good character, which makes us passionately fond of his acquaintance; and yet this very man, when better known, loses the great opinion we conceived of him before, and grows palled and flat upon our hands. And this we may be sure is no less likely to prove our own case: for the persons with whom we hope to ingratiate ourselves by a freer acquaintance, frequently discover some ill quality in us which makes us less acceptable. And therefore, in prudence and tenderness to ourselves, and others both, we should be sparing in our intimacies; because it so very often happens that the more perfectly men are understood, the less they are esteemed.

CHAPTER IX.

Obedience and a State of Subjection.

It is a very valuable advantage to live under the direction of a superior; and whatever the generality of men think of the matter, more difficult and hazardous to command than to obey. Many submit more out of necessity than out of any principle of duty or choice; and, to such as these, this is a state of continual torment. All they do is against the grain, attended with constant murmurings and complaints; the life of slaves and brutes, and not of man, who should act with a spirit of freedom. And this native liberty no inferior attains to till he have learnt to obey heartily, for God's and conscience sake. Whatever post you form an idea of, none will give you quiet and inward content, equal with that of a state of subjection. Many have fed themselves with fond imaginations, how happy they should be if they could change their condition for a higher; but few, if any, who have actually made the experiment, have found themselves at all the happier or easier for it.

'Tis true, indeed, every man's own judgment is the proper rule and measure of his actions; and hence it comes to pass, that we are all best affected to them who are of the same opinion with ourselves. But 'tis as true, that if God rule in our hearts, we shall not think much to recede from our own sense in some cases, when peace and the public good may be promoted by such concessions. For who is absolutely and completely wise, that nothing escapes his knowledge? If then our knowledge be but partial and imperfect, 'tis but reasonable we should not abound too much in our own sense, but allow a fair hearing, at least to those who differ from us. And, in such cases, a man gains a great point when he knows himself in the right, and yet in tenderness and charity can comply with the infirmities or mistakes of others, rather than offend God, by being too tenacious of his own better judgment.

I have frequently been told, that it is much safer to take advice than to give it. For a man may have considered and determined well; and yet there may be some cases which may make it reasonable to depart from that determination, and give ourselves up to be determined by other persons. And when these cases happen, to refuse such compliances, manifestly betrays our own self-conceit, and is not constancy but obstinacy of spirit.

CHAPTER X.

Few Words are Best.

DECLINE crowds and company as much as conveniently you may. For frequent discourse, even of news or indifferent things, which happens upon such occasions, is sometimes an obstruction to virtue, when least intended or suspected: so

to be. The world and its vanities easily take hold of us, and our minds are ensnared and captivated before we are aware. How often have I found reason to wish, that I had not been in company, or that I had said nothing, when I was there! If we examine how it comes to pass that mutual conversation gives so great delight, notwithstanding we so seldom enjoy that pleasure with perfect innocence; the true account, I think, is this, that we find ourselves diverted by discourse, and unbend our thoughts from severer studies: that what we desire and are most fond of, or what we have the greatest aversion to, lies uppermost in our minds; and therefore we propose some ease in discharging ourselves upon these subjects.

But how very seldom do we find that ease we propose by doing so! For this outward consolation mightily takes off from that inward and spiritual satisfaction, in which true happiness consists. Therefore it is our duty to watch and pray, and to fill up the empty spaces of life with these holy and retired exercises. And if at any time the refreshments of company be chosen and convenient, a strict guard should be set upon our tongues, that they utter nothing amiss; but improve these very diversions to the edification of ourselves, and them that hear us. Impertinent and lavish talking is in itself a very vicious habit, and a wretched hindrance to our spiritual proficiency. And these two considerations ought to make us extremely cautious in our conversation. But it is the privilege of virtuous and religious discourse, that piety and goodness are wonderfully promoted by such conferences; and then, especially, when persons of the like heavenly spirit and temper frequent one another's company, with a design of improving by it.

CHAPTER XI.

Of Peace of Mind and a Desire of Improvement

MEN might live quiet and easy enough, if they would be careful not to give themselves trouble, and forbear meddling with what other people do and say, in which they are no way concerned. But how should he be easy, who makes other men's cares his own? who industriously seeks disquiet, and when he might rest in peace within doors, goes abroad to invite and fetch disturbance home to his house; who takes such pains and spends so much time to inquire into the affairs of neighbours and strangers altogether foreign to him; and seldom or never descends into his own breast, that he may examine and understand himself. "Blessed are the meek," says the Scripture, "for they shall inherit the earth peaceably, and increase their joy in the Lord."

Whence is it, think you, that some holy persons can so perfectly abstract themselves from the concerns of this world, and find such satisfaction in their divine retirements and solitary contemplations? From hence, no doubt; that they have made it their business to mortify all earthly and sensual affections, and so have devoted themselves entirely to God, and are at liberty to attend upon Him without distraction. But we find the case much otherwise with us, because our passions interrupt our piety, and the transitory things of this world continue tenderly to affect us. We seldom gain an entire conquest over any one ill habit; nor are we zealous to make every day we live a step to higher degrees of virtue. This is the reason why we are so cold and insensible, or at best but lukewarm and indifferent, in the exercises of piety and private meditation.

Were we but, as we ought to be, dead to the world and our own lusts, disentangled from those chains and snares

within, that hamper and keep our souls down to matter and sense; then should we also relish acts of devotion, and be ravished with marvellous joy when our thoughts are fixed on God and heaven. The only, or the greatest, bar to these spiritual delights proceeds from passions unsubdued; and from our own sloth, which cares not to encounter difficulties, nor aspires to the perfection of the saints. Hence is that tameness and dejection of spirit, so visible, so scandalous, when any little misfortune comes across us: hence our vain confidence and anxious care, which seeks and depends upon human helps and remedies; and neglects God, our only sufficient refuge and deliverer.

Would we but quit ourselves like men, and resolutely stand our ground, we should not fail of succours from above. God is always ready to strengthen those who strive lawfully, and place their hope in the assistance of His heavenly grace: He means our very hardships and dangers for our good, and engages us in new conflicts and temptations that He may make our victories more glorious, and qualify us for a brighter crown. If we content ourselves with the observance of the outward duties only, and suppose this is the utmost perfection necessary for us, we bring religion into a very narrow compass, and may quickly get to the end of it. But, alas! the main of our business lies within. The axe must be laid to the root of the tree, and our sensual appetites quite cut down, before we can attain to true pleasure in holiness and a peaceful serenity of mind.

Would we but impose upon ourselves the task of mortifying a fresh lust and conquering a vicious habit every year, even thus in a little time we might attain to some perfection. But, alas! we often take the direct contrary course; and are generally more wary, more devout, more zealous to do well, and to avoid evil, when we first enter upon a religious life than after we have spent some time in it. The fervour of our affection, which ought in reason to grow every day

stronger and brighter, cools and goes out again; and we reckon it a great matter if our zeal can be kept up to the same warmth which we felt at its first kindling. We are too tender of our ease, and loth to put ourselves upon the stretch; whereas, would we but use a little severity and submit to some violence at first, that trouble would quickly wear off, and all our progress in virtue would prove, not easy and tolerable only, but even a delight and wonderful satisfaction to us.

'Tis hard, I own, to part with our old friends, and to unlearn habits to which we have been long accustomed. And harder yet it is to enter into a formal war with our own inclinations, and obstinately to deny what we eagerly desire. But if we do not conquer smaller difficulties, what will become of us when assaulted by greater? If we do not resist our natural propensions at first, before inclination is strengthened by custom, the enemy will gather strength. Every day's practice is a fresh reinforcement; and the longer the delay, the greater will be the difficulty. Oh, think of this in time, and consider the happy effects of an early and serious piety: what peace, what triumphs to yourselves! what joy to others, to God and Christ, to angels and good men, you will certainly procure by behaving yourselves gallantly in this spiritual warfare! This sure will balance all the hardships of virtue, reproach your cowardice and sloth, provoke and inflame your diligence and courage, and make you zealous, resolute, impatient to grow in grace and advance every day in spiritual perfection.

CHAPTER XII.

The Advantage of Afflictions.

"IT is good for me that I have been in trouble," says David. Nor is it David's case alone; for many men have reason to bless that Providence which sends crosses and calamities upon them. These bring a man's thoughts home, put him upon reflection, and help him to understand himself and his condition. They show him that he is in a state of exile and pilgrimage, and forbid him to set up his hope and rest in a strange country, where he is no better than a sojourner.

Nor is it thus with those sufferings alone which the immediate hand of Heaven inflicts, but even those whereof men are the instruments. The injuries and contumelious usage, the calumnies and censures of them who speak and think ill of us, bring their profit with them too, even when most wrongful, most undeserved. For these oftentimes are an occasion of rectifying our measures, as bringing us to a juster and more modest opinion of ourselves. They cure our ambition and vainglory, and convince us how vain a thing it is to thirst after reputation and the praise of men, when even innocence and goodness cannot protect us from slander and reproaches. They teach us to set a due value upon the testimony of our own consciences, and the righteous approbation of God, the searcher of hearts; when that which He will not fail to commend and reward cannot escape the contempt and condemnation of the world, nor prevail for so much as fair quarter from our mistaken and injurious brethren.

It is therefore both our duty and our wisdom so entirely to place our happiness and expectations in God alone, that we shall not need to be extremely solicitous for many outward comforts, or feel ourselves destitute, or much

dejected, when any of these happen to fail or forsake us. For when a well-disposed man is oppressed with sufferings and temptations, or perplexed with evil thoughts, he then feels, experimentally, how necessary the divine assistance is, and how little he is able to do or endure without it; then he is touched with inward remorse, then does he groan in secret, and in the anguish of his heart pour out his requests for relief and deliverance; then even life itself becomes a burthen, and death desirable, as that which will translate him from this valley of tears and corruption, to a life of immortality with his God and Redeemer. In a word, such circumstances as these are more effectual than ten thousand arguments to convince him, by his own sensible experience, that perfect security and entire satisfaction are not so much as consistent with the condition of man in this present world; and therefore we must be content to wait another and future state, which alone deserves our affections, because it alone can make us truly and completely happy.

CHAPTER XIII.

Of Resisting Temptations.

So long as we continue in this world, we must not flatter ourselves with an imagination so vain as that of being exempted from tribulations and trials. These are so inseparable from mortality, that Job calls the life of man a "warfare," or "place of exercise." It highly concerns every one of us upon this account to take great care for managing himself under his temptations; to watch and pray diligently; as being duly sensible that he hath a watchful enemy to deal with, one who will not fail to take all

advantages of deceiving, and who "goes about continually, seeking whom he may devour." Nor must our attainments in virtue dispose us to remit of this care, for virtue is no absolute security. No man is so perfect, so holy, as never to be assaulted, or out of the reach of this adversary. We may defend ourselves against his attacks, but still attacked we must, and most certainly shall be.

Now though there be great hazard and uneasiness, yet is there likewise great profit to be made from temptations. Particularly, as they contribute to the humbling our minds, to the purging off our dross, and the making us wiser by suffering. This is the rough way to happiness which all the saints of God have travelled before us, and by it at last were safe conducted to their journey's end; and they who fell off and were discouraged at the ruggedness of the passage, are all reprobates and castaways. No order or profession of men is so sacred, no place so remote or solitary, but that temptations and troubles will find them out and intrude upon them.

Nor ought it to seem strange that these should haunt and pursue us close, at all times and places; since we ourselves carry about us the very matter of our temptations, and can never run away from that inborn concupiscence upon which they work, and from whence they take occasion to destroy us. This is the account we may reasonably give ourselves, why there should be such an uninterrupted succession of temptations and miseries, and why one trouble should press so hard upon the heels of another. For how indeed can it be otherwise; since with our innocence we lost our safety and happiness, and must be born to trouble, because the ground of our trouble is now become a part of our nature? Many men involve themselves deeper in temptations, by being too solicitous to decline them. For we must not suppose ourselves always to have conquered a temptation when we have fled from it. The nobler, and sometimes the more effectual way, is to van-

quish them by patient enduring, and being humbled under them.

Thus much is plain, that by declining a temptation we have not disarmed it. The root is standing still, and will soon be sprouting again; and a man who flees is so far from getting ground upon his adversary, that he rather gives him encouragement to pursue more vigorously. The way to overcome is by patience and long-suffering; which, by God's assistance, and by degrees, though perhaps but slow ones, is more likely to succeed, than heat and vehemence, and any the violentest and most obstinate efforts of our own strength. When you find yourselves tempted, be sure to ask advice; and when you see another so, deal with him gently; support him with compassion, and administer all the comfort in your power, as you could not but wish to be treated yourself were you in his afflicted circumstances.

The beginning of all temptations to wickedness, is the fickleness of our own mind and want of trust in God. An inconstant and irresolute man is like a ship without a pilot, driven to and fro, at the mercy of every gust of wind. "Metals are tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of affliction." We seldom know the true extent of our own power till temptation discover it to us. But watchfulness, which is always necessary, is chiefly so when the first assaults are made. For the enemy is more easily repulsed if we never suffer him to get within us, but upon the very first approach draw up our forces, and fight him without the gate. 'Twas well advised of the poet—

> "Take physic early; med'cines come too late
> When the disease is grown inveterate."

And this will be more manifest, if we observe by what methods and degrees temptations grow upon us. The first thing that presents itself to the mind is a plain single thought; this straight is improved into a strong imagination; that again enforced by a sensible delight; then follow evil

motions; and when these are once stirred, there remains nothing but the assent of the will, and then the work is finished. Now the first steps of this are seldom thought worth our care; sometimes not taken notice of; so that the enemy frequently is got close up to us, and even within our trenches, before we observe him; and we have lost the day, for want of defending ourselves, while he was in a condition of being resisted. For the longer we defer the engagement the weaker we grow, and the more onr adversary gathers strength.

The season of these trials is various and uncertain. Upon some they are severer presently after their conversion, upon others towards the latter end of their days. Some have them so thick repeated, that their whole life is one continued conflict; and some again have but very few and gentle trials. All which different cases are ordered by a just and wise God, who knows what each man deserves, and what he is qualified to undergo; and weighs all circumstances so justly, that His several dispensations are constantly subservient to the salvation and happiness of His chosen servants.

Let us not therefore despair when temptations beset us; but excite our zeal, and pray to God more fervently, that He would be our present help and refuge in all our troubles; and, as St. Paul expresses it, "That he would with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it." Let us humble ourselves under the trying hand of God, and patiently submit to His good pleasure in all our tribulations. For those who do so "He will exalt in due time, and save them that be of a meek and a contrite spirit."

By temptations and afflictions a man is brought as it were to the touch; by these his proficiency is measured and easily discernible. The greater these are, the more acceptable the sufferer is to God, and the brighter lustre add to his virtue. For to be religious and zealous in

the service of God, when no uneasiness is upon us, this is no mighty matter. But if we can suffer with patience and resignation, and continue steady in the love and service of God, when He afflicts and sends bitterness into our souls, this argues a noble disposition, and promises an extraordinary perfection. Some persons have come off with safety and honour in very sharp and trying instances, and yet are worsted in common and trivial ones. And this case is capable of a very good improvement; for thus, no doubt, God gives men warning that they should not presume upon their own strength, but humbly take sanctuary in Him in matters of difficulty; moved by the experience of that weakness and frailty which hath yielded to slighter and less violent temptations.

CHAPTER XIV.

Against Rash Judging.

TURN your eyes inward upon yourself; for you can very hardly exceed in judging your own actions, nor be too cautious and sparing in censuring those of others. And "censuring" indeed this deserves to be called in the worst sense of the word, rather than "judging;" if we consider, not only how unprofitable to any good end, but how liable to infinite mistakes, and very often how exceeding sinful all such judgments are. Whereas the examining and judging our own selves is a work very proper for us; such as we are qualified to undertake, and always turns to good account. We generally determine and give sentence, just as we stand affected to persons and things; our own passions and private prepossessions blind our minds, and either hinder us from discerning the truth, or from letting it have its due weight with us. Whereas, if we proceed from no other

principle but the love of God, those matters which disagree with our own sense of things would be allowed fairer consideration and be less uneasy to us.

But now something foreign to the case in hand, either lurking privately in our own breast, or happening from without, engages and draws our minds after it. Many people act upon private respects and personal interests, even when least sensible that they do so. These men continue well satisfied so long as things agree with their own inclination; but are out of all patience upon the least difference and contradiction. And hence it comes to pass, that good correspondence is so often broke, and quarrels commenced between friends and neighbours, even men of piety and the most sacred professions, upon no other ground than that they do not think and act alike.

The reason of this seems to be that mighty ascendant which use and inveterate habits naturally gain upon us. We can very hardly be persuaded to change a practice or opinion, which we have been educated in and long accustomed to; or to suppose that other men see farther into things than ourselves. The man therefore who leans more to his own understanding and study than to that principle of virtue which should dispose him to an entire submission to Christ and His doctrine, is by no means in a condition of having his mind enlightened by God. For God expects that we should be subject to Him without any reserves, and thinks it fit that a religious love and obedience should take place of our own reasonings.

CHAPTER XV.

Of Works of Charity.

THIS is a constant and universal rule, that no consideration of any advantage, no regard of any person whatsoever, must ever prevail with us to do an ill thing. But the benefit of a person who stands in need of our relief is oftentimes a sufficient warrant for leaving a good thing undone; or for changing our measures, and choosing to do one good thing rather than another. For indeed, properly speaking, this is not so much an omitting to do well as a prudent contrivance to do better. But let the thing we do be what it will, it is the principle upon which we do it that must recommend it; and as without charity, both all we are and all we do signify nothing, so, where this is at the bottom, everything we do, how mean soever in itself, is of very valuable consideration. For God observes by what springs we are moved; and measures our desert by the disposition of the heart, and not by the worth of the gift or the quality of the action.

The man, then, that loves a great deal, does a great deal; the man that does anything well, in that one thing does a great deal; and he does well who prefers the good of others before his own private pleasure or profit. That which frequently passes for charity, is really no better than a selfish and carnal principle; for how very seldom do men act upon other motives than the gratifying their own inclinations, the doing their own will, the prospect of their own advantage, the expectation of return or reward, so consulting the convenience, not so much of others, as themselves.

Now, true and perfect "charity seeks not its own advantage;" and if God in His bounty be pleased to recompense it, yet this recompense is not the thing principally in view,

but its great aim and end is the glory of God. For the same reason "charity envieth not," because envy is a passion proceeding from selfishness and pride. And therefore the man who acts upon a principle so generous as neither to seek his own private interest nor to take satisfaction in himself, but places all his content and bliss in God alone, is got above envy and incapable of so mean a passion. Charity looks upon God as the sole beginning and end of all good; the source from whence it flows, and the immense ocean in which it is swallowed up; the person from whom all the saints derive their righteousness, and in the fruition of whom the reward of their righteousness consists. And therefore the man possessed of this principle sets no undue value upon himself or others; he takes no part of the merit or honour to himself; he is not profuse in the commendation of others; but ascribes the whole glory of every virtuous action to Him whose originally and in truth it is. Little need be said to show that one thus disposed, thus persuaded of God, as the Only, the Universal Good, must have set his heart upon things above. For sure the least spark of His holy fire will serve to kindle in our breasts the love of heaven and spiritual joys, and suffice to convince us that all here below is full of vanity, and by no means an object worthy our affections.

CHAPTER XVI.

Of Bearing with other Men's Faults.

WHEN you observe in yourself or others anything amiss which you would fain but cannot cure, your duty in such cases is to endure it till God sees fit to order matters otherwise. And a duty this is highly reasonable, if you consider

that possibly it is much wiser and better that these faults should not be amended than that they should. It may be God permits them for the trial and increase of your patience and humility, without which all our virtues are of no great regard in His sight. But at the same time that you ought to bear, you are no less obliged to pray against them; to beg that the ill example of them may be no hindrance to you in your Christian course; and to implore the assistance of His grace for the bearing them in such a manner that the provocations arising thence may never shake your temper, or betray you to any sinful, or so much as indecent, excess of passion.

If a man refuse to comply with good advice, or to reform upon admonitions and reproofs, you are not, after these offers of doing him service have been made and repeated, obliged to contend with him any longer. 'Tis better to commit the whole affair to God, and endeavour to effect that by your prayers which your discourses could not do. Beseech Him therefore, whose infinite wisdom knows how to bring good out of evil, that His will may be done, and His name glorified; and that all who serve and worship Him may be led into such actions, as most contribute to these ends and are well pleasing in His sight. And when you have thus discharged your part, set yourself resolutely to bear the greatest infirmities and faults of your brethren without any disturbance. And, for confirming this resolution, remember that you also have many failings of your own, by which the patience of other people will have its turn of being exercised. And if you do (as certainly you cannot but) see this, think how unreasonable it is to expect you should make others in all particulars what you would have them to be, when you cannot so much as make yourself what you are sensible you ought to be. And, indeed, nothing is more common than to express exceeding zeal in amending our neighbours, and mighty indignation against their vices or imperfections, while at the same time we

neglect the beginning at home, and either quite overlook, or seem highly contented with, our own.

We take a pleasure in being severe upon others, but cannot endure to hear of our own faults. We are surprised and uneasy at the liberties they take with us, and wonder with what confidence they can pretend such interest in us; and yet there is nothing so extravagant which we do not think we have a right to expect, and resent it highly to be denied. We set up for reformers, declaim at the wickedness of the age, and are all for suppressing and punishing it by rigorous laws, and yet are unwilling that any check or restraint should be put upon our own freedoms. This shows how far we are from observing that great rule of equity, the loving our neighbour as ourselves; and from meting to others the same measure which we are content should be measured to us again.

Further yet, supposing all men to be without faults, some excellences and virtues must be lost too: what would become of patience, what of forgiving and forbearing one another for Christ's sake, if there were no provocations to try our temper? and such there could not be, if every man were perfect and did his duty. But as the present condition of the world is ordered, God hath furnished us with constant occasions of bearing one another's burthens. For there is no man lives without his failings; no man that is so happy as never to give offence; no man without his load of trouble; no man so sufficient, as never to need assistance; none so wise, but the advice of others may, at some time or other, be useful and necessary for him: and therefore we should think ourselves under the strongest engagements to comfort, and relieve, and instruct, and admonish, and bear with one another. Besides, we shall do well to reflect that afflictions and uneasy accidents are the clearest indication of a man's goodness, and the degrees of his improvement. For we mistake extremely in imagining that anything which happens to us from without is the real

cause of our doing well or ill: adversity does not make virtue or vice, but exert and draw them into practice; it does not change the man from what he was, but only discover what he really is.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Recluse Life.

THE man who desires to maintain peace and a good understanding with others, must learn, in order to it, in many cases to deny and subdue himself. If then you would keep your ground, or advance forward in piety and virtue, possess yourself entirely with the notion of your being no better than a stranger and pilgrim only here upon earth. As such, be content to forego the enjoyments and esteem of the world, and to be accounted a fool for Christ's sake. For, till this be done, you are not duly prepared to retire and enter in a course of life wholly devoted to God and religion.

The peculiar habit, and tonsure, and other formalities by which monastics are distinguished from common men, add nothing to their sanctity, nor contribute in the least to render them what they pretend to be. This can only be done by a temper as different from the rest of the world as their way of living; an entire change of manners, and an effectual mortification of their passions and desires. He that retreats out of any other design but the service and honour of God, and the salvation of his soul, will be so far from avoiding misery and trouble that he will involve himself in new and greater troubles, and become more exquisitely wretched than the affairs of the world could make him. Nobody can continue easy in his own mind who does not endeavour to become least of all, and servant of all.

Remember then that you come to obey, and not to govern: the state of life to which you are called is a state of labour and hardship, and much suffering; not of leisure and ease and diversion. You do not so properly forsake, as change, your business. For this sort of life is such a trial of men as the fire is of gold; and none make good their post in it but such as are content to humble themselves, and heartily and cheerfully submit to anything for God's sake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Of the Examples of Holy Men in former Ages.

It will much contribute to our progress and encouragement in Christian virtues, to keep in view those lively patterns which those holy fathers have set us, whose zeal and exalted piety shone clear in former generations. For, by observing the brightness of their lustre, we shall at the same time discern the faintness and dimness of our own light, and blush to find the present age so much eclipsed by the unequal comparison. Alas! how poor and mean are our attainments, when put into the balance with theirs! Those excellent good persons, those affectionate friends and followers of Christ, served God instantly, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in labour and weariness, in watchings and fastings, in prayers and holy meditations, in many persecutions and sharp reproaches.

Blessed God! how many, how grievous miseries and hardships did the apostles and martyrs, the confessors and virgins, endure heretofore! And not they only, but all those brave and generous souls in the primitive and purer state of the Church, who made it the study of their whole lives to tread in the steps of their meek and suffering

Saviour! These heavenly-minded persons have hated their own lives unto the death, that they might preserve them unto life eternal. How very austere, how entirely mortified, was the conversation of the ancient hermits in the deserts! How long, how sharp the temptations they underwent! How fierce and frequent their conflicts with the enemy of souls! How constant and fervent their prayers! How rigorous their abstinence, how unblemished their chastity; how eager their desires, how indefatigable their endeavours after higher degrees of perfection! How vigorous and gallant the war they waged against their vices and rebellious appetites! How pure and uncorrupt all their intentions, how free from any mixture of worldly prospects, and sincerely fixed upon God and His glory! The whole day they employed in hard labour, the whole night in devotion. From which their very labours did not hinder them; for even these were consecrated, too, by the frequent intermingling of prayers and holy ejaculations.

Their great care, in a word, was that no portion of the time God gave them in the body might be spent unprofitably; and what they laboured to make an improvement their zeal made a delight. For time in their esteem was much too swift, and their devotions so far from creating weariness, that every hour seemed short, and snatched away those joys too hastily, which they felt in conversing with Him whom their soul loved. Their thoughts were so intent, their raptures so entertaining, so ravishingly sweet, that they became almost all spirit, and quite forgot their bodies and the care necessary for supporting them in life. Riches and honours and greatness, and friends and relations, were now no longer their concern. How should they? when even a part of their own persons ceased to be so; and providing those things, without which mortals cannot subsist, was now grown a trouble, and to persons so abstracted from flesh and sense, a painful and unseasonable interruption of better and much more important business.

These men, it is true, had no earthly possessions; but they who were poor in that respect were exceeding wealthy in another, rich in the favour of God, and abounding in excellent virtues. What they wanted of outward comforts was much better supplied by the plentiful communications of divine graces, the inward refreshments and unspeakable consolations of the blessed Spirit. These strangers to the world were intimately acquainted with its Maker and Lord; and how meanly soever they might think of themselves, or how despicable they might appear in the eyes of others, yet in the sight of God they were particularly dear, highly honourable and precious. They persevered in their humility and sincere obedience, in their courage and constancy, their meekness and patience and great charity. And by this continuance in well-doing and contented suffering, they made daily advances in spiritual perfection, and attained to a wonderful high pitch of grace and favour with God. By this exemplary piety they are become proper patterns for the imitation of all devout men in after ages; and, though but a few in number, ought to encourage and prevail upon us more powerfully to rival their uncommon zeal, than the numerous examples of negligent and lukewarm Christians should do to slacken and suffer our piety to grow cold.

To these we may add the ardent devotion of those holy men who retired from the world into cloisters and cells, which, at their first institution, were places of great piety and severe virtue. Their prayers were frequent and devout, their emulation in spiritual perfections noble, their discipline strict and well ordered, their obedience to superiors modest and respectful. Even those footsteps of their piety still remaining, for which their successors have since so scandalously degenerated, are sufficient to inform us that the first combatants in this war against the world and the flesh were men of gallantry and just renown. But now, alas! how wretched a pass are we come to when it is counted a mighty matter if here and there one keep himself from transgressing

the rules of his Order, and patiently submit to those exercises which his profession imposes upon him!

Oh, what a miserable age of cold indifference and wicked carelessness are we fallen into! How are the holy flames of primitive zeal extinguished! And instead of being a delight, how great a weariness, how insupportable a burthen, are religious duties and exercises become to us! How wretched is that stupidity, how profound that sleep, which now oppresses the spirit of mankind, when so many bright examples cannot prevail with us to shake off our sloth and slumber, nor awaken our souls into any tolerable concern for banished piety and neglected virtue!

CHAPTER XIX.

The Exercise of a truly Religious Person.

THE life of a Christian who hath dedicated himself to the service of God, should abound with eminent virtues of all kinds, that he may be really the same person which he is by outward appearance and profession. Indeed, he ought not only to be the same, but much more, in his inward disposition of soul; because he professes to serve a God who sees the inward parts, a searcher of the heart and reins, a God and Father of spirits: and therefore, since we are always in His sight, we should be exceeding careful to avoid all impurity, all that may give offence to Him whose eyes cannot behold iniquity. We should, in a word, so far as mortal and frail nature can, imitate the blessed angels in all manner of holiness, since we, as well as they, are always in His presence. To this purpose it would be expedient daily to renew our resolutions of living well, and every morning to refresh and quicken that zeal with which they

were made at first. To beg of God that He would help us, and enable us that day to begin well: to *begin*, I say; for all that we have done hitherto ought in lowliness of mind to seem, and to be acknowledged by us, as nothing.

Great diligence and watchfulness is necessary, in order to discharging faithfully what we have intended, and resolved zealously. For if they, who are most sincere and vigorous in their purposes, are yet too often weary and remiss in their performance, what do we think must needs become of those who purpose but very seldom, or very coldly? It is true, indeed, the occasions of our falling off, or fainting in our minds, are various and many; and seldom do we allow ourselves in any omission of religious duties, without even thus perceiving a very sensible abatement and decay of zeal. The perseverance of good men, in the midst of so many difficulties and avocations, must be ascribed to God's favour and assistance, more than to any care and wisdom of their own. And good men have always this notion of the thing. For they depend upon God for the success of all they do, even of their best and wisest undertakings. "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps," says Solomon. We may contrive and act as seems most advisable; but, as "the very preparations of the heart," by which we do so, are from the Lord, so is the event of our having done it entirely in His disposal.

If at any time a religious exercise be omitted, upon the account of some other act of piety or some work of charity at that time inconsistent with it, this does us no disservice, and the omission is easily repaired. But, if through any lothness or indisposition of mind, if through laziness or any voluntary neglect of our own, our customary devotions be passed over; this is from a wicked cause, and will not fail to have a very ill effect upon us. When we keep our zeal with all our might, and do our very best, yet even then we shall find ourselves often defective. But though we cannot arrive at absolute perfection, nor conquer all our frailties,

nor prevent all our hindrances in goodness; yet ought not this to discourage us from striving and resolving. And when we do so, we shall do well not to content ourselves with general intentions, but bend our forces against some particular thing; and chiefly against such as we have found by experience to be the greatest and most troublesome obstruction to our doing well. The condition of our affairs without, and that of our own souls within, must be diligently considered, and reduced into the best order we can; because both the circumstances of the one and the dispositions of the other contribute greatly to our furtherance in piety.

It may be you cannot at all times recollect and call yourself to account, but certainly you cannot want opportunities of doing so once every day at least. The morning or the evening are proper for it. In the morning you may lay out your business for the day following, and at the return of night again you may reflect what hath passed in the daytime; how your thoughts and words and actions have agreed with the scheme of behaviour you laid before yourself, where you have transgressed, how far exceeded or fallen short, and in what instances (for, alas! it is but too likely that you have in many instances) offended God and man. In this scheme you form of living well, quit yourself like a man in resisting the assaults of the devil. To this end begin with keeping a strict hand over your appetite; for when you have once attained to a rigid and masterly sobriety, all other fleshly desires and temptations will be vanquished and kept under with much less difficulty. To the same purpose beware of idleness, be constantly in action, let reading or writing, or praying or meditating, or contriving somewhat for the good of others, employ your leisure hours. Some bodily exercises are very fit to be used; but these will require prudence in the choice of them, for all are not equally convenient, and therefore the nature and degrees of them must be considered, as well as the temper and

constitution of the person consulted, to render them profitable.

Some religious exercises the community is concerned in, and they must be attended to in public; others are personal, and these will be best performed in private. This distinction is of great use to keep men from acting improperly; for even a good thing may lose much of its gracefulness and commendation by being done out of due place and time. Another necessary caution which many good people stand in need of is, that you should not be so zealously bent upon any private devotions or duties as for their sakes to slight or disuse the public; for these require at least an equal degree of your esteem and care in the attendance of them. But when you have discharged your duty in that point, and done all that your particular station or the commands of your superiors require from you, then is the proper season, and then you will do well to return into your own breast and employ the remainder of your time as piety and religious purposes shall direct. And here again a prudent choice is needful; for all sorts, even of religious entertainments, are not suited alike to our spiritual advantage. Some difference arises from the consideration of the persons, and another very visible one from the different times and seasons of using them. Some are more proper for holy days, others for common days; some for festivals, others for fasts; some for a time of temptation and affliction, others for a peaceful and serene state of mind; some to persons in grief, or under calamitous circumstances; others for prosperity, when the spirits flow gaily, and our hearts rejoice and sing for the goodness of the Lord. Particularly it will be convenient, in an especial manner, to renew and raise our souls by very frequent and solemn acts of piety and devotion at the constant returns of all the Christian festivals. For these should represent to our minds the eternal uninterrupted festival of joy and thanks celebrated by the saints in heaven. And this should put our souls upon the wing,

inflame our devotion, mount us up thither, and make us act even beyond ourselves, more cheerfully, more vigorously, as if we were just then going to receive that glorious reward of our labour which these glad seasons bring so lively ideas of to our thoughts.

And if the time of our receiving that reward be still delayed, let us be so thankful for a longer time given us here as at the same time to be humbled by that very length of life which the generality of the world are apt to esteem the greatest happiness that can befall them. Let us endeavour to do God still better service, but let us suspect that we have not served Him yet as we ought. For if we had, He would not have put off our recompense to a farther day; and probable it is that He does not translate us to heaven as yet because we are not fit for it. And let us therefore double our care to qualify ourselves for that glory which, in His own appointed time, shall not fail to be manifested in us. Come He most assuredly will, and "blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh shall find watching." "Verily, I say unto you, He will make him ruler over all his goods, and partaker of the joy of his Lord."

CHAPTER XX.

Love of Solitude and Silence.

RESERVE a convenient proportion of your time for privacy and conversing with yourself; and let this be spent in frequent and thankful reflections upon the mercies of God, and in reading good books. Among which I advise you, by all means, to let alone nice disputes and unprofitable speculations; and keep to such subjects as may be proper for the exciting your zeal and quickening your affections, rather

than such as may employ the subtlety of your wit. Never fear that you shall want leisure for these good purposes. For if you will prevail with yourself to abate the mere impertinences of life, the unnecessary conversations, the time spent in hearing and telling of news, in inquiring after and spreading about idle reports, and such as are either faulty or frivolous wastings of your time, you cannot want sufficient leisure and great opportunities for cherishing and improving holy and heavenly meditations. Thus did the most eminent saints industriously avoid company and business, and chose to converse with God in private, as much and as often as possibly they could.

'Tis a good reflection, which the philosopher made of himself—that he never was in other men's company but he came out of it less a man than he went in. And this is what we may frequently confirm by our own experience, after a great deal of discourse hath passed. 'Tis certainly much easier for a man to restrain himself from talking at all than to enter into discourse, and not say more than becomes him: infinitely easier to live at home and see nobody, than to go abroad in company and return innocent. A man therefore, who makes inward and spiritual perfection his great end, must imitate the blessed Jesus, and often withdraw himself from the multitude. No one is qualified to converse in public who is not highly contented without such conversation; nor to entertain, or receive entertainment from others, who cannot entertain himself alone with satisfaction. No man is fit to govern who hath not learned how to obey: no man can enjoy mirth with safety who is not at the same time in a condition of rejoicing in a good conscience: none is fit to speak freely but he who can, without any violence to himself, refrain his tongue or keep silence altogether.

Accordingly we may observe that the pleasures and inward security of the best men have always been tempered with the fear of God. Nor was their humility or their care

one whit abated in consideration of those extraordinary virtues, and abundant measures of divine grace, in which they excelled common Christians. But the security of wicked men, and that satisfaction they take in themselves, spring from pride and haughtiness of temper; and therefore the constant effects of it are an undue contempt of others, and a false opinion of themselves.

Never flatter yourself with an expectation of absolute safety in this life, whatever your condition, how far so ever retired from the world, or out of the way of temptation, it may seem to be. For it often happens that those whom the world esteems in strength and virtue above common men, have been involved in dangers proportionably greater than theirs; merely upon the account of the too confident opinion they had of their own abilities. And this consideration makes the being tempted sometimes a blessing, greater than that of living altogether easy and free from temptation. For the oftener we are attacked, the greater check this gives to our self-conceit and spiritual security; and the more we are afflicted, the less apt we shall be to love or use the external advantages of this world beyond the bounds of decency and moderation. And if a man could so perfectly draw off his mind from these as never to pursue any transitory pleasure—never to engage himself with the world—O what blessed, what perpetual peace of conscience would that man feel, and even be ravished with! Nay, could we but cut off all our unprofitable and groundless fears and cares, and employ our thoughts upon such objects only as are weighty and useful—such as promote the honour and service of God, our own salvation, and the good of others—how easy and quiet, how free from all reproach, would such a one's breast be to him!

No man deserves inward and heavenly comforts who does not diligently examine and willingly afflict himself. To be qualified for this solitude, it is absolutely needful to observe that method recommended by the Psalmist,

"Commune with your own heart in your chamber, and be still." "Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door about thee," says our Saviour. Advice which can never be more seasonable than upon these occasions: for the closet will give you the satisfaction which it is scarce possible not to lose in a more public place. And if the closet be not pleasant, the only reason is that it hath been less frequented than it ought. To those who at first use this retirement carefully, it ministers a pleasure and secret consolation above what any company or diversion in the world can pretend to.

It is by silent and solitary study that the soul gets acquainted with the hidden mysteries of Scripture. Here she finds those floods of pious tears by which holy men wash themselves day and night; here she contracts a familiarity and free intercourse with God, so much the closer and more intimate as she removes to a greater distance from the noise and hurry of the world. Think not then that the man who withdraws from his friends and acquaintance is perfectly alone. No, he only changes that for better company, and is visited in his quiet retreats by God and His holy angels. A wise man would rather choose to live thus unobserved, and to prosecute the business of his soul without interruption, than even to work miracles, and attract universal admiration and applause at the expense of neglecting his own safety.

It is highly agreeable to the character of a person entirely devoted to God to stir but seldom abroad, to decline being publicly seen of men, and to be as little fond of seeing the world. For to what purpose indeed should any one be eager to see that which he must not enjoy? "The world passeth away, and all the desires thereof," says the apostle. Our sensual affections invite and entice us, but when the moment of gratifying that inclination is once over, what have you got by the bargain but serious remorse and an unsettled temper of mind? He that goes out full of satisfaction, often returns as full of melancholy and disgust;

and many a merry evening occasions a sad morning. Thus all the pleasures of sense caress and court us at the first meeting, but at their parting leave a sting behind, and gall our hearts with sharp and killing pains. What can you see in any other place which the most retired grove or desert will not present to your eye? Here you survey the heavens, here view the earth, here see the several elements, which are the seeds and first ingredients of which the whole world and every creature in it are compounded.

But what can you see either here or anywhere else which is of long continuance? You expect, perhaps, that variety will satisfy you: alas! it cannot be. For, suppose you could at one view have all things under the sun set before you, what is there even in this save only the beholding them with your eyes? Turn then those eyes where they may gaze with profit. Look up to God on high; fix them upon the throne of grace in prayer, and continue steadfast and fervent in this, till you obtain pardon for your sins and errors. Leave the vanities of the world to the vain men of the world; but consider that you are a child of God, and therefore bend your thoughts and labours entirely to those things which your heavenly Father requires at your hands. Invite that Jesus, in whom your soul delights, into your apartment; there solace yourself with His love; for in that conversation only true peace and solid joy are to be found. If this seem a paradox, I must inform you what is the true occasion of its doing so. Had you never mingled yourself with the world, nor imbibed any of its vain notions, your mind had been more settled and composed. But now the itch of novelty hath taken hold of you, and it must cost some uneasiness to cure this evil. And till that cure be effected, peace and perfect evenness of temper you cannot have, nor be reconciled to solitude and the substantial pleasures that attend it.

CHAPTER XXI.

Compunction of Heart.

He that would grow in virtue and grace must be sure to preserve a constant awful sense of the Divine Majesty upon his mind; checking by this holy fear all his indecent liberties, keeping his appetites and affections under strict discipline; and not letting himself loose to light or extravagant mirth. Employ yourself, therefore, in humbling and afflicting your own mind, and this will certainly lead you to a devout and truly Christian temper. For infinite advantage is to be had by these zealous exercises, which folly and inconsideration quickly lose again. One would wonder indeed how men can indulge their mirth to so extravagant a degree, when the miseries of this life, and the sins we have to account for, are so many and so great that a man who seriously considers the danger his soul is in can very hardly be merry at all, without some sudden damp upon his spirits. It is from the levity of our own unthinking minds, a stupid forgetfulness of our sinful condition, and a continuing insensible of those sorrows which ought most tenderly to affect us, that we so often indulge the excesses of laughter and gaiety when sighs and tears would much better become us.

Assure yourself there can be no true liberty, no innocent merriment, without the fear of God and a good conscience. Happy therefore is the man who can disengage himself from all those hindrances which the business and diversions of the world cast in his way, and can give his thoughts up entirely to that godly sorrow which worketh repentance and salvation. Happy he that can abandon everything by which his conscience is defiled or burthened, and set himself at liberty from treacherous and ensnaring pleasures. And this may be compassed by resolution and constancy. For, how difficult and contrary soever it may seem to the

general way of the world and our own former practice, yet no habit is so strong but by frequent and manly attempts, by the grace of God, the direct contrary habit may be acquired and confirmed.

If you will firmly set yourself to let other people's affairs alone, they will follow the example, and not concern themselves with yours. Do not therefore create unnecessary trouble to yourself, by making other men's business your own, and involve your thoughts and cares in matters of persons above you. Leave the great ones of the world to manage their own concerns, and keep your eyes and observation at home. Your own soul is the thing you ought to look after. This requires your nicest inspection and utmost diligence; and the censuring and correcting yourself is a duty which should take place above the advising or reproving the dearest friend you have. It may be, this reserve may be interpreted sullenness, and lose you the favour and good esteem of men; but let not that loss afflict you. There can be no such just ground of dissatisfaction and remorse as the not behaving yourself with all the strict virtue and circumspection which becomes a person who hath renounced the world and devoted himself to the service of God. 'Tis true, an honourable opinion of us is a comfort; but it is sometimes better to want variety of comforts than to have them. This is often the case with advantages merely human, the external and the worldly; and, as for those which are spiritual and derived from God, if we be either deprived of these, or not sensible of their sweet refreshment, the fault is our own, who neglect to put ourselves into a fit disposition for them, by godly sorrow for our sins, and abandoning those vain and outward comforts which should make room for the substantial and heavenly.

Get therefore a true and perfect knowledge of yourself; see and confess that you deserve not any divine consolation, nay, that you do really deserve desertion and sorrow, and much misery. When a man's mind is inflamed with a truly

religious zeal, this world appears not only flat and insipid, but very bitter and loathsome to him. A good man can never fail of discovering just matter of grief, and many occasions that provoke his tears. For, whether he consider his own circumstances or those of other men, he will find that no man here is exempted from calamities. And the more closely he considers his own condition, the greater still will be his concern. But the misfortunes from without might be borne with better temper were there not much more grievous from within. For, of all the miseries that humble our souls with sadness, none are so justly lamented as our sins and infirmities; the wretched load and incumbrance these are to our conscience; and the indisposition, the disability they bring us under, of attending without distraction to holy duties and heavenly contemplations.

By these we are engaged upon trifling and unprofitable thoughts, and diverted from weighty and useful subjects. For would we but turn the current of our thoughts another way, the effect would be visible and very happy. If we did but seriously reflect how certainly we must die, as often as we think how long it is likely we may live, we should be more zealous and diligent to amend our lives, and provide for that important change. And would we but set before our minds a lively representation of those dreadful torments which await the damned in hell, it were not possible sure to shrink back as we do from the austerities and mortifications of a religious life; or to suppose any labour and pain which we can undergo in the meanwhile a hardship not most willingly to be chosen, for the preventing so dreadful a condemnation. But now, because these things are but seldom and very slightly thought upon, and we, in tenderness to our own ease, much rather submit to the soothing impressions of present deceitful pleasures than to those harsh and cutting ones of future misery and anguish, we still go on in the same coldness and indifference, and indulge our sloth at the expense of our virtue.

I grant, indeed, that some religious severities are tedious and painful to the body. But the fault does not always lie there; for the body sometimes complains and droops, not so much from its own suffering, as from the meanness and cowardice of the soul, which ought to encourage and support it. Beg therefore of God most earnestly that He would kindle in your hearts a true Christian courage and fervent zeal. Dare to entertain yourself upon the most ungrateful, when they are profitable and necessary subjects. Prefer the mournings of a pious penitent before all the vain jollity of a wicked and unthinking world; and pray that God would do to thee, what the Psalmist says He doth to his own people, even "feed thee with the bread of tears, and give thee plenteousness of tears to drink."

CHAPTER XXII.

The Miserable Condition of Man considered.

WRETCHED thou art, O man, wheresoever thou art, wretched thou must be, which way soever thou turnest thyself: beset on all sides with miseries without remedy, without any possibility of escape by human helps; and only to be avoided by taking sanctuary in God. Why then art thou disquieted at crosses and disappointments, when these are the portion of all mankind? It is not yours and mine alone, but the greatest, the best men drink of the bitter cup: and no man ever lived in uninterrupted happiness: none ever succeeded in all his wishes and attempts; none ever was above calamities, or free from vexation of spirit. Since therefore so ordained it is that all must suffer and be miserable, are all equally so? No, there are different conditions and degrees of suffering; and his is certainly the best and most

comfortable who is called and disposed to suffer for the sake of God and a good conscience.

It is usual for men who know no better to envy and admire the rich, the great, the honourable; to imagine that princes and persons of plentiful fortunes are completely happy. But this is the effect of great weakness and inconsideration. If therefore we would rectify such mistaken apprehensions, let us get a right notion of spiritual and heavenly advantages. These will convince us of what poor account all worldly enjoyments should be in our esteem; how very little, how mere a nothing they are; how hard and hazardous to be attained; how uncertain the preservation of them, and how full of trouble and anxious care even while we have them. And who would be fond of that which can neither be got nor lost; no, nor kept neither without fear and sorrow and perpetual solicitude? Surely then the happiness of man does "not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." 'Tis senseless and absurd to think it can. And if no proportion of worldly goods, though never so large, can exempt us from misery, then a competent measure of them ought to satisfy us. For miserable we must be with less or more. The very living here upon earth, without any additional calamity, would make us inevitably so. The more a man desires and labours to be like God, the less agreeable relish he hath of life, because he is so much more sensible, more thoroughly convinced, of the frailty and corruption of human nature. For what is this vicissitude, this daily round of eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, weariness and rest, and the many other necessities which the condition of mortality enslaves us to? Doubtless it is a mighty burthen and affliction to men whose minds are wholly fixed upon higher things, and whose only ambition it is to get above sin and infirmity.

For the distresses and wants of the outward man are a sore hindrance and great oppression to the inward; and we

shall not perhaps injure David's sense by supposing even these included in that petition where he begs of God to "deliver him out of his troubles." But wretched are they indeed who are not sensible of their wretchedness; and yet more so still are those vain people who are even in love with it, who dote upon this mortal life which exposes them to it, and cannot think of parting with it at any rate, even when in such uncomfortable circumstances that all their time and care is scarce sufficient to furnish them with provisions necessary for the support of it. And yet these infatuated creatures are content to lay themselves out upon toil and trouble, and, might they but be suffered to continue here for ever, could dispense with any concern for God and goodness, and willingly forego the hopes and everlasting happiness of a heavenly kingdom.

O foolish and slow of heart to understand and believe your true interest; how deep are you immersed in flesh and sense! How sottishly deluded with dross, and fond of vanities which cannot profit! Have you no notion left of anything but body? No regard for a future enduring substance? Raise your affections up to nobler enjoyments, and disengage them from those gross, those empty objects, which if you still persist in the love and pursuit of, you will one day be taught by sad experience how poor and despicable they really are, and how unworthy of all that eager concern you have thrown away upon them. Be persuaded then by reason and religion, and do not provoke God to convince you, by torments and too late remorse, of how fatal consequence the love of this world is to all that are immoderately fond of it. View well those illustrious patterns of mortification and heavenly-mindedness, which the primitive saints and favourites of Christ have set you. These great good men had small regard to the pleasures of sense and glittering gaieties of this world, but kept their eyes and hearts intent upon eternal joys. Those were their hope, their delight, the earnest and only longing of their

souls: and therefore the only one, lest if their affections were at all divided, the love of the things that are seen should fasten down their hearts to mean and earthly objects, and hinder them from soaring up on high to the infinitely more precious things that are not seen.

This is indeed a work of pains and time; but let not that consideration drive you to despair of attaining a heavenly temper of mind. The undertaking is great, 'tis true; and the time allowed for it but short; but still this short space is enough, if you will take care to make the best of it. Up then, and be doing; do not purpose well to-day, and put off the execution to a farther day, but rather argue yourself into action by such reflections as these. This very instant is the proper time, this the season of amendment, and fighting the good fight. It is by hardship and suffering that men recommend themselves to the acceptance and favour of God. He hath ordained that fire and water, distress and tribulation, should be the way that leads to refreshment and true bliss. Without some violence upon thyself, sin cannot be subdued, nor evil customs broken. Without some uneasiness and pain we cannot live; and while we carry this body of flesh about us, these will make an inseparable part of the burthen. We wish indeed for ease and untroubled satisfaction; but, as the condition of mankind stands at present, we wish in vain. For, in losing the innocence of our nature, we lost our happiness too; and, as both left us, so both must be restored together. Patience is now become a necessary virtue, and we must be content to wait the season of God's mercy; when He shall fully repair our breaches, heal our infirmities, put a period to our unrighteousness, absolve the guilt, blot out the remembrance of them, and cause mortality to be swallowed up of life.

In the meantime it cannot, methinks, but be a mighty mortification to consider how exceeding prone this frail nature of ours is to sin. To-day you confess your sins to God, and to-morrow you act those very sins over again

which you lamented but the day before. This hour you resolve to be watchful, and take good heed to all your ways; and the very next hour you run on as giddily and rashly as ever; forget your resolutions, and stand more self-condemned than if you had never resolved at all. So great reason is there for thinking very meanly of ourselves, and disclaiming all vain confidences in anything we are or do. But these so sudden and frequent relapses are not our misfortunes, but our faults. They are indeed the consequence of our frailty; but that frailty would not affect us to that degree, did not we contribute to it by our own negligence and inconstancy. And a small neglect will soon undo what cost much time and labour to effect; nay, what could not have been effected even so neither, had not Almighty God seconded our endeavours with His divine assistance.

But if we cool so very quickly, and "cannot watch one hour," what will become of us at last, and how shall we persevere in faithfulness unto the end? Wretched are we indeed if we faint and grow weary, if we give out and seek refreshment, as if we were already safe and in absolute peace; when we have scarce begun the battle, and gained but little ground in holiness and reformation of manners. Alas! we are as yet but raw beginners; so far from complete masters in our business, that we have still need to learn and practise the very first rules of living over again, before we can be so perfect as we wish and ought to be. Nor should we disdain to do so, if those condescensions can prove of use to us.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Meditations concerning Death.

SINCE life is of short and uncertain continuance, it highly concerns you to look about you and take good heed how you employ it. To-day the man is vigorous and gay and flourishing, and to-morrow he is cut down, withered and gone. A very little time carries him out of our sight, and a very little more out of our remembrance. O the hardness of men's hearts! O the wretched stupidity that fixes their whole thoughts and care upon the present, and will not be prevailed with to look before them, or bear any regard to that which must come hereafter! Whereas, in truth, every work and word and thought ought to be so ordered as if it were to be our last, and we instantly to die and render an account of it. Would we entertain ourselves more with the thoughts of death, it would be less a terror to us; for in proportion as our lives amend, our fears will abate, and a clear conscience will enable us to meet death with undaunted courage. However flesh and frailty may impose upon us, yet be assured 'tis greater wisdom to be afraid of sinning than to be afraid of dying, a greater blessing to preserve our innocence than to prolong our lives. And whence is all this fear and anxiety? Is it because we are not fit to die? But if you are not fit to-day, how do you propose to be so to-morrow? Alas! to-morrow is uncertain; neither you, nor I, nor any man can depend upon it. Or if we could, yet what does it avail to live, though it were much longer, when we by longer living grow so little better? Assure yourself, long life is far from being always a blessing. Too many (God knows) are so far from growing holier as they grow older, that the number of their days only adds to the number of their sins, and renders their account more heavy hereafter.

Happy is that man who can comfort himself with having employed any one day of his life so perfectly well as he might and ought to have done. Many reckon up the years of their conversion with great satisfaction, and think it a mighty matter that they have so long abandoned the world and a vicious course; and yet, when the time they boast of comes to be compared with the improvements they have made, how shamefully little is the good they have done! If dying now be terrible, yet remember that living longer may be dangerous; and many, many a man finds too great occasion to wish that it had pleased God to take him away sooner. Happy therefore is he who keeps the hour of death constantly in view; and from this prospect of what must come takes care to reconcile himself to it, and to put his soul into a proper temper for it when it does come.

If you attend at any time upon a deathbed and see another in his parting agonies, consider that this friend is gone the same way where you must shortly follow him. In the morning question whether you may live till night; and when night comes do not too confidently promise yourself another morning. Thus shall you be in a constant expectation, and in a good disposition to die. And be sure so to live always that death may never overtake you unprovided, nor its suddenest approach be sudden and surprising in respect of you. Many are snatched away in an instant, and die when they were not in the least aware of it, for "in such an hour as we think not the Son of Man cometh." Let not the preparation I am advising be neglected as a melancholy unpleasant thing, such as embitters life and damps men's present enjoyment, for be assured whatever satisfaction you may take now, when that last hour draws on, it will give you quite other notions of the matter. And the reflections upon your past improvidence and neglect will be more bitter and afflicting then, than any the most solicitous forecast for dying well can possibly be in the meantime.

O how wise, how happy is that man, who makes it his daily care to be such while he liveth as he desires to be found when he comes to die! We may cherish a good hope and great assurance of leaving the world to our comfort and infinite advantage, if, while we continue in it, we can bring ourselves to neglect and despise it; if we be zealous to improve in virtue, in love with discipline and mortification; if we attend to the exercise of repentance; if we be of an humble and obedient disposition; content to deny ourselves, and ready to undergo any hardship for Christ's sake. But if these qualifications be necessary, they are necessary to be attained in health. For then a man is in a condition to strive and to exert himself; but when sickness is upon him, it is a great question what he will be able to do, or whether anything at all. Whatever the generality of the world may imagine who put off this great work till such improper seasons, yet sure it is that few, but very few, are reformed by a sick-bed. And they who defer their repentance and amendment till then, seldom alas! repent as they ought, or are amended in good earnest.

Depend not upon the assistance of your relations and acquaintance; nor cherish an imagination so vain as that their prayers hereafter can effect what you never endeavoured to effect here. These can do you no service; but if they could, yet, when once gone, you will be forgotten much sooner than you are willing to believe. And why should you rest upon their care, when you cannot be prevailed with for your own? Can it be supposed they should be more concerned for your salvation, than you whose proper interest it is? Allowing, then, that these could do you good, yet even thus 'tis better you should do your own business; better, in regard of the person, and better in regard of the time; for *now* is the season of acceptance, *now* is the day of salvation. And therefore this moment is the fittest for your purpose, the sooner you

change the better; live then while you may, and begin from the present minute to live so that you may live for ever. For if you suffer the happy opportunity to slip through your hands, you will wish for it afterwards, when it is too late; and you may perhaps be reduced to such circumstances, that one day, one hour, for making your peace with God may not be obtained; no, not when you would gladly give, were it at your disposal, the whole world to purchase it.

Consider then, my friend and fellow-Christian, consider what a risk you run by your delays; think, what misery and danger, what confusion and despair it is now in your power to prevent, by living like a man that remembers he must die. And therefore so spend every hour, that when your last draws on you may receive it with joy and hope, instead of fear and astonishment. Learn *now* to die daily, to die to sin and the world, that you may then begin to live with Christ. Learn *now* to despise all here below, that you may then be disengaged, and at perfect liberty to leave all and follow Christ. Subdue your body *now* by mortification and self-denial, and you shall then have great boldness in the day of tribulation.

Does any confidence of long life encourage you to defer putting this good advice in execution speedily? Nay, but reflect, fond man, how little you can promise yourself one poor single day. How many instances have you before your eyes, or fresh in your remembrance, of persons miserably deluded and disappointed in this hope, and hurried out of the body without any warning at all? How often have you been surprised with the news of this friend being run through, another drowned in crossing the water, a third breaking his neck by a fall, a fourth fallen down dead at table or choked with his meat, a fifth seized with an apoplexy at play, a sixth burnt in his bed, a seventh murdered, an eighth killed by thieves, a ninth struck with lightning or blasting or pestilence, a tenth swallowed up in

an earthquake? Such vast variety of deaths surround us, and so fleeting a shadow is the life of a man.

And if any of these happens to be your case, who shall help, who can save you, when the precious opportunity is fled and lost? Be doing, then, betimes; for though you cannot so much as guess at the hour and manner of your own death, yet safe you are, or may be, if you will provide against it. Use time, then, while you have it; make haste to be rich toward God, and let religion and your own salvation be your chief, your only concern. Make yourself friends while you may, who when you fail may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Behave yourself as a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, and entangle not your thoughts in matters which do not belong to you. For sojourners are not proprietors, and therefore such should keep their minds loose and free, and not settle their affections upon things which they are leaving very shortly: raise your soul to God, and let it not dwell there, where you "have no continuing city." Look up to that which is so, and send your prayers and tears and earnest desires before you thither, that when God calls you may readily follow in person, and make a happy exchange of this miserable world for a better.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Of the Last Judgment and the Eternal Punishment of Ungodly Men.

"WHATSOEVER thou takest in hand, remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss," says the wise son of Sirach. And certainly this would prove a most useful direction, if we by the end understand that last great account which will one day be required of all our actions. For how powerful,

how happy a restraint should we live under, did we but seriously reflect, and constantly ask ourselves, how we shall dare to stand before that strict and righteous Judge to whom "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid?" One who cannot, like other judges, be diverted from the steady course of justice, blinded by bribes and presents, or softened by subtle extenuations, or imposed upon by feigned excuses and studied evasions; but who weighs all persons and causes by the eternal standard of equity and truth. Ah, wretched, guilty creature! Ah, stupid unthinking sinner! that tremblest at the frown of a man like thyself, and canst not fear that bar where nothing can turn to thy prejudice, but open and notorious faults! How wilt thou appear at this tribunal, or what plea canst thou urge in bar of sentence to Him who needs no evidence, but is Himself privy to thy most concealed impieties? Dost thou know this, and yet go on unconcerned how thou shalt escape the terrors of that dreadful day? Without thy own care, escape thou canst not, for this judgment is universal; all mankind must stand upon their deliverance; every one must bear his own burden, and every one's burden is more than enough for himself; so that no man will be in a condition of assisting another. To expect any advantage, any atonement, then, is most senseless. Thou only canst prevent thy own destruction, and this life is the only time of preventing it. Thy holy labours now will turn to good account; thy pious mournings move compassion, thy prayers and groans enter the ears of God, and melt Him into mercy. The meek and patient man will then be considered for his constant suffering and invincible charity. The grief he now conceives for wrongs is more for the wickedness and guilt of the person who does them, than for any inconvenience brought upon himself; and this disposition will mitigate his own offence: he heartily forgives, and prays that God would forgive his enemies; and this entitles him to the forgiveness of his own trespasses. He is more

easily provoked to pity than to anger; and shall be dealt with accordingly by a God long-suffering, slow to wrath, and sparing when men deserve punishment. He often treats his body with severity and violence, and continues the rigorous discipline till the flesh be effectually subdued by the spirit; and therefore good amends shall be made him for these voluntary sufferings, and the neglected pleasures of sense will be liberally recompensed by the abundance of heavenly and intellectual joys. But then, it is plain, these good qualities, which minister an entrance into that bliss, must be attained as soon as we can possibly. This present state of mortality is the only scene of action and improvement; and since this scene so suddenly may change, we are not safe in the delay of one moment. This is in truth our case. But we are loth to understand it, and so inordinately fond of sensual delights that we even take a pleasure in imposing upon ourselves; and by the most fatal of all infatuations, cherish and gratify our bodies at the expense and extreme hazard of our souls.

And what is the effect of this, but heaping up more fuel for everlasting flames to feed upon? For our sins and lusts kindle and blow up those fires; and the more heinous and impetuous these are, the fiercer and more furiously those will be sure to burn. For, as the torments of ungodly wretches shall there be exquisite for their degree, so shall they for their kind and quality be suited and proportioned to the sins of each particular person, and so contrived as to be most sensibly afflicting and painful to the respective tempers and complexions of men, the habits they have contracted, and the appetites they have indulged. The lazy and stupid shall be awakened and roused into sense by sharp scourges and burning stings. The glutton and drunkard gnawed with insatiable hunger, and parched with unquenchable thirst. The nice and delicate, who proposed no happiness here to themselves but luxury and pleasure, shall then be strangled with the noisome vapours of flaming

pitch and stinking sulphur. The envious and discontented shall howl perpetually like mad dogs. The proud and vainglorious shall be confounded with shame and contempt. The covetous shall pine away with extreme penury and want; and no one vice shall escape a torture exactly fitted to make its indulger the most miserable that it is possible for him to be. In a word, one single hour in those dismal pains and horrors shall be more insupportable than whole ages of that uneasiness which wicked men here have so irreconcilable an aversion to submit to, for mortifying their vanities and amending their lives.

For (which is of all others the last and dreadfullest aggravation) those miseries and tortures have no end, no refreshment, no intermission. But the sharpest afflictions we endure in this life will quickly have a period. They have their interval of ease and comfort; and those sorrows which we feel upon a religious account are largely recompensed with spiritual consolations and sweet peace of mind. Do not then grudge a little present grief, but mourn earnestly for thy sins, and bend thy utmost thoughts and care to the subduing and reforming them, that this short anxiety may deliver thee from eternal despair and anguish inconceivable, and those few tears of repentance may secure to thee a portion of everlasting joy with the blessed.

O happy reverse of all their griefs and sufferings which the righteous shall find in that day, when they shall stand full of hope and humble confidence before that judgment-seat from which their haughty and merciless oppressors, confounded with fear and amazed with guilt, shall strive and wish in vain to hide their trembling heads. When he who now stands tamely at the bar of men and innocently suffers, shall then be advanced to a throne, and placed among the saints and martyrs, to assist at the trial of his once insulting judges. When the poor and meek shall have great boldness, while the proud and great sinner quakes at the presence of God and the Lamb. When that

piety and godly fear, that abstinence and severe virtue, that patient enduring for Christ's sake, which is now thought just matter of derision and contempt, and counted folly and religious madness, shall then be acknowledged by its most satirical scorners to be indeed the true, the only wisdom. When the remembrance of past miseries shall be sweet, and they whose wicked malice exercised such patience shall be struck dumb with sad remorse and bitterness of soul. When all who devoted themselves to God and His service shall be transported with raptures of joy, and all those who disregarded or despised them shall weep and lament. When the afflicted and persecuted shall bless his bitter cup, and feel more refined, more substantial delights from it, than sensual pleasures or uninterrupted prosperity could ever bring to the most voluptuous and fortunate. When the plain dress of the humble, and sackcloth of the penitent, shall shine glorious as the sun; and all the gay pomp and glittering jewels of the proud and gaudy sinner shall be trampled under foot like dung. When the cottage shall take place of the court, patience appear more eligible than the most boundless and arbitrary power, the honest obedience of a humble faith more wise than the nicest cavils of the subtlest wit, and a good conscience more useful learning than the most elaborate systems of philosophy. When the contempt of riches shall approve itself the greatest treasure, devout prayer the most delicious entertainment, silence and caution the best conversation. When good works shall plead better than the most accurate eloquence, alms prove the most prevailing advocate, self-denial the most exalted pleasure, and the conquest of ill habits the most glorious triumph.

If then this be (and this most assuredly is) a true representation of that decisive day; if this the different fate and effect of these so very different persons and practices; consider, I conjure thee, the circumstances of those damned. And harden thyself from this reflection: to endure a *little*

now when that *little* will secure thee against enduring infinitely more hereafter. Make trial of thyself, and if the slight difficulties of a religious life seem tedious and tiresome, turn the argument against thy sensual inclination, and think how one who sinks under these will be able to dwell with exquisite and everlasting torments. Nor is this a trifling, needless inquiry, but absolutely necessary and of mighty moment. For matters are so ordered that perfect ease can be no man's portion in *both* worlds. They who choose their good things here cannot have them hereafter too, nor shall any man who indulges sense and pleasure upon earth, rejoice and reign with Christ in the kingdom of heaven.

Suppose, then, that, from your entrance into the body to this very day, you had enjoyed the utmost your heart could possibly desire, of all which this world calls happiness—honours, riches, pleasures, without check, or stint, or interruption; yet what good would all this do to you, if it should please God just now to strike you with death? Do not you plainly see, without my prosecuting this argument any farther, that all below is vanity and mere nothing, and that the love of God and a religious life is the only thing which can stand you in any stead? This will stick by you when all the rest forsake you. This is neither destroyed by death, nor afraid of punishment, but triumphs over both; fills the man with confidence and joyful expectation at the dreadful day of judgment, and sets him above all the terrors and dismal apprehensions of hell and its tortures. But then this is the peculiar privilege of the servants of God; for how is it possible for the men who practise and delight in wickedness to think of death and judgment without fear and perplexity of heart? How should they enjoy quiet, and be easy in their minds, if they think at all what is coming apace upon them? Let then the love of God prevail over that of sin. But if thou art not yet perfect enough to be actuated by this noble principle, let at least the love of

thyself reclaim thee, and the fear of hell restrain and deter thee from a course which must end at last in thy utter and inevitable ruin. This, says the Scripture, "is the beginning of wisdom;" for he who is proof against the fear of God cannot persevere in anything that is good; as having no manner of principle that can save him, no curb upon his mind that can awe or hold him in from running headlong into the snares of the devil.

CHAPTER XXV.

Of Zeal in the Reformation of our Lives.

"BE fervent in prayer, serving the Lord," says the Apostle. And such indeed it highly concerns every one to be in His service. For what is the end we propose by dedicating ourselves in solemn vows to Christ? Or to what purpose do we renounce the world and its vanities, but that these sacred ties may engage our utmost watchfulness and diligence, to consecrate our persons and actions, to conform ourselves to the image of God, by living to Him, and like Him, and much above the rate of common men? Let not therefore these good resolutions cool upon your hands; but be zealous in piety and virtue. Consider that you shall shortly receive an ample recompense for all your holy labours, and see a happy end of grief and fear and hardship. Be content with "travail and pain" for a very little while, and "you shall be sure to find rest and peace and joy to your souls. The yoke is easy and the burden is light;" but "the weight of glory is far more exceeding and eternal." Be but you careful to discharge your part, and then you need never doubt God's making good His. Support and encourage yourself with the full assurance of obtaining the

crown; but take heed that assurance do not degenerate into presumption; nor the prospect of bliss, which should excite a more active and cheerful obedience, become an occasion of spiritual security and sloth.

I remember an instance of a person, irresolute and wavering in the concerns of his soul, divided between hope and fear, who in his prayers was earnestly entreating to be assured of his own perseverance, and expressing how happy he should think himself could he but be satisfied on this point; whereupon he was immediately answered from within, "Well, and supposing you could be assured of this, how would you proceed then? Do but act now as you would think yourself obliged to do in that case, and never question your persevering." This comfortable reply settled his mind; and instead of indulging any curious inquiries into events, or anxious doubts concerning the success of his endeavours, he immediately applied himself to consider what God expected from him, and to set about the performance of that, without more to do. "Trust in the Lord, and be doing good," says the Psalmist; "commit thy way to Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

The great and common obstacle to vigorous virtue is the dreadful notion men form to themselves of the difficulties attending it, and how laborious a thing religion is. And true it is, exalted piety will cost many a sore conflict. But even this consideration may be some encouragement too, when we consider that the hardship of the undertaking and the violence of the opposition add to the glory of the fight, and entitle the conqueror to a crown so much brighter as the toil and hazard of the day he won was greater. For the more a man subdues himself, and does honour to the divine grace, by rendering it victorious over flesh and blood, the larger measures of that grace he shall obtain from God, and become more exemplary in the world.

There are not, 'tis confessed, in every man the same passions, or not the same degrees of them, to master and mortify.

But though a man, whose affections are vehement, and his disposition by nature or custom more stubborn and averse to virtue, hath more to make his way through; yet if this man's resolutions be firmer, and his vigour be proportionably greater, he shall be able to advance farther than others of a quieter temper and less rebellious passions, if that sedateness at the same time dispose them to ease and inactivity.

Now in this undertaking, two things there are of mighty moment for promoting it. The first is, to observe the tendencies of one's temper and constitution, and take care to bend nature the contrary way, by keeping aloof off from all those temptations and occasions of sinning with which we feel ourselves most easily beset, and strongly inclined to comply. The other, to discover our peculiar defects, and labour with all our might to attain those virtues which we chiefly want.

And as this knowledge of our own frailties and necessities is greatly instrumental to our improvement, so we shall do well to profit by what we see in others, and to be particularly concerned for avoiding and subduing those habits which we find most usual and offensive in them with whom we converse. For the commonness of any ill thing is so far from extenuating the blame of those who copy after it, that it is the direct contrary; and such examples should be looked upon as marks which discover to us where the rocks and sands lie; such as are set to warn us off, not to invite us in. Indeed a wise and good man will turn examples of all sorts to his own advantage. The good he will make his patterns, and strive to equal or excel them. The bad he will by all means avoid. Or if by reflection the deformity of his neighbour's actions happen to represent that of his own, he will be sure to do so no more; and think it a happy occasion that he is thus grown wiser by the folly of others. For we often see and judge that in the deportment of those we converse with, which too near a light will not let us discern, or

partiality let us condemn, in our owu. And this should make us cautious, when we remember that the eyes of others are as sharp, as critical observers, as severe judges of us and all we do, as ours can possibly be of them. From this universal disposition to observe and judge proceeds, no doubt, that pleasing approbation or vehement dislike of good and bad examples. For what indeed gives us a more sensible satisfaction than the seeing men in every point agreeable to their character? When they who call themselves by the name of Christ, and pretend in a peculiar manner to belong and be resigned up to Him, are eminent in good works and heavenly dispositions; when they submit entirely to His yoke, and think nothing too much to do or suffer in obedience to His will; how charming, how delightful a sight is this? And again, how offensive, how very shocking, when they who make the same outward profession shall dishonour and defile it by a scandalous and profligate conversation; and instead of that severe, that spiritual and heavenly life to which their very name and the pattern of their Master obliges them, abandon themselves to all manner of excess, and wallow in the most brutish and detestable pollutions? But even where men do not degenerate into all this beastliness, where cares and business of the world divert and draw them off from better employments, 'tis unseemly to others, and of ill consequence to themselves, to neglect their proper concern, and engage their thoughts and time in matters foreign to their main design.

Quicken therefore yourself up to duty by the remembrance of your station, who you are, and what you have obliged yourself to be. Bear constantly about you a lively idea of Christ crucified. Consider carefully His life, and let the perfection of that shame you into the reforming your own: your own, I say, whose very baptism represents your profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour, and to be made like unto Him; and yet, after so many

years being called a Christian, you are still too far from being one, if "dying to sin, and living to righteousness," as your Jesus died and rose again for you, be that which makes a Christian, and distinguishes him from other men. If persons dedicated to piety and virtue would but with due attention fix their thoughts upon the actions and sufferings of Christ, this single subject would furnish them with instructions and motives abundantly sufficient for their purpose. St. Paul, we see, determined to know nothing but "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified;" and this indeed, truly known, is the best, the most useful, and most comprehensive learning.

This fires men with an eager, holy zeal, and renders them not only exact, but cheerful in their duty; it makes them perform what He commands with diligence, and suffer all that He ordains with patience and contentedness. Whereas a negligent and lukewarm Christian conspires against himself; his life is one perpetual torment, for want of entire resignation and fervent love. The trials and afflictions bear hard upon his spirit, and the good he attempts is strained and against the grain. He feels not the support of spiritual comforts; he knows he must not have recourse to worldly ones; or, if he might, they will not do his business; and so he is left destitute of all. For by transgressing the rules of Christian discipline, he hazards the safety of his soul; and by seeking relief in inconvenient liberties, he creates fresh torments to himself; because these cannot satisfy his conscience, but will be sure to leave some displeasure and bitterness behind them. And who can ever be easy who is reproached with his own ill conduct, and chooses a remedy worse than the distemper?

To this pattern, set us by Christ Himself, it will be of great use to add those of the apostles, and other eminent lights in the Church heretofore. These will convince us what excellences mere men are capable of; and if we heartily aspire after their perfections, we ought not to dis-

trust God's assistance, but may confidently promise ourselves that an equal degree of zeal will be supported by an equal measure of grace and strength. Observe, then, their austerities, their fervent prayers and heavenly meditations; observe the great and happy efficacy of them, in raising those holy persons above the world and its temptations, and rendering their conversation all heavenly and divine, even whilst upon earth. It were indeed a desirable thing, that we could so wholly abstract ourselves from flesh and sense that the praises of God and attendance upon His commands, the contemplation of His glories and the ravishing satisfaction of devout minds, might be our constant and only employment. And happy should we be if the necessary cares of life gave no distraction to our thoughts, no interruption to those holy exercises. But these are charms and joys reserved for a future and better state; we cannot here be so refined, we cannot be excused from the incumbrances of the body, and its inseparable frailties and necessities. And therefore the virtue proper to our present condition is of another nature. Use these worldly comforts we may, but we must not place our happiness in them; live upon them our bodies must, but our souls should relish nothing but God. Whatever His providence thinks fit for us, we are to receive with meekness and contentedness; as being well assured that His wisdom *can*, and His goodness *will*, choose and ordain what is best. "In the day of prosperity we may rejoice," but that joy must be so tempered with gratitude and moderation as neither to swell into insolence and pride, nor to engage our affections in the love of the world. "In the day of adversity we are to consider" and entertain the most calamitous accidents without murmuring or discontent. In every change of circumstances our minds must be entirely resigned to God; for He is all in all, eternal and unchangeable, perfect and happy in Himself, absolute and sole Lord of the Universe; and every creature is, and ought to be, entirely at His disposal.

But though He be always the same, and can at any time do what is good in His sight, yet this is by no means our case. Frail and of short continuance is our character; and this should excite our diligence "to work while it is day, because our night cometh on apace, wherein no man can work." Consider, therefore, you must die—die, you know not how soon; and be afraid lest that fatal hour overtake you before the business of life be finished. Remember that the time once yours can never be so again; the wealth of both the Indies cannot redeem one single opportunity which you have once let slip; and therefore lay fast hold on all that offer, and suffer no hour to slide by without its due improvement.

Virtue can never be attained without great pains and diligence; and if you cool and linger in this pursuit, the moment that you gain not ground, you lose it. For the affairs of our souls can never stand at one stay; but as often as we favour ourselves in point of duty, we decline and fall back again towards sin, or at least into an indisposition towards goodness; but if we cherish our zeal, and constantly blow up its holy fires by a vigorous attendance upon our business, we shall soon feel the comfort of this kindly warmth, and all the difficulties we found or formed to ourselves will wear off quickly. God will give more grace to him that uses what He gave formerly; and virtue every day will disclose her charms, and make us more in love with her. Then it is that the wise man's description is experimentally made good to us: "That her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." I readily acknowledge the attempt I am now advising to be exceeding laborious and great; no bodily toil is to be compared to it, nor any conquest over temporal enemies so hazardous and expensive as that which we gain upon ourselves and the adversary of souls. But as the difficulty exceeds, so does the benefit and glory likewise. This field must be fought and won, or we are lost for ever; and he

who does not inure himself to vanquishing by subduing less temptations, will never be able to grapple with more violent and trying ones; and infirmities once yielded to, grow insensibly to stubborn habits of vice. This is a daily warfare, and we may daily reap the fruits of it. For every night will crown us with fresh laurels, and the reflection upon a day well spent furnish us with joys more pleasing than ten thousand triumphs. Since therefore every day's behaviour is of such mighty consequence in giving a turn to our spiritual affairs, beware lest any pass unprofitably. Watch continually over thyself, and let not this necessary fervour abate for want of care to cherish and excite it. Remember that your own salvation is the trust committed to your charge, a trust of importance greater than the whole world, and therefore, whatever becomes of the rest, do you secure one. To admonish and reprove your brethren while you overlook yourself, is a most preposterous course; it is neglecting your own province, and invading another man's. You have no right to take the mote out of *their* eye till the beam be first cast out of *your own*. If then you would escape the censure of hypocrisy, begin at home to reform, and be sure to do that effectually. For the greater violence you are content to put upon your own inclinations, and the sorer conflicts you undergo, the more meritorous is your virtue, and the more abundant will be your joy.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

The Life of the Spiritual Man.

"THE kingdom of God is within you," says our Blessed Lord. Betake thyself, then, entirely to God; love Him with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and bid a final adieu to this wretched world, and thou shalt find sweet content and comfort unspeakable. Learn to despise these outward vanities, and seek pure and spiritual satisfactions. Place all thy hopes, thy happiness, thy thoughts in them, and thou shalt feel this kingdom spring up and grow within thee. "For the kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" a joy peculiar to the saints, in which wicked and worldly-minded men have no part. Christ will approach to those that fly to Him for refuge, meet and embrace them in His arms, and fill them with His heavenly consolations. He knocks, and waits to come in, and only stays till thou hast swept and garnished thy soul, and prepared an apartment, clean and fit for so pure, so divine an inhabitant. For all His charms and glories shine inward. They are not like the gaudy pomps and glittering outsides of earthly ornaments, but lie deep in the breast of His saints. There is His beauty, there His sweet conversation, there His ravishing comforts, there the abundance of His peace, and the intimacy of His friendship.

Come then, believing soul, to work, and employ all thy diligence to prepare thy heart for thy Beloved—that

Heavenly Spouse who will not disdain this poor and homely mansion, and only asks thy love and care to make it worthy of Him. Hear His own gracious promise: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come and make our abode with him." Make room, then, for this Blessed Guest; cast out the crowd of worldly cares and desires; admit no partner in thy breast, but reserve thy whole heart for this One Inhabitant. This One is enough, for He is all the world; and if thou hast Him, thou hast riches and honour, and plenty of everything that is good. He will be thy Master, thy Protector, thy Counsellor, thy Agent, thy Friend; will take thy cares upon Himself, and manage all thy concerns to the best advantage; nor shalt thou need any other assistant, or ask relief from men. For why indeed from men, whose power is so short and their affections so inconstant? They quickly change, and mock the hopes of those that depend upon their kindness; but Christ endureth for ever, and is a sure help in all His servants' extremities. Supposing all the sincerity and zeal for our service that man is capable of, yet still he is but man, mortal and frail, and cannot always have the ability, even when he hath most the disposition, to relieve and do us good. Since, then, so little confidence is due to his succours, the concern ought not to be great if he withdraw or deny them; if he oppose and grieve, and labour to do us harm. For this is frequently the case, the effect of a fickle temper, that the very same persons who to-day are our dearest friends, to-morrow shall be our bitterest enemies; and they who now are our most furious adversaries, within a little while come over to our side. It cannot well be otherwise in persons so unsettled, so liable to turn with every breath of wind. Place, then, thy hope and trust in Him alone, with "whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Let Him be the only object of thy fear and love. In Him thou art sure to find a constant and powerful Friend—One who will heartily espouse thy cause, and

order matters better than thou thyself, if left to thine own choice, could possibly do. Alas! thou hast here no continuing city, but art a stranger and sojourner, and must expect to find no settlement till possessed of and united to Christ.

Why do thy anxious thoughts look out for ease and a fixed happiness in a place which is not, cannot be, thy rest? Thy conversation ought to be in heaven, for there is thy home, and all things here should be no otherwise regarded than as refreshments and conveniences given to support thee in thy journey thither; things in perpetual motion, and such as pass away from thee; and things which thou thyself art passing away from too, as fast as time and mortality can carry thee. Do not then imagine that they can stick by thee, or thou by them; but look upon them with an eye of indifference, and keep thy soul disengaged. For if thou suffer them to fasten upon thy affections, they will enslave thy mind and turn to thy eternal ruin. Assert, then, and preserve thy native liberty, by raising thy soul above this vain world, and fixing thy desires and meditations upon the most high God. Converse with Christ in prayer, and let this be so constant, so intent, as to contract an intimate familiarity with Him.

It may be, His glories and divine excellences are objects too refined and lofty for thy contemplations to dwell upon with relish and sensible delight. But He hath condescended to thy mean capacity, and by becoming man, afflicted man, hath furnished us with matter of meditation, of a size with our minds, while dwelling in flesh. Consider, then, His poverty and sufferings. And if thou canst not soar up so high as Christ sitting on His throne, behold Him hanging on His cross. Take sanctuary in His stripes and wounds and death; those stripes by which the world is healed, that death by which mankind live. And if these be well attended to, they will administer marvellous strength and comfort to thy adversities, enable thee to bear wrongs

with ease, contempt with patience, calumny and detraction with content. What! was the Son of God a scorn of men, and an outcast of the people? Was the King of Heaven reduced to wants and necessities upon earth, and had not so much as "where to lay His head?" Was He, who loved His enemies so tenderly as even to die for them, forsaken by His friends? Did Christ submit cheerfully to endure and to be despised? And dost thou, wretched sinner, murmur and complain when poverty or contempt come upon thee, when thy friends desert or thy enemies slander thee? Did He undergo the malice and *contradiction* of men, and dost thou expect that all men should favour and assist, and speak of thee with honour? Nay, wretched man, entertain not so vain a hope. It cannot be; it is not fit it should. For couldst thou be exempted from injuries and afflictions, what opportunity could there ever be for the exercise of thy patience? If nothing cross should happen in the whole course of thy life, how couldst thou approve thy friendship and love for Christ, how express thy likeness to Him? This, the Apostle tells us, is the condition, this the way that leads to happiness; and they who desire to reign with Christ must not think much to suffer with Him and for Him.

Oh! had we but, with Thomas, put our "fingers into the print of His nails, and thrust our hands into His side;" had we but acquainted ourselves with His sufferings by deep and serious consideration, and tasted indeed the astonishing greatness of His love; the joys and miseries of this life would soon become indifferent to us. Or rather, they would no longer be indifferent, but we should even rejoice in tribulation, and triumph in the opposition and shame and wrongful dealings of men, which draw us to so much nearer and more lively resemblance of the Blessed Jesus. For the love of Christ teaches us to despise ourselves; and they who do so will bear the reproaches and despisings of others with easiness and temper. A man whose soul is

united to Christ in fervent love, and who hath freed himself from passions and worldly solicitudes—this man, I say, is as it were spiritualized, can have recourse to God without distraction, lives in a manner by and within himself; nay, is raised above himself, and enjoys heaven while yet upon earth. He that hath shook off the fallacies and prepossessions of sense, that sees and judges things, not after the deceitful measures of common opinion, but by the standard of truth and their own nature; he is the wise, the truly learned man, and he is taught this wisdom, not by human methods, but by instructions from above, from God the fountain and perfection of all wisdom.

This man can never want opportunities of enjoying and improving his happiness. The interruptions, which common men lament, cannot affect him. For nothing can take him from himself; and so long as he hath his own breast to retire into, he cannot be deprived of a fit place and proper season for any holy exercise. If business and the world at any time call him abroad, he always acts and converses there with cautious reserve, and keeps it in his power to recollect and retreat again at pleasure. Bodily labour is no hindrance, for this employs but the least part of him; the cares of life he never lays himself out upon; but suits his temper to his present circumstances, and only studies to keep his mind easy and composed; the unreasonableness, and folly, and unaccountable perverseness of other men's humour and behaviour give him no disturbance, for he is taken up with his own. In short, every man finds more or less vexation and obstruction in the affairs of his soul, as he engages himself more or less in the world, and as he chooses or refuses to make those things his care which are not properly so.

A man whose mind is purified from the dross of earth, and disposed as it ought to God and heavenly things, will find that every accident of life contributes to his advantage. For the true reason of our passion and disquiet, when things

fall out contrary to our expectations or desires, is the want of that resignation and temper which never fails to compose the spirit of men, mortified to themselves and the world, and disengaged from the vanities and false appearances of happiness here below. Nothing so infects and defiles, so entangles and perplexes a man's mind, as a sordid love of the creatures. But when we can once prevail with ourselves to despise these trifling, these deluding comforts without us, our retirements into our own breasts will be frequent and free, our joys resulting from them undisturbed, and our contemplations of heaven and heavenly things full of rapture and transport.

CHAPTER II.

The Advantage of Humility.

BE not extremely solicitous what friends thou hast to appear in thy behalf, nor what foes employ their malice in creating thee difficulty and trouble; but let it be thy great care to keep God thy friend and helper, and be sure to preserve a good conscience; for, so long as thy own heart condemns thee not, God will not fail to plead thy cause, and assist and bless thy righteous undertakings. And those whom He receives into His peculiar protection, no wickedness or spite shall be able to hurt. Suffer thou mayst indeed, but provided thou learn to suffer without murmuring and impatience, thou shalt certainly see the salvation of God. And if this seem to tarry, yet wait for it; for He best knows the proper season of deliverance, and therefore you ought entirely to rest upon His wise disposal. Deliver no doubt He will; the relieving men in distress, and wiping off the shame and reproach of His servants, being acts by which God delights

to signalize His providence. But there is often reason why the doing it should be deferred, since the discovery of our failings by other people, and the reproofs we meet with upon their account, have frequently a very happy effect upon our minds, and render them more modest and humble in their own esteem of themselves.

And humility is a virtue of so general, so exceeding good influence, that we can scarce purchase it too dear. For he who is lowly in his own eyes, and sensible of his own failings, makes no difficulty to acknowledge his offences against his neighbour, and gives all reasonable satisfaction to any who have cause to be angry at him. Nor does this forwardness to reconciliation expose him to the insults of injurious men; for God charges His providence with a peculiar protection of the humble, and delivers such as are of a contrite spirit. He condescends to dwell with the humble, and hath engaged to comfort their holy sorrows. To these He promises large portions of His grace, and that "they who abase themselves shall afterwards be exalted:" to these He reveals his secrets, and draws them to Himself with the cords of love and kindness. The humble suffers no disturbance of mind, but receives the reproaches and affronts of men without any great impression. For he considers that God, and not the world, is his hope; and if His favour be but secured, the rest cannot be of any very great importance. In short, this virtue is so necessary, so fundamental a one, that no man ought to esteem himself a proficient in goodness who is not yet arrived to that pitch of it which teaches him to think himself the least of all saints, and last of all men.

CHAPTER III.

The Peacemaker.

SECURE peace at home in the first place; and when thy own breast is thus composed, it will then be proper to reconcile and make peace among thy neighbours. And this indeed is a very worthy and reputable action; it brings greater and juster commendation to a man, and more benefit to those with whom he converses, than wit, or learning, or any of those other so much admired accomplishments. And as everything is set off by its contrary, so here the mischief of a contentious disposition is inconceivable. For nothing can be so innocent, nothing so well or kindly meant, but such a man will be sure to fix some ill interpretation upon it; but the good temper will be as careful, on the other hand, to take everything in the best sense it is capable of. For a peaceable man is not apt to suspect ill of any; but the peevish and discontented are racked and tormented with a thousand jealous whimsies, and neither are quiet themselves, nor content to let other people be so. They are very liberal in saying what they should not, and as backward in doing what they should; diligent observers of their neighbour's duty, and scandalously negligent of their own. Whereas, in truth, our Saviour's rule should always be our measure; for no man is fit to censure or correct his brother, by pulling "the mote out of his eye," till he have first exercised a due severity upon himself, and be effectually reformed, by casting "the beam out of his own eye." And oh! how happy should we be, how eased of detraction, and calumny, and censoriousness, if none will take upon them to condemn or censure others, till they were first qualified for the authority they usurp, by a thorough amendment of their own manners, and being proof against any just reprehension themselves!

Who can forbear the observing how manifestly unequal we are in our dealings? Every one is ingenious at framing excuses, and making large allowances for what he doth himself; and yet scarce anybody admits the apologies alleged by others in their own vindication. How much more just and reasonable were our proceedings, would we but pass a favourable construction upon the actions of others, and turn the severity of our censure upon our own? If you expect to be borne with, you must first learn to bear with your brethren, and exercise the good-nature you expect, as oft as occasion offers. For men are best taught by examples, and the measure we mete gives us a right to receive the same again. But is this charity? Is this humility? Nothing more distant from it. For these dispose us to condemn and be angry with nobody but ourselves. To keep up a good understanding with men of goodness and temper is but a very vulgar virtue. This is easy and delightful, for every man naturally desires quiet and good usage, and cannot help being well affected to persons who love and please, and are like him. The difficulty is, to carry matters smooth and inoffensively with men of rugged, intractable, and fierce dispositions; with those who make little conscience of what they do or say, and stick at nothing unjust or unfair in their dealings. And he who can do this, is a truly great soul, and sets a noble and commendable pattern of philosophical, or, which is more, of Christian fortitude.

There are a sort of men who cherish peace and quiet with themselves and all the world; and another very vile sort of wretches, the very reverse of these, who delight to fish in troubled waters, and are neither easy, nor will suffer anybody else to be so; eternally troublesome to others, but much more tormenting and vexatious to themselves. And there are yet a third sort, who are not satisfied with giving no offence, but make it their business to reconcile others, where it hath been given, and to restore that peace which they were never instrumental in disturbing. But when all is

done, our life here is exposed to perpetual misery and contention, and the utmost degree of peace we must expect to arrive at does not consist in being free from injuries and crosses, but in bearing them with humility, and not being provoked to impatience and uneasy resentments. And therefore, the more any man hath brought himself to suffer, and the better he entertains afflictions and wrongs, the more serene his mind will be. For this person hath gained a conquest over himself, is above the reach of fortune, hath the world at his command, is a friend of Christ, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

CHAPTER IV.

Purity and Sincerity.

THERE are two wings by which a man soars above the world—sincerity and purity. The former regards the intention, the latter the affections. That aspires and aims at a likeness to God; this makes us really like Him. We should find no difficulty in any good action were but our minds free from all intemperate passion and desire. And this perfection of freedom we should not fail to attain, did we in all our designs and undertakings propose no other ends than obedience to the will of God, and promoting the good of our neighbour. Were but our minds thus fixed and our intentions regulated, everything would strangely contribute to our edification. We should study the volume of Nature with profit, and every line in that large book would tend to our instruction. The very smallest, and in common esteem most despicable, creature would represent, as in a glass, the goodness of God to us. And the reason why these things are seen with so useless speculation is

because our minds are not rightly disposed to draw those profitable and practical inferences which very naturally result from them; for as colours appear to our minds as they are painted in the eye, so the judgment men make of all outward objects depends upon the condition of the mind. And we argue and pronounce of them differently, as we happen to be differently affected beforehand.

If there be such a thing as true pleasure in this world, the pure in heart enjoy it. And if there be a hell upon earth, it dwells in that man's breast who hath a guilty and polluted conscience. As iron is scoured from the rust by fire, and becomes bright and new, so that zeal by which we renounce the world and turn entirely to God takes off our filth and changes us into new men. The lukewarm and indifferent Christian grudges everything he does, boggles at every difficulty, and seeks his satisfaction in worldly and outward comforts. But if he warmly apply himself to subdue his passions, and resolutely attempt the following God in his own way, the hardships which at first discouraged him grow familiar and lessen upon his hands. All that God appoints him to do or suffer, becomes sensibly to him an "easy yoke and a light burden," and he finds "peace and rest to his soul."

CHAPTER V.

Know Thyself.

IT is a very usual thing with us to have a mighty confidence in ourselves, when, alas! the want both of abilities and performance reproves our vanity and folly; for how small is the proportion of our gifts in comparison of our own imaginations concerning them! And how defective our

wisdom and care to use and improve even that proportion we have! The light that is in us shines but dimly, and by our neglect we suffer it to go quite out. We are often blind and not sensible of our infirmities; we stumble and fall, and still pretend we see; commit horrible sins; aggravate our guilt by defending what we have done; nay, are sometimes so wretchedly deluded as even to sanctify our wickedness by a pretence of zeal. The smallest faults of others seldom escape our censure; and the much greater of our own as seldom fall under our observation. The burdens and hardships we put upon them, seem reasonable, easy, and light; but the least and most trivial uneasiness they create to us, we have a quick and painful sense of, and cry out, "Who can bear it?" Whereas, would we but take a right estimate of ourselves, and judge our own actions impartially, we should find little leisure and less provocation to pronounce severely concerning our brethren.

Now this is the wise and truly spiritual man's method: he employs his thoughts at home, considers that there lies his proper business and care; and is tender of other people's failings, from a due and humble consciousness of his own. And whatever fond opinions we may cherish of our own virtue, religious and perfect we are not, nor ever can be, till we examine our own consciences diligently, and leave all the rest of the world to stand and fall by the judgment of their own master. Censoriousness and Christian piety can never dwell together. For this would work us to a neglect of all things without us, and make us both forbear and despise all judging but those of God and our own consciences. The mind which does not converse with itself is an idle wanderer, and all the learning in the world is fruitless and misemployed, whilst in the midst of his boasted knowledge a man continues in profound ignorance of that which in point both of duty and advantage he is most concerned to know. True peace and satisfaction of mind can only be acquired by doing our own business; and friendship

and charity are best preserved by leaving off all impertinent and busy curiosity concerning the conduct and reputation of our neighbours.

The abandoning all worldly care is a true argument of greater proficience in goodness; for by esteeming highly of anything here below, our value for God and heaven is unavoidably lessened and impaired. Let nothing therefore but God, and the things that be of God, seem great or grateful to thee, worthy desiring or rejoicing in. And all that imaginary comfort which the creatures pretend to administer treat with the generous neglect and contempt that it deserves. For a soul entirely devoted to the love of God will naturally despise everything in comparison of Him. And reason good there is why it should do so, when we consider that everything else is frail and of short continuance, empty and unsatisfactory; but God alone eternal, omnipresent, infinite in every excellence; and therefore He is the best, He the only comfort and true joy of the soul, who alone can fill and exceed its largest desires.

CHAPTER VI.

The Joy of a Good Conscience.

THE glory and privilege of a good man consists in the testimony of his own mind; for this is a perpetual feast and triumph. It sets him above the power of fortune, and makes the sharpest afflictions not only an exercise of his invincible patience, but a matter of undisturbed joy to him. Whereas even prosperity itself cannot procure ease and content to a guilty and self-condemning breast. Wouldst thou then enjoy a sweet and uninterrupted tranquillity? Keep all at peace within, and give thy own thoughts no cause to

reproach thee. All the satisfaction we take or promise ourselves is vain and dangerous, except that only which proceeds from a sense of having done our duty. The men thou seest so gay, so seemingly full of delight, are galled and stung within; they have no inward, no true contentment; and notwithstanding their most industrious pursuits of pleasure, that sentence of God is irreversible, and the sad effects of it hang over their hearts, that "there is no peace to the wicked." They may perhaps make mighty boasts of their enjoyments, put on an air of happiness, give out that their pomp and greatness secures them from the assaults of misery; but these are all delusions, and ought not to incline our assent or provoke our envy. We see not their inward tortures, nor are witnesses of those checks and terrors which make retirement bitter and insupportable, and haunt their closets and their beds. We see not yet, but there is a time coming when we shall see an angry God breaking out upon them in fury, their mighty projects quashed and baffled, and all the happiness they vainly boasted of vanish like a dream.

While therefore these men take a pride in their successes and outward enjoyments, do thou with equal satisfaction entertain thy afflictions. This is not indeed to flesh and blood an easy undertaking; but to a soul filled with grace and love, which knows and proposes to itself no other happiness but God, nothing is impracticable, nothing difficult. For what is this but to rejoice in the fatherly care and affection of Him whose providence ordereth these sufferings for thy good? The glory which we give or receive from one another is very fickle and perishing; it cannot last long, and while it does, some alloy of sorrows will ever attend and damp it. The good man's glory stands upon stronger foundations; it rises from within, and must endure so long as that innocence which creates it; nay, it must last as long as God Himself, for His will carefully performed, His favour and approbation which follows that

performance, are the solid basis on which it stands. And these can never fail so long as truth and justice continue impregnable. To him who aspires after eternal glory and honour, that of this world is of very little consideration. And these are so very different, so inconsistent, that the love and sincere desires of the one are best proved by a neglect and disesteem of the other. Nay, not only the future, but the present happiness is best secured by seeking the approbation of God alone; for nothing contributes more to an easy and quiet mind than a disregard of the praise and despising the censures and reproaches of men.

A pure and quiet conscience does above all things dispose a man to rest contented with his condition; and particularly with regard to the opinion of the world it is highly reasonable he should do so. For what is any one really the better or the worse for what other people say of him? Their commendations add nothing to his virtue, nor does their dispraise and scandal take one whit from it. The man is still the same: what his own actions and the judgment of God make him. This is the standard of our worth and happiness; neither more nor less belongs to us than will be found to do so at the last great account, and that will depend, not upon what we were said or supposed to be, but upon what in very deed we were in this world. The more respect, therefore, we bear to the condition of our own minds, the less impression will the characters and reports of men make upon us. For God seeth not as men see: they observe the face and outward appearance, but He searcheth and understands the heart. They look upon the action, and form a judgment from thence; He sees our intentions, and condemns or acquits us according to our honesty and sincerity, or corrupt inclinations and wicked designs. And therefore a modest, humble man makes it his constant care to be doing good, and to think meanly of his own performances. He seeks, nay, he feels, no great matter of comfort from any of the advantages which attend well-doing in this

world, but considers whom he serves, and for whose sake he does it, and cheerfully relies upon Him alone for the praise and reward of that which best deserves it. And when we are not anxiously concerned for the testimony and credit of men, then may we truly be said to have resigned ourselves to God, and to depend upon Him, with that steadfast and holy confidence which becomes us. "Not he that commendeth himself" (no, nor he whom others commend neither) "is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." And therefore a holy and spiritual man indeed lays aside, as much as may be, all concern with the world. He considers that God is the only person whom he should labour to please, and while he is happy in His approbation, and the witness of a good conscience, all outward accidents are considered as things remote and foreign to his main design, and such as ought not much to affect him.

CHAPTER VII.

Of Loving Jesus above all Things.

BLESSED is that man indeed who feels and relishes the love of Jesus, who finds the sweet of this love, and can even despise and hate himself for his Saviour's sake. For, though the love of ourselves be the very voice of reason and nature, yet the same voice commands us too to quit a less valuable friend for a better. And this exchange He hath made necessary to our obedience, who requires us to love Him only, above all things. And He alone is worthy of our love. For the objects of this world, which are too apt to engage our affections, are uncertain and deceitful; but Christ is faithful and eternal, and will not fail to return and reward our love. He that depends upon any temporal comfort, will one day be convinced of its frailty to his

cost, when he and it both perish together; but Jesus remaineth for ever. And as He cannot perish Himself, so neither will He suffer any to perish who depend upon Him. Let Him then be your hope, your joy, your love, whose friendship and whose power are everlasting. Though all things forsake you, yet will not He; nay, all things else will certainly forsake you, but even then He will be all, and more than all, the world to you.

Living and dying, then, keep close and steadfast to Him, for He in life and death will be to you advantage. But then His friendship and constant protection depends upon this condition, that you admit no rival into competition with Him. He will not accept divided affections, but expects to reign supreme and sole Lord of your hearts; and the only way of inviting Him thither is to cast out all other inmates, and let Him have the whole house to Himself; and indeed, when we come to consider and compute matters justly, whatever love or regard we have allowed to anything but Him will be found in a manner perfectly lost and thrown away. Do not therefore indulge a passion which can turn to no account. Lean not upon a broken reed, which will not only let thee fall, but pierce thy arm too. And such a reed is mortal man. "For all flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof flourisheth as a flower of the field: the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth;" and they who are enamoured with its beauty, find how poor and transitory, how empty and deceitful, a good they set their hearts upon. Wherever else we expect comfort, our hopes are soon blasted or wretchedly disappointed; but when our thoughts and wishes centre in Jesus, we are sure to find what we look for, sure to obtain all that we did, more than we could, expect. Think not to find satisfaction in thyself; for the better you understand yourself, the less cause you will find to love yourself; and the more you indulge this love, the greater and more certain will be your ruin. Seek then thy Lord and only Saviour; for he who

hath Christ possesses all things; and he who neglects Him, does himself more mischief than all the enemies—nay, all this world and the powers of hell could ever bring upon him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of Intimate Conversation and Friendship with Jesus.

WHILE Jesus is present by His grace and comfort, nothing is hard to do, nothing grievous to suffer; but happiness and perfect peace dwell and reign in my breast. But the moment he withdraws His cheering presence, all my supports are lost and gone, all my faculties disabled, and every difficulty insuperable, every cross insupportable. The consolations of this world make no impression, nor give any solid joy, while He continues silent; but let Him speak one single word of comfort to the soul, and she is gay in the midst of distresses. Thus Mary rose immediately, and dried up her tears, upon the news of His approach, and the first call of her dear Master. And happy sure was she, happy is every mortal in this vale of tears, whom Jesus calls. For whom He calls and commands to come to Him, He calls from grief and mourning to true joy. How flat and insipid, how harsh and unpleasant is all we are, and all we have, without this heavenly Comforter? How empty and deluding all those wishes and desires which are placed upon any other object? They bid us infinitely to our loss. A loss greater and more irretrievable than if we lost the whole world. For could we gain the whole world with the loss of Him, it were a foolish and most miserable exchange. And what indeed is all the world without Him? To be deprived of this one Friend is bitterer than death; to enjoy and possess Him, the only happiness of life. His friendship is security sufficient

against a whole world of enemies; a treasure above all the riches of the universe. He who finds this hath more than both the Indies; and he who loses it, loses more than can be expressed. But why do I say more? He loses all. For this is poverty indeed, this the only poverty, to lose the only true riches.

So all-sufficient, so delightful, so heavenly sweet is the friendship and company of Jesus. But every man is not qualified for so precious a blessing, for it requires great care, and skill, and wisdom to be fit for this enjoyment. Humility and charity must make and keep Him ours. Piety and peace are the dispositions He delights in. Sin and passion and worldly affections will drive Him away. And if he takes His flight, where, wretched man, where wilt thou find a friend? Without a friend thou canst not live in comfort; and if He be not thy only friend, thou art left desolate and forlorn. Consider, then, how miserable thou makest thyself by placing thy confidence or thy joy in any other. For better were it far that the whole world should bend their utmost spite against thee, than this one Friend be provoked to displeasure. If therefore relations and acquaintance be dear, yet let none be so comparably to thy God and Saviour. Remember, they are dear for His sake, but He for His own. For this is the peculiar prerogative of Christ, that enemies as well as friends should challenge a share in thy affections upon His account. Thou art to forgive and love, to pity and pray for all mankind, because He loves them all; and it ought to be the earnest desire of our hearts that all may know and be sensible of His love, and make some suitable returns for such wonderful goodness. But neither we nor any other person have a right to be loved for our own selves; for the foundation of love is excellence and goodness, and this is all from God. In Him alone it dwells originally, inherently, independently; and what proportion soever any creature hath is entirely derived from Him, the emanation of that

universal and inexhaustible source. And therefore He alone hath right to command our love for His own excellence, because all excellence is His; He alone is to be loved above all others, because He neither hath nor can have any equal. Covet not, then, the praise or love of men, for praise and love are God's peculiar. Nor lavishly dispense these to others, but in thyself, and all persons of virtue and merit, laud, and admire, and love the graces of Christ.

Bring to thy Lord a clean and upright spirit, free from the sordid affections of the world; that thou mayest be entirely His, and solace thyself with the delights of His conversation. But leave the world, and come to Him, thou canst not, without the prevention and assistance of His grace. This only can exalt thy desires, and draw and charm thy heart with the cords of divine love. For man can "do all things through Christ that strengthens him;" but if that succour be withdrawn, he is blind and naked, destitute and weak, full of confusion and torment; or rather, he is confusion in the abstract, weakness and impotence in itself. And if sometimes thou feel an inward scourge, let not thy melancholy thoughts deject or drive thee to despair. For spiritual comforts and joys are sown in tears; and patience brings forth plentiful and perfect fruits of righteousness and peace. If these sorrows proceed from a reflection upon thy own sins and infirmities, indulge the holy grief; and lament, as beomes a serious penitent, thy own unworthiness and former misery. If adversities sent from the hand of God afflict thee, support thyself with the consolations of a good conscience; and be assured that suffering so as may advance thy Master's honour will end in glory and advantage to thyself. But consider that in either case the trouble cannot be long; for these black intervals of sadness will as certainly, as naturally, be followed with inward peace and joy, as summer succeeds winter, and storms are hushed into a profound calm.

CHAPTER IX.

The Disconsolate State.

WHEN all human comforts forsake us, if God vouchsafe to supply their place with spiritual and heavenly, which are infinitely better, we are not much to wonder if the soul preserve its temper, and bear up manfully under such circumstances. But when the world and God both frown, then to bear such desertion with patience, and be content to be abandoned of all our hopes for His glory; then to acknowledge our unworthiness, and not charge God foolishly, nor be partial to our suffering selves; this is virtue and resignation indeed, the very excellence and perfection of an humble and submissive mind. Who that considers can forbear rejoicing while the cheerful light of God's countenance shines bright about him? What wretch is so unreasonable to grudge his service when bounty and blessings reward his pains, and convince him that he does not serve God for nought? This is the happy season which every man desires and triumphs in. Smooth and pleasant is his passage whom the grace of God conducts and carries through this troublesome world. For how can we think it strange that he should not feel the weight of his burden who is strengthened and supported by Almighty Power, and led through difficulties and dangers by the Captain of his salvation?

It is natural for us to cling fast about anything that may give us ease, and hard for a man to divest himself of carnal affections, so that before our passions be effectually subdued, and our delight and hope fixed entirely upon God, many and frequent conflicts must be undergone. And yet at no expense less than this is our peace and quiet to be purchased. For so long as a man rests upon his own strength, he is easily diverted to worldly comforts, and tastes little satisfaction but what arises from such; but he whose soul is

enamoured with God and goodness, expects not his delight from sensual enjoyments, but finds a pleasure in the severer exercises of virtue and devotion, and even enjoys the difficulties he undergoes for Christ's sake.

If, then, God shed down spiritual comforts from above, entertain the precious gifts with humility and thanks, and lose not the effect and reward of grace by supposing it your due, or valuing yourself upon it. Rejoice in the blessing; but temper that joy with gratitude. Let it not swell to insolence and vanity, to censoriousness or contempt of thy weaker brethren; but the more thou hast received, the greater let thy modesty be, and the more thy fear, thy diligence and watchfulness, that thou abuse not such gracious liberality. For comfort and gladness will not last always; a cloud will come betwixt, and interrupt the cheerful beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Temptations will have their turn too; and therefore, when these fall hard and heavy, let patience and humility, not hopeless despondency, be the effect of such oppressions. The greatness of thy sufferings must inflame thy trust, thy zeal, thy devotion; and fervent prayer is the proper weapon against the attacks of our spiritual adversary. For matters are not desperate. He who took away His supports only withdraws them for a season; and to those who seek them with holy perseverance, will, at a fit (that is, at His own) time, restore them again with advantage. This is a usual thing with God. The prophets and saints of old have all advanced to their crowns by the same rough way of grief and desertion. Nor may we suppose that these disconsolate intervals are the effects of God's anger and final abdication of us.

Observe how eminent an instance of these changes we have in "the man after God's own heart." When the grace and favour of God was lifted up upon him, his mind was exalted proportionably: "In my prosperity I said I shall never be cast down; Thou, Lord, of Thy goodness,

hast made my hill so strong." When this favour was withdrawn, he confesses the consequence of it, the deep and heavy impression it made upon his spirits: "Thou didst turn Thy face from me, and I was troubled." But yet this trouble, sharp and sensible as it was, did not sink down into despair. His remedy was prayer: "Then cried I unto Thee, O Lord, and got me to my Lord right humbly." And how successful this application proved, himself declares: "The Lord heard me, and had mercy upon me; Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing; Thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness." Now, if these sorrows were the portion of those bright patterns of piety; if God's dearly beloved children and faithfullest servants have not lived constantly under His propitious smiles; if men of so exalted virtue were yet differently affected as they felt different dispensations of Providence towards them, what are we poor, we weak, desertless wretches, that we should expect to be exempted from troubles? What is our zeal in comparison of theirs, that we should hope to have it always warm, always gay? What have we done to confine the kindly influences of that Spirit, and secure them constant to ourselves, which even to those that use and improve it best, "goes and comes, and blows only where and when it listeth?" And therefore Job takes notice of it as a fate common to all mankind, that God does not so magnify, or set His heart upon any one among them, but that "He visits him every morning, and tries him every moment."

Where therefore can we safely place our confidence, except in the grace and mercy of God only? All other comforters are miserable. The company and exhortation of religious men, the tender and affectionate advice of dear and faithful friends, the entertainment of good books, the moving strains of pious eloquence, the heavenly raptures of psalms and hymns, all these administer but very poor and slender relief to assuage the anguish of our minds, or but so much as to divert and deceive our pain, if God withdraw

His consolations, and leave us to the desolate condition of merely human helps. Then, as our last and best refuge, we must fly to God, humble ourselves under His mighty hand, submit to what He lays upon us, acknowledge His goodness even in our sufferings, and be content to suffer still, so long as He sees fit, for He will not see fit to continue His displeasure for ever, but will revive the contrite and exalt the humble in due time.

I never yet, to the best of my remembrance, met with any remarkable good man who had not, at some time or other, fallen into these discomforts, and languished under the apprehension of God's displeasure, or the abatement of his own zeal. Nor was it ever designed that any man in this life should arrive at so exalted a state of holiness and absolute safety as not to be sometimes tempted. Though this happens at very different times—for some have their trials in the beginning of their conversion, which are reserved for others to their latter and more perfect days —it seems the sublime and rapturous contemplations of God are a blessing too precious for those who have not first endured some trouble of mind to qualify them for so excellent a reward. Well, then, may we rejoice in these temptations, which are ordained certain forerunners of more abundant grace, and signs of those unspeakable consolations and delights, which are reserved for them that have approved themselves faithful. For not to him that is excused from fighting, but "to him that overcometh by striving courageously, and endureth to the end, will I give to eat of the Tree of Life."

Most wisely therefore are these vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity appointed for the improvement of our piety and virtue. Were our troubles without intermission, no flesh could be saved; and therefore God softens and rewards them with inward and heavenly comforts, that, so assisted by His grace and encouraged by His favour, we may be able to bear up against our sharpest trials. But were that

grace and favour constant too, we should be immoderately exalted with our performances, and impute the blessings of God to our own merit. And therefore the returns of affliction and spiritual desertion are convenient, to prevent or check our pride. They show us that, how greatly soever we may value ourselves, yet we are not so perfect but that we deserve to suffer; and the good we receive, we receive not of debt, but of liberality and free grace. Mistake not, man, the devil never sleeps. He always watches for an opportunity to assault and work thee mischief. The flesh is not utterly dead; nor its appetites and passions so totally extinct but that every fresh object will awaken them into lust. Be thou therefore awake too, and prepare every day for some new conflict; speak not peace to thyself when beset on every side with numerous and restless enemies; for wretched is thy case if their violence be suffered to bear thee down, or their subtle and wakeful malice surprise thee into sin.

CHAPTER X.

Thankfulness for God's Mercies.

"MAN is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" and dost thou refuse the condition of nature by hoping to be exempted from labour and suffering? Consider this, and apply thyself vigorously to patience, as a most necessary virtue; and learn to bear the cross as the business thou art created for. For this will much better become a sinful creature than to depend upon comforts which thou deservest not, and pleasures which belong not to thee. Could even the worldly-minded be secure of spiritual joys without interruption, he could not, in agreement with his own principle, but be passionately fond of them, as yielding

more substantial satisfaction than all external and sensual delight. For what comparison can there be between those pleasures which are attended with shame or deceit, and those which are solid and durable, void of reproach and indecency, the fruits of virtue, and the special gift of God to chaste and heavenly souls? This, then, were epicurism indeed, were this to be attained and preserved by any the most assiduous care of ours. But that which renders even these joys less sensible and less eagerly desired is, that they are the free gift of God, who both dispenses and withdraws them as Himself sees fit, and frequently suspends the happiness they bring by strong and severe trials. For we are in a state of continual discipline and warfare, and our conflicts must return very thick upon us so long as we remain in such a state.

Nor are these difficulties from the malice of our enemies only, but we ourselves contribute to our own misery, and obstruct the more liberal communications of divine grace and comfort, by affecting a mistaken freedom and extravagant conceits of our own strength and goodness. The bounty of God is admirable, who supports us with the inward satisfactions of His spirit; but the folly of man is prodigious, who does not discern and thankfully acknowledge that all his ability to do well is imparted by a higher hand. If then the gifts of Heaven are distributed to us more sparingly than we wish or expect, we lessen their proportions by not being duly qualified to receive them; and qualified we cannot be while ungrateful to the Author, and negligent to improve all we receive to the Giver's praise and honour. For he who hath and useth grace aright does by that very act incline God to give more. And from the proud unthankful neglecters of the favour, even what they had is taken away, and added to the portion of the humble and diligent; those who are duly sensible from whom and to what purposes they have it.

Might I be allowed to choose my own lot, I should think

it much more eligible to want my spiritual comforts, than to abound in these at the expense of my humility. No; let a penitent and contrite spirit always be my portion, and may I ever so be the favourite of Heaven as never to forget that I am chief of sinners. Knowledge in the sublime and glorious mysteries of the Christian faith, and ravishing contemplations of God and a future state, are most desirable advantages; but still I prefer "charity which edifieth," before the highest intellectual perfections of that "knowledge which puffeth up." For everything which is high is not therefore holy. Many meats are agreeable to the palate which are not conducive to health; and those gifts which are first in our esteem, do not always recommend us most to God. Those spiritual advantages are certainly best for us which increase our modesty, and awaken our caution, and dispose us to suspect and to deny ourselves. And therefore it is an argument of wisdom in God to recall His gifts sometimes, as well as of His goodness to impart them at others, that by the loss of what we had we may experimentally find our own impotence, confess and feel our wants, and know to whom the whole glory of all that is excellent in us does of right belong. Deal justly, then, in this matter; "render to God the things that are God's," and take to thyself what is properly thy own: to Him, the thanks for His graces, nay, for the very power of using them aright; to thyself, the shame and condemnation of having used them no better; and know that His is the honour for all thou hast done well, thine only the blame and just punishment for all thou hast done amiss.

Sit down in the lowest place, and then shalt thou with honour be promoted to the highest; for the loftier the building, the deeper must the foundation be laid. The highest in God's esteem are meanest in their own; and their excellence consists in the meekness and truth, not in the pomp and ostentation of piety, which affects to be seen and admired of men. The reposing our hope and trust in God alone is

the most effectual prevention of vanity and insolence; and ascribing to Him all our virtues and attainments is inconsistent with coveting the praise of men. For such persons are concerned to approve their actions to God only, and labour to advance His glory as the chief and only thing which ought to be magnified in all that is pious and commendable, in themselves and every good man.

Receive, then, a little with due sense of gratitude; thus thou shalt obtain more. The gifts which others esteem meanest and most contemptible, consider as the gifts of God, and let this raise their value in thy esteem. For indeed everything ought to be esteemed which is a mark of His favour, who is the supreme Lord of all. Even stripes and punishments from His hands should be, not only submitted to with patience, but received with humble thanks; since His rod is intended for our good, and no dispensation of His providence is without its profitable and wise design. If, then, thou value the grace of God, and desire to keep it, be thankful when He gives; be resigned and patient when He takes away; pray fervently and frequently for the returns of His favour, and let not thy own pride or carelessness provoke Him to withdraw it.

CHAPTER XI.

Of Loving Christ in Affliction.

MANY we find possessed with strong desires of Christ's heavenly kingdom, and eager of reigning with Him there; but few who are in love with His cross, and content to suffer with Him upon earth. The graces and sweet consolations of His Spirit charm and draw us, but afflictions drive us away from Him. When He invites men to sit down at

His table, the guests come crowding in apace: but if He call us after Him into the wilderness, to fast and pray with Him, He calls in vain, and goes alone. The breaking of bread is what all of us like, but the drinking of His bitter cup we are shamefully averse to. We read the history of His life, and peruse His miracles with reverence and delight, for these were full of mercy and relief to wretched men; but when He comes to the tragical circumstances of His dolorous passion and bitter death, we either shut our books or read the melancholy story with coldness and indifference. Very hardly persuading ourselves, that in "this part He hath left us an example, that we should follow His steps." Such was the behaviour, not of the multitudes only, but of His own disciples too, heretofore, who thronged into His hosannas and His preaching; but when He was apprehended and treated as a malefactor, all "forsook Him and fled." And such is the behaviour of all those Christians still who serve Him cheerfully while things go well with them, and magnify His mercy so long as they taste His goodness; but draw back when afflictions approach, and if He hide the brightness of His face, fall into wretched dejections and despondency of mind, and are provoked to impatience and murmuring and sad complaints.

Methinks we might find charms and engagements, many and powerful, which should unite our souls and affections to the blessed Jesus, from what He is in Himself, not from what He is to us; without any respect of our own private interest, and the present advantages we receive from Him. This would confirm and root us fast in love, and praise and gratitude; beyond the power of outward calamities, or inward anxieties of mind, to shake and divert us. Then, should we, with those holy men, even think it good, and thank God that we have been in trouble, and though He "should slay us," yet should we still delight and "trust in Him."

Oh! could we once but get above this mercenary disposition of proposing interest and gain in all we do, and love our blessed Lord for His own sake, how noble would be the fruits of so generous a principle? And, indeed, how can we pretend to love Him, when we only love ourselves; and pay obedience to His commands, not out of regard to His authority and our obligations, nor from a desire to please Him, but purely to promote our own advantage? For where, among the many millions who profess to be zealous Christians, where is the man that would be content to serve God as his Maker and rightful Lord, had he no expectation of reward from Him? Nay, who almost is so spiritual, so refined, as that poverty of spirit recommended and blessed by our Saviour requires we should be—that is, resigned as to all temporal enjoyments, and well satisfied to persevere in our duty—and not to think our Master hard, though He should even strip us bare of all those comforts which are usually the encouragements of piety and virtue? This is a temper rarely to be met with; such a generosity and greatness of spirit as crowns and kingdoms, nay, the whole Eastern world, were wisely given in exchange for. For this is the perfection of love; a virtue so exalted, that no other part of religion is to be named with it. A man may bestow all his wealth upon the poor, and be never the better. He may chastise and mortify his flesh and sensual appetite, with all the severities of the most exemplary penitence, and yet this is but a low and little excellence in comparison. He may attain to the highest and clearest knowledge in the mysteries of religion, but still he is infinitely short. His virtues may be bright and exemplary, his devotion fervent and constant, his meditations ravishing and divine: all these are valuable gifts; but there is still one excellence behind, more valuable, more necessary than all the rest; and that is, being able, after having renounced all the world besides, to renounce himself for the sake of his Lord; to devote all he is or can do, so entirely to His

service, as to be content with everything; to study His will, His pleasure, His glory in all things, and to consult his own in nothing; and when he hath faithfully and diligently performed all which he knew it became and was expected from him to do, to esteem all this of no consideration, and account that he hath done nothing.

Others, no doubt, will have quite different notions of him. They will see and admire, publish and extol his virtues; but still their commendations, though never so profuse, never so just, will not have any influence upon his judgment, nor tempt him to swerve one whit from that opinion, which truth itself hath directed us to in this case, "When ye have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants." He will not think that complaint of the prophet beneath him, "I am poor and desolate;" when yet in truth among mortal men none is more wealthy, none more happy, none greater and more powerful than he who in a true Christian humility thinks himself most helpless, most infirm, most miserable. In a word, none more honourable in God's eyes than he who is vilest and most despicable in his own.

CHAPTER XII.

The Reasonableness of taking up our Cross.

WHEN Jesus thus describes the condition of our being owned for His, "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me;" the generality of men are apt to cry out with those in the Gospel upon another occasion, "This is a hard saying, and who can bear it?" But, oh! that such would seriously consider how infinitely more terrible and confounding that sentence will be which their angry Judge shall pronounce in thunder at the last day; and

how those ears, which are too soft and tender to bear this, will then be able to endure a "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Ah! how absurd, how senseless is it, not to harden ourselves at present, and cheerfully embrace a command which, though attended with some short uneasiness now, should yet be welcome to us, because it will give us boldness in the great day of trial; and by imposing some short and very tolerable pains, be our security against torments insupportable and eternal! For when our Lord shall come to judge the world with terrible pomp, the Cross shall be displayed and lifted high in heaven. This thing, now so much abhorred, so full of shame, shall then be a banner of triumph; and they who have fought under it here, and followed the crucified Captain of their salvation, in a life of humility and sufferings, shall flock to it as their proper standard, and enter with their glorious Leader into his joy and kingdom.

Why should we then boggle at that cross which leads directly to a crown? Why thus obstruct our happiness by refusing that which heals our spiritual infirmities, guards us against our worst enemies, fills us with heavenly comforts, brightens our virtues, and supports us with assured hopes of inconceivable and everlasting bliss? Remember thy great Master and Example, bearing His cross, dying upon His cross, that thou hereafter mightest not disdain to bear it for thine own advantage, when He for thy sake hath borne it before thee. "For if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him; but if we deny Him," and are ashamed of this punishment, He will also "deny and be ashamed of us," and shut us out of His glory.

Consider that thy all depends upon suffering and dying. This is the sum of thy duty, this the source of thy happiness. God hath ordained no other way of bringing us to Himself except that one of "dying daily," and "crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts." In this all the dispensations

of Providence conspire; for what course soever you take, which way soever you turn, how prudently soever you contrive, the cross is sure to meet you everywhere. And that which, willingly embraced, would prove your safety and virtue, is sure to be your portion, whether you will or not. Bodily sickness and pain, disappointments and losses in your fortunes, anguish and perplexity of heart, discomfort and desertions from God, injuries and provocations from men, and, which is worse than all, displeasure and discontent at yourself; one or more of these will be perpetually exercising your patience; and so long as God sees fit to continue you in this state of mortality and discipline, 'tis vain to hope you shall be exempted from them.

For God in His great wisdom and goodness appoints us to tribulation, and damps or withdraws our present comforts, that we may learn to love and value Him and heaven the more, to acknowledge our dependence upon His bounty, be made sensible of our own impotence, and grow wiser and more humble by afflictions. By these we are taught to understand and value the sufferings of Christ, of which we should have but a very cold and imperfect idea did not our own experience teach us what it is to suffer. And the greater conformity to His image our trials work us up to, the clearer and more affecting sense we have of His infinite condescension. Avoid the cross then we cannot, because we cannot run away from ourselves, nor cease to be men; and therefore, what we cannot avoid we must make it our endeavour patiently to endure, and render that which would otherwise be our torment an instrument of virtue here and of glory hereafter.

Now this is still in our own power. For they who sustain their cross shall likewise be sustained by it in return, and all their pains largely rewarded in their proper time and place. But this life is not that time and place; and therefore we must be content to labour now, and expect our recompense hereafter. But if we bear with murmuring and

grudging what bear we must, we do but gall our shoulders with the yoke, and render that a heavy unprofitable load which might be fruitful and glorious. If we cast off one burden, we are immediately pursued and oppressed by another; and instead of affliction, full of hope and humility, draw upon ourselves that most intolerable of all burdens, guilt and despair.

Why should you entertain an imagination so vain as that of being made an exception to all mankind? Produce me, if you can, one single instance in the whole catalogue of glorified saints who passed this vale of tears without his portion of misery. Even Jesus Christ Himself, our great Lord, though God as well as man, yet lived a life of trouble, and none was ever so truly a "Man of Sorrows," or so intimately "acquainted with grief." Himself hath told us that "it behoved Him thus to suffer, and to rise again the third day, and so to enter into His glory."

And if this was the way necessary for Christ Himself to ascend to the throne of God by, we must not presume to hope for a smooth and easy passage thither. His whole life was little else but one continued cross, a chain of sufferings drawn out to the length of so many years. And do we, who profess to tread in His steps, expect a life of softness and ease and pleasure? No, no, fond man, expect nothing but trouble. This thou mayest depend upon, for it will never disappoint thee. It is not only the condition of thy happiness as a Christian, but thy certain settlement and portion as a man. For mortality is beset on every side with crosses, and exposed to suffering every moment. And though these be both the punishment and the remedy for sin, yet may we not imagine that they who are most careful to preserve themselves from sinning are in the same proportion excused from suffering. For frequently the best men undergo the severest trials; and the better they are, the tenderer and more painful sense they have of them. For the fervent love and desire of a better country, their

proper and eternal home, renders the present pilgrimage and banishment more tiresome and afflicting.

But yet these calamities are no just reflection upon the wisdom and goodness of Almighty God; for as He appoints the rod in His mercy, so does He likewise furnish His servants with mighty consolations and supports suitable to their circumstances. And they who submit to the cross as becomes them, reap large and glorious fruits by sowing in tears. The burden of their miseries is lightened by casting their care and reposing their trust upon One who hath a tender care for them. And the more the outward man is weakened and oppressed, the greater strength and grace they feel in the inner man. Nay, such is their desire, such the satisfaction of being conformed to the image of Christ, that good men oftentimes would not so much as wish to be freed from those miseries in which the less discerning part of the world are apt to think the very extremity of unhappiness to consist. For these better instructed souls have a farther prospect, and can soften all their distresses by this consideration, that the more they endure the purer and more refined they are from sin, and the more acceptable and dear they become to God. It is true this consideration is not the effect of any strength or wisdom merely human, but the product of divine grace. This sometimes gains so absolute a conquest over natural inclinations, and exalts flesh and sense to so high a degree of resignation and perfection, that what as men we cannot but decline and have violent aversions to, as Christians we contentedly embrace and are entirely satisfied with.

When therefore we feel in ourselves, or observe in others, a zeal so powerful, so noble, as not only to bear, but even to love and delight in the cross; when we vanquish and bring into absolute subjection these bodies and their appetites, by a long painful course of rigorous and voluntary severities; when we industriously avoid honours and wealth, bear injuries and infamy contentedly, despise ourselves,

and even delight to be despised by others; when we entertain the sharpest misfortunes with constancy and temper, and are so perfectly dead to the world as no longer so much as to desire those enjoyments and advantages which recommend and sweeten life to mankind; do not suppose that this is the work or falls within the compass of man; for they who depend upon their natural powers, or their own most exquisite philosophy, can never rise so high, nor thus abstract their minds from matter and sense. No principle but that of holy trust and faith in God is capable of such divine operations. This strength and resolution comes from heaven. No force less than Almighty can beat down the flesh, the world, and the devil under our feet—none defeat and set us above the horrors and assaults of his malice and temptations—less than His who vanquished this old serpent upon the cross, and by so doing sanctified our cross to us too.

Call up, then, all thy powers of reason and religion; remember whom thou hast engaged to follow, and with all the resolute fidelity due to thy vows and obedience set thyself manfully to take up His cross who submitted to die upon a cross for thy salvation. Prepare and dispose thy heart that no affliction may overbear thee by surprise; but, considering what infinite variety of troubles hem thee in, and wait thee everywhere, let none have the advantage of finding thee unprovided. Were there a possibility of escaping, we might then be allowed to contrive methods of declining our miseries; but since they cannot be shifted off, the only remedy we have left against them is readiness to suffer. Consider it is thy Lord's cup, and that He drank the very bitterest dregs of it; consider it is He who gives it; and that He therefore gives it that thou mayest be partaker of His sufferings, in order to be made a more worthy partaker of His glories. 'Tis true, He was strengthened in His agonies by an angel sent from above, nor shalt thou want supports proper for thy condition. But what these are,

or in what measures fit to be imparted, our Lord Himself knows best; and to His wise disposal we must leave it. But all we have to do ourselves is to secure a humble and patient disposition. And this we should find less difficulty in, would we but follow the pattern our Jesus hath left, of "enduring the cross, and despising the shame, for the glory set before Him." And what can recommend our suffering, what confirm our patience more, than to consider that "these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?"—that glory, in comparison of which they are not worthy so much as to be named; a glory so exceeding, that if all the tribulations incident to all mankind were heaped upon one single person, yet even so, the recompense is infinitely above what such a suffering could pretend to deserve; and heaven would be cheap and wisely bought, even at this vast expense.

Esteem thyself, then, happy indeed when thou canst even enjoy thy sorrows, and find a sensible satisfaction in suffering for Christ; for this is, in a manner, to attain heaven upon earth—a happiness which no man can ever arrive at so long as adversities bring pain, and discontent, and sad oppressions of spirit; for the solicitude and constant labour to avoid calamities will be sure to produce perpetual disquiet.

Suffering and dying are not only necessary incumbrances upon us, but the best and most authentic instances of our virtue and obedience. It is the business and perfection of a Christian to do thus daily; and they who in good earnest apply themselves to it will quickly find their affections raised, their strength increased, their comfort and inward peace wonderfully advanced. St. Paul was rapt up into the third heaven, yet did not he boast so much of this as of his afflictions. And wherein the uncommon privileges of this especial favourite consisted we learn from the mouth of Christ Himself, when he says, "I will show him how great

things he must suffer for My name's sake." Suppose, then, you could be admitted to his ecstasies and revelations, yet even these, it is plain from his example, would not exempt you from trouble and sufferings; for the more you are loved, and the more vehemently you love and are desirous to please your Saviour, the greater proofs of this kind you must expect to give.

Consider those Apostles who went away from their persecutors, "rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ." And learn from thence to covet and value the honour and dignity of enduring pain and poverty, persecution and reproach. For this would seem no mean preferment, but a favour reserved for those whom God is kindest to, did we but reflect upon the gain it brings to ourselves, the glory to our Maker, the joy to saints and angels, and the benefit to our brethren, who shall observe and be encouraged by our steadfastness, and patience, and holy perseverance. Nay, even the wicked and carnal will be moved by such examples; for there is so manifest a congruity and decency in submitting to any adversities which it shall please God to lay upon us, that even they who have not the heart to imitate, yet will not be able to forbear commending and admiring the pattern we set them.

Would we indeed weigh things in a just balance, it is most unreasonable we should decline suffering for Christ, when it is so very visible that we are well content to undergo much sorer hardships for the world than any He thinks fit to call us to. And shall humour, or passion, or temporal interest be suffered to prevail upon us more powerfully than duty? especially when that duty promotes an infinitely better interest, and the more we are mortified to ourselves and the world the nobler advances we make towards God and life eternal? These are refined privileges, for which no man is qualified till he be first purified in the furnace of adversity; nor can the spiritual and divine graces

dwell in a soul till the dross of earth and sensual appetites be first wrought off. Assure yourself that suffering for and in obedience to Christ, is not only the most acceptable thing to God, but really advantageous for yourself, and that which contributes most to the soul's health of anything that can happen in the present state. And would the prejudices flesh and blood lie under permit us to discern and consider matters impartially, this would be first in our wishes, and preferred before all the outward prosperity or inward satisfactions this world can give. For who would not be ambitious of resembling our Lord and His most eminent saints? Who is so blind as not to see that the thing in which they signalized their merit, was not the larger degree of their revelations, or the pleasures they enjoyed, but the number and extremity of their afflictions? And we may be very confident that if Christ had known any better way to heaven than by crosses and patience, He would both have chosen it Himself and reserved it for His faithfullest servants and dearest friends. But since His own example and His constant directions declare that "if any man will come to Him, he must deny himself, and take up His cross and follow Him," it is but folly and lost labour to think of any other method. For when all is done, this will be the sum and conclusion of the whole matter, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God.'

BOOK III.

DIGESTED INTO CONFERENCES BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE SOUL OF HIS DISCIPLE.

CHAPTER I.

The Happiness of such a Conversation.

DISCIPLE. "I will hear what the Lord God will say concerning me." For blessed is the soul which hears the Lord speaking, and feels the transporting comforts of His gracious words. Blessed are the ears which with a greedy attention drink in the soft and gentle whispers of His spirit, while they continue obstinately deaf to the treacherous insinuations of this deluding world. And doubly blessed are they who hear the sound of truth, not only in the outward administrations of the Word, but by the inward and familiar communications and motions of infused grace. Blessed those eyes which are shut to all the objects of the world, and constantly wakeful and open to the affairs of the soul, and turned inward upon one's self. Blessed are they whose sharper sight enters deep, and pierces into the secret and sublime mysteries of heavenly truth, purged and prepared by spiritual meditations and daily exercise of holy duties. Blessed indeed are they who disengage themselves from all worldly incumbrances, and gain leisure and opportunities for attending continually upon God alone.

Consider this, my soul, and shake off sensual desires, which must be first abandoned before thou canst listen with due reverence and attention to those things which the Lord

God will speak. And O! what comfortable words are those, "I am thy peace, thy life, thy salvation, and exceeding great reward. Come unto Me thou that art weary and heavy laden, and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul. Set thy affections on things above, and not on things on the earth. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal." What are all things here below but dangerous and empty delusions? And what could it profit a man to gain, though it were all the creatures, if he be forsaken and cast off by the Creator? In Him alone is pleasure and bliss and glory. Therefore let go those cheating shadows, and embrace the only substantial good; bid a final adieu to the deceits of the world, and place all thy love and endeavours upon thy God; for in His service and acceptance thou shalt attain the end of thy wishes, the fruit of thy labours, solid satisfaction and true happiness.

CHAPTER II.

God is in the Small Still Voice.

DISCIPLE. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Behold, I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaid; O give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments." Incline my soul to the words of Thy mouth, which "drop down as the rain upon the tender herb, and distil gently, like dew upon the grass." The Israelites indeed besought Moses heretofore: "Speak thou unto us, and we will hear; but let not God speak unto us, lest we die." But let it not be so done unto me, my God. I rather choose to make my humble petition in the prophet Samuel's form: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Let not Moses, nor any of the prophets, be my only instructor, but do Thou thy

self also vouchsafe to teach me by thyself. For Thou art the source of all their light and knowledge. They could not utter truth without Thy inspiration and heavenly guidance; but Thou art essential wisdom and truth, and canst communicate Thyself effectually to my soul.

Their words, alas! are air and empty sound, but Thine alone are spirit and life. Their expressions may be proper, their arguments moving, but unless Thou break silence, my soul will still continue deaf and insensible. They deliver the words, but Thou art the Interpreter, and lettest me into the true and hidden sense of their abstruse oracles. Their books are sealed, and only Thy hand can open and explain them. From them we receive the command, but only from Thee the disposition to obey, and the whole power of performing it. They show the way, but Thou impartest the strength to walk in it; all they can do, is still remote and without us. Thou only enterest into the soul, and by a secret conveyance puttest truth in the inward parts. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water," but except Thou be pleased "to give the increase, the word will return unto Thee void, and accomplish" no part of "the end whereto Thou sentest it." The voice of their cry pierces our ears; but the knowing what they cry, and the impression upon our hearts, is Thy peculiar gift.

Therefore I cannot but implore again Thy grace and mercy, and beg that Moses may not speak to me, but Thou, my Lord, my God, the only and eternal truth, lest I die; not by the terrors of Thy thundering voice, but by the effectual communications of Thy will. For if I be instructed and admonished by the outward ministration only, and be not inwardly disposed and zealously affected to obedience, the advantages of instruction will but aggravate my condemnation. For this is the dismal consequence of the word "preached not profiting, when it is not mixed with faith in them that hear it." And mixed with faith Thou knowest it cannot be, except seconded and enforced by the

voice of Thy Spirit, except Thou incline me to love the good I know, and enable me faithfully to fulfil the doctrine I believe. "Speak therefore, Lord," I say again; to Thee Thy servant listens gladly, for "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Speak powerfully to my soul, and carry the saving truths home to my conscience and affections; that Thy words may bring comfort and peace, reformation and holiness to Thy attentive servant, and to thyself immortal honour and praise.

CHAPTER III.

Of the General Disregard to God's Word, and the Obedience due to it.

CHRIST. Since then, My son, thou so passionately desirest to hear My voice, incline thou thine ears to My words—words which well deserve and will abundantly reward thy most diligent attention, for they are sweet and charming, far above all the engaging arts of human eloquence; useful and instructive beyond the most laboured systems of philosophy. The wisdom of this world could not invent or order, nor can it comprehend them. The mysterious truths they declare are too strong for human sense to behold; nor canst thou enter into their secrets, till guided by that light from whence they flow. My precepts are pure and spiritual, such as a carnal and impure heart can find no relish in. My every word is of weight; and spoken, not to entertain the curious and tickle itching ears, but to subdue the heart and command a strict obedience. Hear therefore, but hear, as becomes thee, with respectful silence and entire submission; with profound and awful humility, with an earnest desire to be taught, and sincere and vigorous resolutions of doing as thou art taught.

DISCIPLE. I own the mighty favour, and heartily acknow-

ledge, with Thy holy prophet, that "blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him in thy law; that thou mayest give him strength in time of adversity, lest he fall away with the ungodly."

CHRIST. That prophet spoke what I inspired, and so did all those holy men of old; for they were all of My sending. Nor is my care at all abated now, though the effects of it may be less visible. For I, who taught them then, continue teaching still; nay, I direct my speech to all, but all will not hear it. For there are many deaf to all My charms, and therefore deaf because they stop their ears; "hate My instructions, and will none of My reproofs." They listen to the world much rather than to God, and are more disposed to obey their own corrupt and sensual than His pure and heavenly will. The world invites them with short and transitory, trifling and empty joys, and they greedily engage in its service; I covenant for eternal and excellent rewards, and the insensible wretches will not consider or think them worth their acceptance. This folly is universal; for who among the sons of men expresses half that zeal and earnestness, that solicitous desire to please, and dutiful fear to offend, in his deportment towards Me, which he does in matters relating to this world, or in obedience to masters upon earth? Consider this, and blush for shame; for what but shame and confusion of face can be the effect of thy reflection upon this unworthy usage, this most absurd folly?

A small preferment is esteemed a valuable consideration for long and painful journeys. Men fly for it eagerly, and hasten all they can to get ground of their competitors: this is every one's care, and it is accounted a reproach to be negligent in such pursuits. But when advancement to heaven and eternal happiness is offered, they are slothful and inactive, and scarce a man is to be found who thinks it worth the while to mend his pace, or sets one step forward to meet or to secure so glorious an advantage. A little sordid gain engages all men's industry; a trifling sum

embroils them in tedious and expensive suits, and promises of things scarce worth their having they are content to drudge for; to lose the ease of their days, and the sleep of their nights, and think their toil and anxious care well paid if they can compass them at last; but a substantial and unchangeable good, a recompense greater than they know how to value justly, immortal glory and the honours of the saints, are sunk so low in wretched men's esteem that the least pains and hardship are thought too much for them.

And art thou not ashamed, lazy, insensible, grumbling wretch, that the children of this world should pursue death and ruin with a more vigorous industry and zeal, than thou canst find in thy heart to bestow upon life and happiness? Shall toys and vanities win more upon their affections, than solid and true good can upon thine? Nay, even those vanities, whose very enjoyments are empty, do often mock their hopes, and are never enjoyed at all: their friends promise and deceive, they labour but cannot attain; but My promises are without repentance; none taxeth Me with breach of faith, or can complain that his dependence upon My word hath at any time disappointed him. For I require only love and perseverance, and if these be not wanting I answer to the full; nay, I far exceed My servants' largest wishes and longing expectations. Yet false and fickle men can easily persuade, and the God who cannot lie calls and promises in vain! I am the sure rewarder of all that diligently seek Me; and if such meet with sufferings and sharp temptations, these are not marks of My displeasure, but wisely ordered, and kindly intended, to prove the sincerity of My servants' zeal, and to illustrate their virtues.

Write, then, My words in thy heart; grave them in deep and lasting characters; ponder them diligently, for thou shalt find them a seasonable relief and necessary support in the day of trial and adversity. What reading only hath not taught thee, affliction will interpret and make plain. For I do not always visit My chosen alike. Sometimes the com-

forts of My grace are proper; at others, the withdrawing those comforts, and bringing their patience and constancy to the touch by outward calamities and inward anguish of spirit. Thus I daily train them up in goodness, by chastising and making them hate their sins, and cultivating and encouraging their advancement in virtue. The one dispensation engages their love of Me the other abates their fondness for the world. But lost and wretched is that stupid creature upon whom these methods make no impression; for "he that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him in the last day."

CHAPTER IV.

A Prayer for Heavenly Instruction and Devotion.

DISCIPLE. O Lord, my God, Thou art my all, my only good! but who, alas! am I, that I should take upon me to speak to so great, so glorious a Majesty? Poor sinful dust and ashes, a wretched worm, less than the least of all Thy servants; much less, much viler, and more despicable, than I dare to think, or am able to express or conceive. And this very vileness, Lord, I beg Thou wouldst consider, that so my helpless desolate condition may move Thy tender pity to a miserable creature, who neither is, nor hath, nor can do anything without Thee. For Thou only art good, and holy, and powerful; and that of power so boundless, of mercy so diffusive, that Thou fillest all things with Thy goodness; and none but those guilty souls who refuse to partake of Thy grace are shut out from its kindly influences. Behold me, then, hungering and thirsting after Thy righteousness, and let not me be sent empty away. Call up Thy bowels, and remember Thy compassions and old loving-kindnesses; and fill my soul

with Thy grace and heavenly dispositions, that it may be a dwelling fit to entertain that blessed Inhabitant, who will not take up His abode in defiled and desolate places.

But how can I furnish a house for my Lord, except He vouchsafe to assist and supply my wants? How can I sustain the miseries and temptations of a troublesome dangerous world, except Thou graciously interpose and support my weakness? Turn not, then, Thy face away from me, neither delay Thy Fatherly care; for if Thou grant not refreshing dews, and water not my heart with Thy grace, it will remain a dry and barren ground. Teach me, dear God, to know and do Thy will; and with sincere humility and indefatigable zeal enable me to persevere in my obedience. For Thou art my wisdom and my righteousness; my infirmities are not hid from Thee; Thou knowest me perfectly, and understoodest all my defects, not only before I was born, but even long before the world itself was made.

CHAPTER V.

Walk humbly with thy God, and Worship Him in Truth.

CHRIST. I do, indeed, My son, know thy frailties and thy dangers, but let not these discourage thy endeavours. Seek and love the truth, and let thy heart be right with Me, and all shall be well at last. For truth and sincerity will be thy protection, and defend thee from the assaults of the devil, and the attempts of wicked and deceitful men. Those who are "thus set free, shall be free indeed;" nor shall the seducements or the discouragements of enemies to the truth be able to ensnare or divert them from their duty.

DISCIPLE. True, Lord. And this persuasion makes me more

earnestly implore Thy assistance; that Thou, who art truth itself, wouldst in much mercy condescend to instruct and direct me; to preserve and protect me; to break the snares of the ungodly to pieces; to deliver my soul, and establish me unto the end; to purge me from all corrupt and inordinate affections, that my own happy experience may convince me of what I already believe, and render Thy service perfect freedom.

CHRIST. My children cannot be more zealously disposed to ask these blessings, than I am ready and pleased to grant them. Hear, therefore, the truth, and how thou mayest recommend thyself to My favour and acceptance. Reflect with sad remorse upon thy past offences; let the remembrance of these render thee vile in thy own eyes, and take heed that no confidence in thy best actions swell thee with vain conceits of thy own deserts. For sure it is thou art a sinner, laden with guilt and many grievous infirmities; prone in thy own nature to vanity, easily seduced, quickly diverted from good resolutions, and overcome by very slight temptations. In short, no excellence belongs to thee which can in any degree justify thy pride or boasting; but infinite occasions there are to exercise thy humility and lamentation, infinitely more, in truth, than thou canst be duly sensible of.

Let not, then, the mistaken value of anything thou art, or doest, delude thee with false appearances of worth and perfection; let not thy affections be seduced to follow vain and wretched objects, or think any advantage can deserve thy praise or admiration, thy love and pains, except such only as are fixed and eternal. Let truth be thy chief delight, for this is unchangeable; let thy own unworthiness be the chief object of thy hatred and contempt, for this is the vilest, the justest thing, upon which thy displeasure can discharge itself. Fear and decline no calamity, comparably to sin; for no loss nor worldly disappointment or disaster can have so fatal consequences as the loss of a good conscience

and God's favour, by transgressing His righteous commands.

Some men are more concerned for subtlety of knowledge in religion than for a humble and sincere obedience. They are actuated by a spirit of pride and curiosity, and affect to penetrate the mysteries of faith; and value themselves much more for being able learnedly to dispute for truth than for adorning it by their lives, and rendering that knowledge effectual to salvation. These men frequently fall into dangerous snares. I set my face against their arrogance, and suffer them to perish through the vanity of their own imaginations.

But do thou employ thy mind upon other sorts of inquiries, and account it greater wisdom to get a perfect knowledge of thy own works than those of Almighty God. "His ways are unsearchable, and past finding out;" but thy own are necessary to be nicely examined. And the consideration of the evil thou hast done, and the good thou hast left undone, will turn to better account than thy scholastic speculations concerning the divine nature and counsels. Some place their religion in images, some in good books, some in an outward show and pomp of devotion, measuring their piety by the prayers they say, the sermons they hear, the meals they abstain from: others honour Me with their lips, and talk familiarly of Me, whose hearts I am as utter a stranger to as their allowing Me no place in their thoughts and affections can make Me. But some again, without such formal pretences, are men of true spiritual wisdom and inward purity; their desires and conversation are in heaven, and earthly entertainments are no longer welcome to them; they even grudge those hours which the necessary cares for supporting these bodies cut off from the greater concerns of their souls. And these are the men that lend a willing ear and bring a temper truly teachable to the instructions of My Spirit: in them He reigns and triumphs. For, having vanquished the corrupt inclinations

of flesh, and inspired them with a true Christian bravery of soul, they despise the treacherous vanities of this world, and lay out all their love and labour upon the joys of that better world, which, till God thinks fit to admit them into it, they strive to anticipate by keeping their minds night and day intent upon it.

CHAPTER VI.

The Power of the Love of God.

DISCIPLE. I laud and magnify Thy glorious name, O Father of Heaven, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the goodness and tender compassions with which Thou hast been pleased to remember and relieve my misery. For unto Thy loving-kindness alone, O Father of Mercies and God of all comfort, are owing all the supports with which the soul of Thy unworthy servant hath been at any time refreshed in the midst of my trouble. And therefore to Thee alone be the praise. To Thee, O Father, with Thy only begotten Son, and the Blessed Spirit the Comforter, will I render honour and thanksgiving for evermore. Descend then, Blessed God, into that soul for which Thou hast expressed so great a tenderness, and let Thy presence fill me with gladness; for Thou art my health, my joy and my glory, my hope and my refuge in the day of distress.

I must confess with sorrow that my love is weak, and my virtue imperfect; nor can the one be supported without Thy grace, or the other be cherished unless Thou fan Thy holy fire, and feed it with Thy heavenly comforts. O visit me then with Thy salvation, and make me to improve under Thy holy discipline. Deliver and purify my heart from all corrupt affections and irregular passions; heal my spiritual diseases, and take away that dross and filth which obstruct

my purer delights of divine love, discompose my patience, and shake my intentions of perseverance.

For love is great and powerful, an excellent virtue and mighty advantage in well-doing. It lightens the heaviest burdens, makes difficulties easy, and smooths the rugged ways of duty, takes out the bitterness of sufferings, and gives them a delightful relish. This is the principle which fires us with a vigorous and active zeal, inspires brave and noble attempts, and spurs us on with an impatient desire of still higher degrees of perfection. For love ever labours to be uppermost, and disdains to take up with low and vulgar attainments. It hates confinement, and would fain get loose from all wordly affections, that so its inward and spiritual prospects may not be intercepted by any temporal good or evil, which darken and block it up. In love is the perfection of pleasure and strength; it is higher than heaven, broader than the sea, it fills the spacious universe, for it is born of God, the first and best of all His creatures; and as it came from Him, so it never rests till it has got above all finite beings, and centre again in that only, that infinite good, from whence it originally sprung.

The person actuated by it flies with eager haste, does everything with cheerfulness and pleasure, and suffers no impediments to stop him in his course; he gives all things liberally, and yet possesses all, because his soul is united to that supreme Good in and from whom is all perfection. He looks not so much at the gift as the Giver; and be the quality of that what it will, it only serves to render him more grateful to its author. Love knows no bounds, no measure, but thinks it can never do enough, and attempts things even above its strength, not considering so much what it is able as what it is desirous and disposed to effect; the vehemence of desire takes off all sense of difficulty, and thinks nothing so great but that it may and ought to aim at it. And hence proceed those mighty and astonishing achievements which love does daily bring to pass, where

the fire continues strong, and is not damped by sloth and faint-heartedness.

Love is eternally awake, never tired with labour, nor oppressed with affliction, nor discouraged by fear; but like a clear and strong flame, is ever mounting upwards, and makes its way through all opposition. It cries continually in the ears (for fervent love is that cry which pierces the ears) of the Most Highest; and all the language of devout souls inflamed with it is to this effect: my God, my Love, Thou art my all, and I am entirely Thine. Enlarge my heart, and make me capable of yet more love, that I may feel and feast upon the sweetness of the delightful affections, and even melt away and lose myself in the ecstasies and charms of this heavenly disposition. Increase and blow up this divine flame, that, not content to excel others, I may daily excel myself. Teach me the song of love, and receive me up on high, to Him in whom my soul delighteth; and fill me with such raptures of joy and praise, that even sense and life may be swallowed up in bliss. Let me love Thee much more than myself; nay, love myself and all good men, to whom Thou art dear, only in and for Thee; for so hast Thou commanded in that law of love which is but as it were a beam and efflux of Thy own glorious and divine excellence.

The love of God is nimble in its motions, sincere in its intentions, ardent and zealous in devotion, sweet to the soul, brave in attempting, patient in enduring, faithful in executing, prudent in action, slow in resentment, generous and manly, and seeks not to please the person's self, but the person beloved. For, where a man seeks his own advantage only, there interest, not love, is the principle upon which he moves. Love is cautious and circumspect, upright and humble, not soft and effeminate, not fickle and fanciful, not fond of vanities; but sober and grave, chaste and refined, constant and sedate, severe and reserved. This disposes us to submission and respect towards our superiors, to a mean and modest opinion of ourselves, to gratitude and devotion

towards God; it inspires hope and holy trust, even in times of calamity and discomfort. And necessary it is that it should do so, since no man is so happy as to love without pain, or always to live under the light of God's countenance, so as that no clouds should ever intercept the cheering warmth of his favour, and create some dark intervals.

That man therefore does not deserve the character of one that loves God, who is not disposed and content to suffer any afflictions which the Divine Providence sees fit to inflict; or thinks much to do whatever His will declares fit to be performed. In a word, the hardest and most unpalatable proofs of our virtue best declare the fervency and sincerity of it; and if disasters or calamitous accidents cool or draw off our affections, this is an argument that a man is not yet what the apostle requires we should all be, "rooted and grounded in love."

CHAPTER VII.

The Trial of true Love.

CHRIST. I have observed, My son, thy notions of divine love; but thou, alas! art not yet arrived to that resolute bravery and prudence there described.

DISCIPLE. Lord, make me sensible wherein I fail, and teach me how to mend it.

CHRIST. A small temptation shocks thy obedience. Thou bogglest at difficulties, and fallest from thy own steadfastness, if I seem to withdraw My favour. The comforts and assistance of graces are to be wished with zeal, but not with impatience; nor mayest thou so set thy heart upon them, as presently to recoil, if such supplies do not at all times answer thy expectation. I hide My face to try thy courage. For true Christian magnanimity is most eminently seen in troubles

and distresses; in turning the deaf ear to all those crafty insinuations of the enemy which take the advantage of melancholy and deep perplexity of heart, to ruin and seduce unstable souls by tempting them to despair. This virtue rejoices in prosperity, but does it with such temper as not to be offended and fall away by reason of adversity.

He that loves prudently, keeps his eyes upon the giver, considers the kindness and disposition of his friend, and values the gift by that, not by its own quality and intrinsic worth. He finds more real satisfaction in My affection than in the most profuse and desirable benefits which flow from it. Not that I would condemn all doubts and sad misgivings, for those are incident to the best men; and the infirmities of nature do not admit such perfect evenness of mind as is always affected alike with the love and delights of holiness. Those sensible pleasures that good men sometimes feel themselves transported with, are the effect of bounty and favour and great indulgence, not necessary and inseparable consequences of virtue. The sweet foretastes of heavenly joys are such as you cannot depend upon, till brought to the fruition of that land of promise. And therefore no just conclusions can be drawn from thence to the prejudice of those who want them, because in this life they are given at discretion, and frequently make way for a severer and more seasonable discipline. And when that discipline takes place, then to persist in doing well, to strive manfully against all the reluctances of frail flesh and blood, and hold out in despite of all the importunities and discouraging suggestions of the tempter; this is a proof of true spiritual bravery, and entitles such valiant combatants to a noble reward and exceeding bright crown.

Let reason, therefore, and a well-grounded faith, not fancy and imagination, govern thy behaviour; and, after what manner soever thy soul is affected, let thy purposes of obedience be still the same, and thy perseverance unbroken. Sometimes perhaps thou art all rapture and joy, and these

ecstasies are not what the profane world suppose, mere dreams and delusions: sometimes again thou wilt relapse into weakness and wanderings; these are not thy choice, but thy misfortune; nor dost thou create them to thyself, but suffer them with much regret. Now, what is not the man's own act shall never be imputed to him as a fault; and what is thus, by God's permission, or the frailty of nature, if rightly managed, will tend to thy advantage, and rather improve than endanger thy virtue.

This indeed you must know and constantly remember, that the inveterate enemy of souls is ever labouring by all means to cool your zeal. He watches and greedily takes hold of all occasions to slacken your devotion, to prevail with you to neglect or abate of your prayers and other holy exercises; to divert your thoughts of Christ and His sufferings, and fix them upon objects of a different kind; to beat you off from that strict guard which ought always to be kept upon your soul; and to undermine your good intentions and repeated resolutions. He conveys many loose and wicked thoughts into your heart, uses a thousand sleights and artifices to represent religion a tiresome, tedious and unnecessary thing, and to draw off your attendance upon God in prayers, in hearing His Word, in reading the Holy Scriptures. And happy he thinks himself if by degrees he can draw you to a disuse of these things; for nothing more provokes his malice and crosses his designs than to see men frequently upon their knees, zealous in discovering and confessing their sins, devout and attentive comers to church, and constant receivers of the Lord's Supper. When therefore he would persuade you to be cold and remiss in any matter of this nature, be sure to give no credit to his false and wheedling insinuations, for they are so many snares laid to captivate and to destroy you. Turn smartly back upon him, with a "Get thee behind me, Satan;" "Blush, if thou canst, unclean spirit, at thy own treacherous villainy; I am well aware of thy deadly baits, and sensible that hell

and death are upon the hook; thy sly deceits are lost upon me, for I am resolved already, and my Jesus, who vanquished thee upon the cross, will assist my weakness, and enable me to overcome thy temptations. Think not to terrify me with difficulties, for death and sufferings are light calamities in comparison of guilt and sin; and these I infinitely rather choose than once to comply with thy wicked motions. Begone then, and for ever hold thy peace; for I will stop my ears, and am from this minute inflexibly deaf to thy most troublesome solicitations. Thou thinkest to run down a poor weak mortal, but even that mortal is a match 'for thee through Christ that strengthens him.' And strengthen me He will; for 'the Lord is my light and salvation, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid? Though an host were banded together against me, yet will I not be dismayed; for the Lord is my helper, and my God is the rock of my confidence.'"

Fight therefore the good fight, and follow the Captain of thy salvation, like a stout soldier. And if at any time thou lose ground through human infirmities, rally thy forces again quickly, and enter upon a second engagement with redoubled vigour, not doubting seasonable recruits from Me. But if at any time thou prove victorious, let not this success exalt thee beyond measure. For pride and arrogance are of fatal consequences; they often end in dangerous errors, and are justly punished with almost incurable blindness. Let the frequent examples of vain men, undone by their own folly and My just indignation, be set before thy eyes, as so many sea-marks, to warn thee from steering the same dangerous course; and the greater conquests thou obtainest over the devil and thy own frailty, the more humble and cautious let these advantages make thee in thy conduct; and the more just to God, in ascribing the whole success and glory to the powerful assistance of His grace.

CHAPTER VIII.

Grace must be received without Ostentation.

CHRIST. My son, when thou feelest thy soul warmed with devotion and holy zeal for My service, it will be advisable to decline all those methods of publishing it to the world which vain men are so industrious to take, and content thyself with its being known to God and thy own conscience. Rather endeavour to moderate and suppress those pompous expressions of it, in which some place the very perfection of zeal. Think meanly of thy own virtues. Boast not of that grace whereby thou art capable of differing from another; but let the remembrance of thy own unworthiness make thee fear the loss of gifts which thou didst not deserve ever to have. This is not only an undeserved, it is also a very short and uncertain privilege; for the brightest and warmest zeal is apt to languish and wax cold; and unless men could assure themselves of such a degree of grace as would alter and fix these variable natures of theirs, the fervours of religious and holy desires can never be constant and equal.

While, therefore, thou enjoyest these pleasing pious comforts, humble thy soul with reflections upon thy impotence and misery, thy coldness and deadness, when thou hast them not. And consider withal, that the improvement and commendation of a Christian's virtue consists, not only in the thankful use of grace, but in a modest, humble, and resigned temper, which can bear its being taken away without murmuring or despondency, still exciting and encouraging itself, still continuing the same diligence in holy duties, and never suffering sloth or despair or discontent to abate one whit of a man's best endeavours to do the utmost his condition is capable of.

This is an excellence which very few come up to; idle-

ness and impatience are the usual effects of spiritual disappointments. Which yet is most unreasonable, if we think at all, in whose disposal these, as well as all other successes are. For men cannot command events; God is sole master of His own favours. He gives to whom He pleases; nor will He be limited otherwise than by His own wisdom, what or how much, or in what time and manner He shall give. And even when He is most liberal, men may convert His best gifts into occasions of their own destruction. Thus some men of bold ungoverned zeal aspire at things beyond their strength, and express more vehemence than conduct in their actions. They are perfectly carried out of themselves with eagerness; forget they are still poor insects upon earth, and think of nothing less than building their nest in heaven. Now these are often left to themselves, and taught by sad experience that the faint flutterings of man are weak and ineffectual, and that none soars to heaven, except I assist his flight and mount him upon My own wings.

It is therefore highly expedient that persons of more zeal than experience should not proceed upon their own false measure of themselves, but refer their proceedings to the guidance and better judgment of some persons, whom long time and much observation hath taught to temper those vain conceits they are apt to entertain of their own strength, and to proportion their undertakings to their circumstances. But this is a submission which humility must qualify them for. For he who is wise in his own eyes seldom endures to be directed by another. And this consideration makes a very moderate degree of knowledge, attended with a modest and governable mind much more safe and eligible than the highest attainments with pride and self-conceit. The mighty transports and great satisfaction men frequently feel from their own improvement in goodness, are of dangerous consequence, if they be suffered to destroy the remembrance of a man's former weakness and his fears of relapsing into

sin again. And, on the other hand, these fears may run into excess, if difficulties tempt men to despair, and beget melancholy distrusts of God's ability and readiness to relieve and rescue them by the succours of that grace which knows how to scatter and defeat the strongest temptations.

The same disposition of soul, which leads to security in times of prosperity and peace, inclines to fearfulness and dejection of mind in the day of adversity and conflict. For would a man but guard himself against vain confidences, and proceed always with caution and prudence, when his graces and his hopes are at the highest, this would preserve him from those dangers which unwary heat and too sanguine hopes are apt to involve him in. And therefore, when you form to yourself the fairest and most promising expectations, it will be seasonable to consider what may become of you if God should hide His face, and abate or wholly withdraw those cheering comforts which now so much exalt you. And so again, when these are interrupted, support your spirits in those dark intervals with the hope that day may break upon you again, and that this night of affliction is prolonged to make you more advised and get the greater honour.

For such trials as these are more for the advantage of My faithful servants than a constant succession of prosperity and consolation could possibly be. They must needs be so; since virtue does not consist in abundance of illumination and knowledge, but in lowliness of mind, in meekness and charity, in a mind entirely resigned to God, and sincerely disposed to serve and please him; in a just sense of a man's own vileness, and not only thinking very meanly of one's self, but being well content to be so thought of by others.

CHAPTER IX.

Of Acknowledging our Unworthiness before God.

DISCIPLE. "Behold, now, I take upon me to speak unto my Lord, who am but dust and ashes," vile and sinful dust and ashes! For should I entertain any better opinion of myself, I make my God my enemy, and stand convicted by the undeniable testimony and just reproaches of my own guilty conscience. But if I humble my soul, cast off all vain imaginations of merit, and think myself that wretched thing I really am, Thy grace exalts me, Thy light cheers and supports me, and all that groundless arrogance, to which my corrupt heart is naturally disposed, vanishes into nothing. Oh! give me then a right understanding of myself; help me truly to discern what I am now, what I was originally, and whence I came. That I am nothing, and proceeded out of nothing, and if destitute of Thy grace, have nothing left but what I had much better be without, even sin and infirmity. And yet as vile, as sinful, as dejected, as I am of myself, as soon as Thy bright beams of favour are cast upon me, my weakness is made strong, and my heaviness turned into joy. I cannot observe the sudden wondrous change without astonishment, and am not able to account for the happy exaltation of my nature, which, though by its own weight inclined to sink perpetually, and by a fatal tendency to sin and hell, pressed down with a load of flesh and frailty, is yet by the mighty operations of grace, enabled to aspire to spiritual and refined objects, and take noble flights to thee and heaven.

This, I am duly sensible, is the strange effect of thy free grace alone, preventing my desires, inspiring noble thoughts, assisting my weaknesses, supplying my wants, rescuing me from dangers innumerable, which, without these powerful succours, must unavoidably destroy and swallow me up.

For an inordinate love of myself was formerly my ruin; but a sincere love of Thee, and an entire dependence upon Thy goodness, recovers and restores me; and the more I love and trust in Thee, the less reason I find to value and have any confidence in anything of my own. For thou, O dearest Redeemer, art bountiful and kind far beyond my deserts. My deserts! Alas, they are none at all, or worse than none; but thou exceedest even my largest desires, and givest more, infinitely more, than I either dare presume to ask or am able to express.

Eternal thanks and praise be therefore rendered to my God, for that unspeakable goodness which does not disdain to bestow the precious gifts of His grace and spirit upon a wretch unworthy the least of all His mercies. Yea, blessed and adored be His liberality and long-suffering, which, in despite of all our provocations, continues to engage those by kindness, who, by their former ingratitude and abuse of it, had justly forfeited all future favours, and by many excellent arts and holy importunities invites and draws men to Himself and their own happiness who have an aversion to both. Even so, sweet Jesus, extend Thy compassion, and continue Thy care of us, who are too prone to neglect Thee, and ruin ourselves. Oh! bring us to Thyself, by thankful, humble, pious dispositions; for we ourselves are nothing, and Thou art holiness and health, our only strength and salvation.

CHAPTER X.

Of doing all to the Glory of God.

CHRIST. The sure and only way to happiness is to make Me, my son, the chief and ultimate end of all thy actions and desires. By this thy sincerity will best be proved; by

this thy mind is refined and purified from all those sordid interests and partial respects which are apt to debauch human nature, too much of itself addicted to private gain and selfishness, and those false prospects of happiness which the love of this world vainly proposes. For as soon as any man descends to these, and seeks himself in all he does, he finds his own inability to compass his intentions, and grows barren and unprofitable. Keep Me then constantly in view, and aim at nothing but the advancement of My honour; which is indeed but reasonable and just, since I am the first and perfect good, the source from whence all things flow, and therefore all of right return to, and should centre at last in Me again. I ask but of My own the tribute and acknowledgment of the successes given by My providence, of the actions performed by virtue of My concurrence, of the very faculties and powers originally inspired by My creating spirit.

The high and honourable, as well as mean and low, the rich and poor, all drink of this common fountain, and the most powerful of the sons of men can do nothing till furnished with ability from hence. This spring is inexhaustible, and they who receive most, and are grateful in their returns, I water with more liberal measures of grace. Them that honour Me, I never fail to honour and bless in a visible and eminent manner; but if men glory in anything but the Lord, I blast their devices, disappoint their hopes, make them ashamed of their vain boastings. For so have I ordered matters by My providence, that no true lasting satisfaction shall ever fill that heart which sets its affections upon private and paltry advantages. Crosses from without and perplexities from within are the certain consequence of worldly desires and selfish principles.

If therefore thou hast received or done any good thing, take care of misplacing the honour and thanks due for it upon thyself or any other person. For this is robbing God of His due, from whom men receive whatever they have or

are, and stand in duty and equity bound to pay Him their acknowledgments. Since therefore the whole is My gift, when I demand the whole thanks and praise, I demand but the product of My own; and this is what, as I injure no man in requiring, so I resolve never to depart from.

This is the true principle of justice. Necessary to be considered, and thoroughly submitted to; because it checks and utterly confounds that other most pernicious principle of pride and vainglory to which mankind are so exceeding prone. Nor is it less conducive to their happiness than to their duty. For, where this generous love and regard of Me takes place, it does not only engage My favour, but secures the man from envy and discontent, partiality, and every other passion that uses to torment little and worldly-minded people. For this respectful deference and fervent love of God enlarges the soul, and fills it with great and truly noble thoughts. And therefore this is a certain mark of true and heavenly wisdom, to make Me its only joy and hope: for how can he be wise who does not see that God is the perfection and original of all good, and that the necessary consequence of His being so is that He is to be praised, honoured, admired, in and for and above all; since all the good which men pretend to esteem is by communication from Him; an emanation from His fulness, an effect of that sole, that universal cause?

CHAPTER XI.

God's Service is perfect Freedom.

DISCIPLE. I will again take the confidence to speak unto the Lord; nor ought I indeed to hold my peace, but address myself to Thee, my Lord and God, my heavenly

King, that sittest on Thy throne far above the skies, and thus will I proclaim Thy mercies and my own happiness. How pure, O Lord, how sweet, how exquisite are the pleasures Thou reservest for them that fear Thee, that delight themselves in Thy love, that are entirely devoted to Thy service. No tongue can worthily express the wondrous joys, the transports and ravishing ecstasies, which fill these pious souls, inflamed with the love, and employed in the contemplation of Thee. For this is a subject boundless as Thy goodness: that goodness which exerted itself in commanding me out of nothing. And when that being which Thou gavest was rendered liable to eternal misery, a fresh and yet more valuable instance of Thy mercy was that of bestowing upon me a new and better life when I was worse than nothing. For Thou hadst compassion on my weakness and my wanderings. Thou soughtest and with tender care broughtest back Thy lost sheep, taughtest me the right way, helpedst me to walk in it, and didst instruct and guide me in Thy love.

O thou overflowing spring of endless love! how shall I worthily magnify Thee, how can I forget Thee—Thee, who, in my lowest ebb of misery, didst condescend so graciously, so effectually, to remember me? Whose kindness rescued me from death, and far exceeded all my hopes; restored me to that favour which my sins had forfeited, and showed itself a friend to that wretch who was become Thine and his own enemy. "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits He hath done unto me?" If I resolve to serve Thee, yet how poor a tribute is that to Him whom all created nature is bound to serve? This is so far from a sufficient return, that I ought rather to admire Thy mercy, and esteem it an honour to myself when Thou vouchsafest to accept the service of so poor, so worthless a creature, and dost not disdain to reckon me amongst those whom Thou sufferest to do Thee homage.

For even in this I pay Thee but Thy own, since I and all I

have are Thine. But why do I speak of serving Thee, when, by a most astonishing condescension, even Thou, the mighty God, art pleased to serve me? For this is the effect of that excellently good Providence which hath contrived and ordered heaven and earth, and all the creatures, in such a manner that they should be useful and beneficial to mankind; which hath appointed blessed spirits above for guards and ministers to the heirs of salvation; and, which is most surprising, when Thou Thyself, for my sake, hadst taken upon Thee the form of a servant, and wert made a frail and afflicted man! When Thou didst give Thy life for undone sinners, and still dost give Thyself in grace, and hast engaged to give Thyself even the full and eternal fruition of Thy glorious Godhead to every sincere believer.

Oh! that it were in my power to make a suitable return for love which passes, not my thanks only, but even my knowledge! Oh! that my ways were made so direct that my whole life might be one continued act of gratitude and obedience! Nay, such is my infirmity that I must be content to wish that any one day of that life might be employed as it ought in Thy service. I know, O Lord, that Thou art worthy to receive all duty and honour and praise for ever. I am sensible that Thou art my rightful Lord, and I thy poor servant; that the utmost I can do is Thy just due, and that I ought to take unspeakable delight in thanking and obeying Thee; that nothing else but this should give me any satisfaction, and that when I have laid myself out entirely upon it, I still have done too little. This is the real persuasion, this is the earnest desire of my soul; and where my power falls short of my inclination, there do Thou, I beseech thee, strengthen and supply what is wanting by Thy grace, that my deeds and deportment may bear testimony and proportion to my pious disposition.

To be the meanest of Thy servants is the highest advancement; to despise and forsake all for Thee is true riches and honour. They who thus enter themselves into Thy family,

and cheerfully undertake this task, shall have a glorious reward; they will feel the pleasures of this world infinitely paid, infinitely outdone, by the better and larger amends of grace and divine comforts in exchange. They who thus bind themselves to Thee, that abandon wordly cares, and attend to the one thing necessary, attain to true and generous freedom of soul. For the straight way of Thy commandments is the only perfect law of liberty. O happy confinement! what sets men at large from the slavery of sin, from worldly cares and incumbrances, from the insupportable tyranny of unruly appetites and domineering passions! O blessed dependence! which makes us of the most high God's retinue, raises us up to a level with the angels, renders us dear to the Almighty, a terror to evil spirits, conquerors over our greatest and fiercest enemy, and recommends us to the love, the praise, the imitation, of all good men. Who would not greedily embrace such a service, where the very work is pleasant, the encouragements paid down in hand noble and great, and the wages promised in recompense for our labours, happiness exquisite, unspeakable, and everlasting?

CHAPTER XII.

Of Regulating our Desires.

CHRIST. Yet still, My son, there are many things in which thou art not sufficiently instructed.

DISCIPLE. Lord, be Thou pleased to let me know, and enable me to receive and do them.

CHRIST. Thy desires must be reduced into subjection, and My will take place in everything; nor must thy own private interest, but the zeal and regard for My honour, and the obedience due to My commands, be the governing

principle of all thy actions. You feel desires, like inward springs, put you into motion; and very eager sometimes you are of doing what you are verily persuaded is good. But even when the thing itself is commendable, the intention and motive men go upon ought to be nicely considered. For it makes a mighty difference whether I or themselves be principally in their thoughts. Now this discovery is not hard to make. For if My honour be their great concern, howsoever My providence disposes their affairs, they will conclude what I do best, and will be contented with it. But if under this disguise of holiness there be a lurking corruption of private and bye-respects, if gain makes men frugal or ambition virtuous, or the praise of the world charitable, or the consideration of their own health temperate, these are principles upon which no dependence can safely be had. Their conduct will be unequal, and vary as events do; and every disappointment of their expectations will produce trouble and impatience.

Do not therefore be too confident of every sort of inclination to do well; but first advise with Me, and take care to build upon a good foundation. For men who act upon indirect ends very often repent when it is too late; and that which at first they proposed great satisfaction and advantage from, proves at long run their torment and loss. Nay, I must give you this further caution yet, that even good inclinations are not to be taken at first sight, nor rashly pursued without a diligent and prudent observation. For it may be convenient sometimes to put some restraints upon the very best intentions. They who neglect this, and give free scope to their zeal by too great eagerness, often exceed the bounds of moderation and decency; sometimes give offence to their brethren by their extravagant heats and impetuous sallies, and sometimes, upon any resistance or difficulty which obstructs those precipitate fervours, lose all their inward peace, desist from their good designs, and fall from the height of rapture to the extremities of melan-

choly and despair. So that, to make thy zeal in well-doing in all points what it ought to be, it is by no means sufficient that it be honest and well-disposed, unless it be also sober and regular and discreet.

Again, there are some occasions and circumstances which render a sort of holy violence necessary, and oblige men to act quite contrary to their inclination to bear no manner of regard to flesh and sense, or what will be more agreeable any farther than may serve to set the mind in array against them, and resolutely engage in a formal war, for the reducing or keeping them in obedience to the superior faculties of the soul. For, by thus frequently controlling and counter-working all that human nature hath a tendency to, the outward man is by degrees qualified for duty, and acquires a great readiness of doing or suffering whatever shall be imposed upon it. And in these exercises the first foundations are laid of contentedness with a little, of satisfaction in a private and neglected state, a mean and narrow fortune, and of patience under any crosses or calamities, without those murmuring thoughts which are apt to beget hard and irreverent reflections, and too often break out in wicked complaints and saucy expostulations against the justice and wisdom and goodness of God and Providence.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Necessity and Reasonableness of Patience.

DISCIPLE. By all the collections I am able to make from my dear Lord's instructions, and the little experience I have of the world, patience seems to me a most necessary virtue; for the condition of man in this life is so exposed to calamities and sorrows, that in despite of all his endeavours after

peace, troubles await him everywhere, and his state is that of warfare and continual suffering.

CHRIST. It is so, My son; nor is it fit it should be otherwise. For those men have a wrong notion of peace who make it consist in freedom from suffering; in either having no troubles, or being insensible of any. This is a state neither attainable by a man nor convenient for a Christian. The peace I would have thee aspire after is such as consists very well with afflictions; and this is gained when a man hath brought himself to that equal composure and resigned temper of soul as firmly to persist in his duty, and to rest satisfied in the dispensations of God, when He thinks fit to try his virtue by very great and grievous adversities. If this appear a hard saying, think how much harder it will be to endure the torments of hell, and the implacable vengeance of an angry God. Nature, as well as religion, teaches men of two evils to choose the less; and this is done, when they set themselves submissively to undergo tribulation here, for the sake of God and a good conscience, that they may by such patient suffering deliver themselves from the dire effects of His wrath and never-ceasing punishment hereafter.

Now tribulation is a portion distributed in common to all the sons of men; distributed in large measures, even to those children of this generation which thou perhaps vainly imaginest to be most exempted from it. For even the gayest and most prosperous of them all are not without their many and sore evils. It is true, indeed, they take a great deal of pleasure, indulge their inclinations without control, and so their misery makes a less ensible impression upon their spirits; but miseries they have. Or, put the very best of their case, and suppose their joys to be without any interruption, their wishes without any disappointment, yet even thus how long would their happiness last? Alas, they vanish like a dream, and all their prosperity soon scatters like smoke. Nay, not only the enjoyments themselves,

but the very remembrance of them perish in a moment. Their life is but a vapour, and death will be sure to swallow up them and their gaieties in speedy and perpetual oblivion.

But this is putting the case more favourably than it ever happens in reality; for even in this life their plenty and pleasures are chequered with misfortunes, and all their sweets alloyed with a bitter mixture of cares and fears and inward perplexities of heart. The very objects that minister pleasure, bring pain along with them too. And this is one great argument, how wise a Providence the world is governed by, that the very inordinacy of those affections which pursue the pleasures of sense so eagerly should prove a torment to the guilty mind, and embase those very pleasures they indulge. These very pleasures, too, are short and fleeting, treacherous and deceitful, irregular and exorbitant, a shame and blemish to human nature; and if men be not sensible of this, that ignorance proceeds from their own inadvertency. Their reason is intoxicated with present delights, and their minds blinded by vicious habits, by which they degenerate into brutes, stupidly abandon themselves to the transitory pleasures of sin and lust, at the expense of everlasting pains, and consult the present gratification of a vile mortal body with the ruin of a precious and immortal soul.

Go not thou therefore after their excesses, nor place thy happiness in serving, but rather in commanding, subduing, denying, mortifying thy own inclinations. "Delight thou in the Lord, and He shall grant thee thy heart's desire." For this delight will teach thee that the happiness of man consists in inward and spiritual satisfactions, in the contempt of this world and its empty gaieties. And the less these are esteemed and affected, the greater and more ravishingly sweet shall those generous and noble pleasures prove, which result from the experience of God's favour, and the substantial comforts of a good conscience.

But still these comforts are not to be had without much labour, many conflicts, and sharp sufferings; for the

corrupt inclinations of flesh and blood, and the confirmed habits of vice create great difficulties, and ask time and pains to conquer. And conquered they may be by introducing the contrary habits of virtue. The flesh indeed will recoil, and think itself ill-used; but reason and religion will silence those grumblings, and resolute perseverance in good works vanquish all thy reluctances. The subtle old serpent will seduce and importune thee; but prayer and good thoughts drive the evil spirit away, and fasting and holy exercise, or constant lawful business, will keep him out. For he never enters so easily, so successfully, as when idleness sets open the door, and an empty heart makes room for his wicked suggestions.

CHAPTER XIV.

Obedience to Superiors enforced by Christ's Example.

CHRIST. Know, My son, that the man who refuses obedience rejects the grace and excludes himself from the favour of God, and by seeking his own private advantage inordinately, breaks the order and obstructs the good of the public. Disrespect and contumacy to superiors is an infallible mark of rebellious appetites, and of passions not reduced to the governance of reason and religion. Submission therefore is of good use for subduing the flesh and its lusts, and a good preservative against temptations. For the foreign enemy will be more successfully opposed when thy domestic one is first vanquished and all quiet within. And man himself is his own worst enemy. Nor are his circumstances ever more full of danger than when the sensitive raises insurrections, and would dethrone the rational soul. And in order to this bringing the inferior faculties to

reason, an humble opinion of yourself is necessary; for partiality and pride are at the bottom of all the disorders in thy own breast, and all the disturbance given by unruly men to society and good government of all kinds.

And what such mighty merit is there in this submission? What disparagement can it be thought to thee, who art dust and vileness, when thou rememberest that I Myself, the Almighty Majesty of Heaven, and the Lord of all the Universe—I, who created thee and the whole world out of nothing—did yet condescend to a state of subjection, and appeared in the very lowest, most servile and despicable form for thy sake, who art nothing? And why? but that so thy pride might have no pretence to support it, after so eminent a pattern of humility. Learn then, thou wretch, to humble thyself, and, like that earth of which thou art, be even content to be trampled upon and trodden under foot. Lay thyself, like the streets, to the feet of insulting men who walk over thee, and never rest till thou hast broken thy own perverseness, and art in a constant readiness to comply with every just command of all who have authority over thee.

Till this be done, pursue thy passions with remorseless indignation, and spare them not, till the very last remains of pride be absolutely suppressed and killed in thy heart. And if thou sometimes find ill usage and tyrannical barbarity, yet still consider thou art but a man, and oughtest not to complain; nay, rather consider that thou art a sinner, in justice consigned over to hell and eternal fire; and let the anger of an offended God, which strictly is thy portion and desert, check thy resentments of the insolence and injuries, the reproachful treatment and unjustifiable hardships, which men may sometimes offer to thee. This wrath of God hout hast provoked, but I in mercy spared thee; I had compassion on thy soul, and ransomed it from death by my own blood. And canst thou think that no return is due for such mercy? Yes; know that I require thou shouldst be sensible of the astonishing greatness of My love, and show that sense

by gratitude and humility, by a modest and respectful observance of my representatives here below, and by not disdaining to suffer any shame and contempt, any injustice and barbarity, when Providence and duty call thee to it, which I, thy Master, thy God, did not grudge to undergo for thy sake, whilst conversing in human flesh upon earth.

CHAPTER XV.

God's Judgments are to be considered for our Humiliation.

DISCIPLE. When Thou, Lord, utterest Thy voice in judgments, my joints are loosed, my limbs quake for fear, my very soul is confounded and trembles at Thy thunder. In the midst of these horrors I begin to reflect that the "heavens themselves are not pure in Thy sight;" and that even the angels Thou "hast charged with folly." If, then, those exalted intellectual spirits were not able to stand before Thee, and kept not their first estate, what must become of such a wretch as I am? If even the stars fell from the firmament, how can dust and ashes hope to escape? They who did eat angels' food degenerated from their primitive excellence, and fed on husks with swine; how then should a creature preserve its innocence whose very original is impure?

This, Lord, convinces me that there is no holiness but what is derived from Thee alone; no wisdom without Thy governance; no strength a sufficient defence if Thou withdraw Thy gracious protection; no continence or abstemiousness effectual, except Thou guard it; no watchfulness against the enemy, unless Thy wakeful eyes keep all our approaches, and repulse the assaults of the tempter. If Thou cease to support us with Thy mighty hand, the waves swallow us up; we sink and perish without Thee, and with Thee walk upon

the sea in safety. Weak and unstable are our resolutions; but Thy grace gives strength and perseverance. Cold and timorous are our hearts; but Thou warmest them with zeal, and inspirest them with courage. "Lift up then, Lord, our hands that hang down, and our feeble knees, that we faint not in this spiritual warfare;" and enable those who can do nothing without Thee, to conquer all difficulties through Thy strength.

I know, O Lord, that if any good thing seem to be in me, yet even this deserves my meanest opinion, and will in no degree justify my thinking otherwise of myself than as a most vile and worthless wretch. And therefore, when Thy angry justice afflicts me, it is my duty, with the profoundest humility, to lay my mouth in the dust and meekly submit to Thy correcting hand. For, though I cannot discover all the reasons of Thy mysterious judgments, yet this I find no difficulty to discern, that I myself am nothing, and that I proceeded out of nothing. Oh, the dark abyss! in which I can find nothing relating to myself but vanity and nothing. Where, then, is the presumption, where the pride, the lofty conceit of my worth and virtue? Whither are all my vain confidences, and towering imaginations fled? Thy judgments, Lord, have swept them away like a torrent, and all are sunk in those unsearchable depths. These show me to myself, and justify the prophet's rebuke, "Shall the clay exalt itself against the potter that fashioned it? Behold, as the clay is in the hands of the potter, so is every mortal man in thy hand, O Lord."

And is it possible for that soul to swell with insolence and vain conceit, which is duly sensible of Thy majesty, and submits to it with that lowliness and resigned submission which Thy truth directs? No, no, not all the voices of mankind, conspiring unanimously in his praise, can blow him up to fond conceits of his own excellence, when once his hopes and heart are fixed on God; for he considers that all these are but so many copies of himself; frail and

feeble, deceivable and perishing, emptiness and nothing. That they, as well as their words, are only air and sound, and both will quickly vanish together; but God and His truth remain for evermore. "Cease therefore from man, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" and endeavour to have praise of Him, who resisteth the proud, but in His own due time exalteth them who humble themselves under His mighty hand."

CHAPTER XVI.

With what Reserves we ought to Pray.

CHRIST. Let this, My son, be the language and style of all thy prayers: "Lord, if it be Thy pleasure, grant me this request; if what I ask conduce to Thy glory, do Thou be pleased to give and prosper it: Lord, if Thou, to whom all things and their consequences are perfectly known, seest that this will be for my true advantage, not only bestow it, but, with it, grace to use it to Thy glory; but if Thou seest it may prove hurtful to me, do not only deny my petitions, which proceed from ignorance and mistake, but remove far from me the very desire of that which cannot be obtained without my prejudice."

This last is a very reasonable and expedient request; because many desires, which seem not innocent only, but even virtuous and wise, profitable and praiseworthy, in a man's own eyes, are yet neither inspired by God nor agreeable to His will; nor is it easy to discern whether one be acted by a good or evil spirit; or whether, in the matter of his prayers, his own inclination and private respects do not determine him. And many a one, who hath fancied the impulse of divine grace, and persuaded himself that he hath been directed and acted by it all along, finds the delusion

out at last, and what he imputed to the Spirit of God, proves in the end a suggestion of the devil, or the eager longing of his own vain mind.

The surest way, then, never to offend God in thy desires, and to be accepted in thy addresses to Him, will be to temper all thy inclinations with His fear, and not so much as indulge a secret wish, without such reservations as may testify an entire submission to the divine disposal. And when those wishes break out into words, men shall do well to conceive and present them in such forms as may express some check upon themselves, and mighty caution in restraining their tongues from asking anything in a peremptory manner; but leaving the matter entirely to God's better choice. As thus: "Lord, Thou knowest whether the having or the being denied the matter of my petition be most convenient; and therefore all I beg is, That what thou seest most expedient may be done; I ask, indeed, as is my duty, but I presume not to prescribe to Thy heavenly wisdom. Give therefore, Lord, such things, and in such measures, and at such times as Thou seest fit. Deal with me as Thou knowest is necessary; for that I am well assured is best for me which is most agreeable to Thy will, and most conducive to Thy glory. Appoint me any post, and use me as Thy own; turn and change me and my fortune at pleasure. I only beg to be qualified for Thy dispensations, to use them rightly, and greatly to in prove under them. For I am Thy servant, devoted to Thee without the least reserve. I desire not to live to myself, but to Thee. Oh! that I might be enabled faithfully and worthily to perform that homage and duty to all which my heart is most freely and sincerely disposed."

CHAPTER XVII.

A Prayer for Grace to do the Will of God.

DISCIPLE. "Hear me, most merciful Saviour, I humbly beseech Thee, and let Thy grace be ever present with Thy weak, unworthy servant. I am not of myself able to do or think anything that is good. Oh! let Thy spirit assist my poor endeavours; vanquish the temptations that so thick beset me; fix my inconstant mind, and follow me all the days of my life, that I may persevere in good works unto the end. Regulate my affections and desires, and confine them to such objects only as are well-pleasing in Thy sight. Let Thy will be the guide and measure of mine, and let mine steadily conform to Thy pleasure. Remove far from me all inclinations and aversions, but such as agree with those of the blessed Jesus. Help me to die daily to the world, and to the things of the world; and mortify my vanity to that degree that even shame and contempt for Thy sake may be not only supportable but welcome to me. Let all my hopes and wishes centre in Thee alone, and nothing appear desirable in comparison of a pure heart and peaceful conscience. For Thou, O Lord, art my peace, Thou my only rest; in Thee alone is pleasure and true satisfaction, and all without Thee is misery and torment. Oh! grant me this blessed retreat, this happy security; that I may abandon all the false appearances of happiness here below, and find soft ease and sweet repose in Thy love and favour, Thou true, Thou chief, Thou eternal good, of pious souls."

CHAPTER XVIII.

God is our only Comfort in Trouble.

DISCIPLE. Whatever comforts and happiness I propose, this is not the time and place of enjoying them, but I expect that blessed fruition in another state. For, what would it avail could I attain the utmost delights the world can afford, when a very short space must of necessity put a period to them? Do not then mistake thy happiness, my soul; for these thing are not, cannot be, thy rest. The fulness of joy and undisturbed pleasure is nowhere to be found, save in God only; He is the comforter of the afflicted, He the wealth of the poor, He the support and strength of the weak, He the glory and great reward of the humble.

Nor let it disturb thy peace, or discourage thy hope, that thou canst not yet aspire to thy promised felicity. For God is faithful and cannot lie. Only wait His own time patiently, and thou shalt not fail of His mercy, and an abundant recompense of thy faith and patient trust in due season. But if this delay draw off thy affections to present comforts, and abate thy zeal for future and distant rewards, thou shalt desire earthly blessings, and not be filled; and at the same time shalt lose those heavenly and eternal joys which alone can satisfy and make thee happy. Use, then, these temporal things, but love none but the things that are eternal. The present were not designed for enjoyment, but for necessity and convenience. Thy nature is not cut out for them, nor is it in their power to make thee perfect, though all this mortal state is capable of were united together for that purpose. For God alone is a good large enough to fill the desires of an immortal soul. He only is proportioned to thy wants and noble faculties; and the happiness to be met with in Him is not that transitory, imperfect thing which the children of this generation fondly covet and

admire; but that exquisite, that infinite and inward delight, of which the pure in heart and spiritual persons receive some sweet foretastes and pledges, by having their conversation in heaven while they themselves are upon earth. For man is vain, and all his comforts like him: empty and unsatisfactory, false and fleeting, swift in decay, and of short continuance; but those from God resemble the perfections of their author, spiritual and true, immutable and eternal. A truly pious soul can never be destitute, because he constantly bears his happiness about him, even the blessed Jesus, the divine Comforter; and, when bereft of all besides, can thus converse with Him in the profoundest solitude.

Blessed be Thy mercy, O dearest Jesus! Blessed be Thy cheering presence! O let me never be deprived of this inestimable bliss. While I have this consolation within I feel no want of earthly enjoyments, for this supplies, exceeds them all. Oh! let me thankfully rejoice in Thy favour, and the light of Thy countenance lifted up upon me! Or, if at any time Thou withdraw those bright beams, and interpose a cloud of sorrow, yet even then preserve me from sad distrust, and let the consideration of Thy will, which is always best, be my support in my blackest and most melancholy circumstances. Let me not cast away my hope and confidence, because Thou hidest Thy face for a season; but help me to discern the great wisdom and benefit of such trying dispensations, and to support my faith with the prospect of that reward which is laid up in heaven for those upon whom patience hath its perfect work. For Thou, O Lord, art gracious and merciful, and though we perpetually offend and provoke Thee, yet wilt "Thou not always be chiding, nor keep Thy anger for ever;" but wilt turn again, and in much compassion quicken Thy suffering servants, that they may rejoice in Thee, and triumph over their calamities.

CHAPTER XIX.

Of Casting our Care upon God.

CHRIST. My son, be content that I should dispose of thee and all thy affairs as My divine wisdom sees fit; for I best know what is convenient for thee. Thou judgest rashly, and art liable to human frailties. Sense and present satisfactions blind thy eyes and bias thy reason; but Christians, who should walk by faith and not by sight, must not be governed by the same measures which common men make use of in distinguishing good and evil accidents.

DISCIPLE. Lord, I acknowledge my infirmity; and am sensible that Thy care and concern for me is more prudent, more tender, than that I have for my own self. And he hath made but small progress in the school of Christ whose weak faith is still to learn that lesson of being satisfied with all Thy dispensations and casting his care upon Thee. All, therefore, that I beg is the establishing my heart in the way of Thy commandments; and, so long as I swerve not from truth and righteousness, secure my soul, and for the rest, do Thy pleasure. For Thou art wise, and just, and good; and such, I am sure, are all the methods of Thy providence; though human understandings may not distinctly perceive, nor be able to account for the reasons of them. If therefore Thou condemn me to darkness and affliction, I will praise and thank Thee for Thy deserved correction, even in the midst of my trouble; or, if Thou spare the rod, and make my darkness to be light, I will then thankfully receive the blessing and magnify the favour which I cannot deserve.

CHRIST. This is indeed, My son, the disposition and deportment befitting the character of My faithful children. And all who profess to walk with Me in piety and virtue must bring themselves to a soul so even, so resigned, that

suffering and joy, poverty or riches, may be entertained alike; the one without murmuring or complaint, the other without the least pride or change of temper. For both are equally the appointment of My providence, and as such should be met with cheerfulness and perfect content.

DISCIPLE. Lord, I am willing to endure whatever Thou art pleased to lay upon me. I do desire to receive good and evil, the sweet and bitter, the comforts and the crosses of this life, with the very same resentments of mind. Nay, not only to receive, but to be thankful for both, since both come from Thy own hand, which cannot err in ordaining all my events. This only I implore, that in all changes of condition Thou wouldest in Thy mercy preserve me from sin; for, while I keep my innocence and continue in Thy love, not calamity, nor death, nor hell itself, shall make me afraid. However Thou mayest exercise my patience or frown upon me at present, yet so long as Thou dost not cast me off for ever, nor blot my name out of Thy Book of Life, I am above all danger, and the utmost powers and malice of fortune and enemies and devils combined together, can never hurt me.

CHAPTER XX.

Christ our Pattern of Patience in Affliction.

CHRIST. My son, remember I came down from heaven for thy salvation; I bore the punishment due to thee, and all the miseries to which human nature is exposed. I bore them, not by constraint but choice, and urged by no necessity but that which powerful love imposed upon Me. And one great end for which I condescended to do so was to teach thee patience by this example; and that My willing sufferings might dispose thee to submit to the necessary

incumbrances of thy present condition, without reluctance and murmuring. Sorrow became familiar to Me; My constant attendant from the manger to the cross; for every hour produced some fresh instance of it. My circumstances were low, and I contented Myself with the want of even the necessaries of life; My innocence was slandered, and daily complaints and reproaches were sounding in My ears; shame and contempt I entertained without return or angry resentment; My good deeds were repaid with malice and ingratitude, My miracles blasphemed, and My doctrine traduced and vilely misrepresented.

DISCIPLE. Yes, Lord, I read the story of Thy invincible meekness with wonder and astonishment; and cannot but infer from thence, that, since Thou wert pleased to give such amazing proofs of an entire obedience to Thy heavenly Father's will, I, who am a wretched sinner, and not only subject to these miseries by the condition of my nature, but one who have deserved them as chastisements for my transgressions, am much more obliged, with a most perfect submission, to receive whatever Thy providence thinks fit to inflict; and must by no means grumble at the weight or the continuance of any burden Thou shalt lay upon me in the present world. If anything here seem heavy, yet it is rendered much easier and more supportable by the assistance of Thy grace, by the contemplation of Thy example, and by the many patterns of constancy and virtue which Thy now glorious saints, but once afflicted servants, who travelled the same rugged journey of life, have in all ages set for my imitation and encouragement. I plainly see under this Gospel state, a mighty support which even Thy own peculiar people wanted under the old law. For then the way to heaven was dark, and the prospect at their journey's end less glorious and inviting. Few then applied themselves with zeal to seek a future and spiritual kingdom; nor could they do so with equal encouragement till Thy meritorious death had opened an entrance into the high and holy place.

But how contentedly, how thankfully, ought I to tread in Thy blessed steps, sustained by the assurance of eternal rewards, and directed in the right way by the light of Thy doctrine? For Thou "art the way, the truth, and the life." Thy afflictions have taught me and all believers that tribulation is the passage to Thy heavenly kingdom, and that the proper method of attaining Thy crown is being made a partaker of Thy cross. Hadst thou not gone before us, who would have the heart to follow? Who could persevere in a course of sufferings? Nay, though Thou hast thus showed us the way, yet how loth, how backward are we to follow still? And, if neither Thy miracles, nor Thy precepts, Thy wondrous humiliation, nor Thy glorious exaltation, can warm us into greater zeal and resolution, than by lamentable experience we daily see and feel they do, how wretchedly slothful, alas! how cold and motionless, should we have stood, had not Thy grace and marvellous condescension vouchsafed to grant us the advantage of so clear a light, and the powerful motive of so bright an example?

CHAPTER XXI.

Of Bearing Injuries, and how we may Judge of True Patience.

CHRIST. Cease thy complaints, My son, and, when afflictions threaten to attack thee, call to remembrance what I endured for thy sake; nay, not what I endured for thine only, but what so many brave and generous saints have since courageously endured for Mine. Alas! thy trials yet are small, nor hast thou resisted unto blood, as I and they have done. Their difficulties were greater, their temptations sharper, their sorrows more piercing, their exercises more severe; and yet in all these they were more

than conquerors. It will therefore be of great service to the confirming thy hope and patience, if thou diligently compare thy very light with their much heavier burden; and reproach thyself for sinking under a weight which they would scarce have felt. But, if thy own load seem so insupportable, and thou canst hardly be brought to think the case of others so much more deplorable, consider whether this false estimate do not proceed from partial affection, tenderness to thyself, and a fretful impatience, rather than from the true nature and reason of the thing. For these corrupt men's judgments, and make them see their own and other people's circumstances with very different eyes. But be thy ideas true or mistaken, yet still the greater and the less calamities call equally for submission and constancy. And it is not the degree or measure, but the author and the consequence of suffering, which is the proper motive to patience.

Now the better thou art composed under any trouble, the more commendable is thy wisdom, and the larger will be thy recompense. Nay, not only so, but the easier will be thy lot too. For consideration will reconcile thee to it, and time and experience make the thing familiar. Nor matters it much who are the immediate instruments, or from what next hand thy afflictions come. For those are very idle pretences which men usually labour to cover their want of temper withal. "Had this been done by an enemy or a stranger, I could have borne it; but from a friend, a relation, one whom I have highly obliged, and have a right to expect better usage from, what flesh can brook such baseness and ingratitude? Had I given any just occasion for that disparaging report it would never have vexed me; but to be slandered and abused without any ground, without the least fault or provocation of mine, methinks 'tis very hard: the thing itself I could away with; but the person or the particular circumstances put me out of all patience." Alas! these are nice and frivolous

distinctions, such as are altogether foreign and impertinent to the matter in hand, and what the virtue of patience is no way concerned in. For this takes injuries and affronts by the great, without entering into any particular examination of their nature and quality and peculiar aggravations; nor does it at all regard the person by whom it is exercised, but considers that person only by whom it is to be crowned.

No man hath yet arrived to a due perfection in this grace, who is not content with any kind of trial, from any hand whatsoever. The differences of friend or foe, of superior, inferior, or equal; of a good-natured and conscientious, or a wicked, perverse, vexatious man, are of no consideration at all. But let the provocation be what it will, and come from whom it will, let it be offered but once, or repeated ever so often, it is all alike. Because in all the overruling hand of God is attended to, and everything received as ordained and originally inflicted by Him; and what proceeds from Him is always good, and sure to turn to account. And as nothing He appoints, though seemingly never so grievous, shall be to good men's disadvantage, so nothing, though ever so slight and despicable in itself, when dutifully and decently entertained, shall be passed over unrewarded. Arm thyself therefore for combat, and decline no occasion of engaging that offers, if thou desire the glory of the conquest. Without fighting thy way through, there is no coming at the crown. And they who refuse to suffer with Christ, do in effect, and by necessary consequence, refuse to reign with Him. Stand up then bravely to afflictions, and quit thyself like a man; repose and happiness is what thou covetest, but these are only to be obtained by labour. Victory and triumph are the things thou aimest at; but who was ever yet so absurd as to think of triumphs without enemies and hardships, or of conquering without a battle?

DISCIPLE. I acquiesce, dear Lord, in all Thou sayest, nor

will I indulge such vain imaginations. But since even where the spirit is most willing the flesh is miserably weak, assist me, I beseech Thee, that by Thy power and strength I may be able to do what by my own I cannot accomplish, and nature is averse from so much as attempting. Thou knowest full well how little I can bear; how every shock makes my feeble heart give ground; Lord, do Thou support and confirm me, that tribulation may appear not only tolerable, but even desirable, in compliance with my will and my duty. For what regret soever humanity may betray in these cases when danger approaches, in my own better judgment, which considers things in the Christian and spiritual sense, I am abundantly satisfied how much the harsher dispensations of Thy providence conduce to my soul's advantage. And, though "no chastisement for the present seems joyous but grievous," yet my better sense, when I think freely, convinces me of Thy wisdom and mercy, and that it is "even good for me to be afflicted."

CHAPTER XXII.

The Infirmities and Miseries of our present State.

DISCIPLE. "I will confess my unrighteousness unto the Lord," and bewail my infirmities before Him. For every trivial accident casts me down, and I am often overwhelmed with sorrow, upon occasions which my calmer thoughts abundantly convince me deserve rather my contempt than my serious concern. Sometimes I see and condemn my own folly, and mighty resolutions I make, how bravely I will behave myself for the time to come; and yet, upon the next assault of some slight misfortune, this imaginary hero is beaten from his post, and cannot stand the shock of a

very common difficulty. The poorest and most despicable things are, I find, capable of becoming great and dangerous temptations; and I, who at a distance defy them, yet, when brought to the trial, feel by sad experience upon how slippery ground I stand.

This is indeed the wretched condition of Thy poor unstable servant. But, Lord, do Thou, in much compassion, look upon my frailty, for Thou knowest it more perfectly than I myself can. Stretch forth Thy hand, and draw me out of these deep waters, and out of this mire of sin and weakness, that I sink not in my corruption. I cannot easily express the melancholy reflections, the shame and confusion, the indignation and sad perplexity of heart, which the consciousness of my own inability to resist temptations, and the inconstancy of my best and most vigorous purposes create; and though my will be not always vanquished, nor do I (blessed be God) yield to every wicked suggestion, yet the repeated assaults of the enemy disturb my quiet, and I am weary of a life which consists in perpetual hazard and painful conflicts with myself. The wretchedness of my condition is but too manifest. I need no other argument to prove it, than that easy access evil thoughts find in my breast; which, in despite of all my watchful cares, and most manful struggles, are much sooner insinuated and received, than either driven out again, or prevented from entering.

Look down, then, Thou Almighty Rock of Israel and lover of souls, and interpose Thy power and protection; give seasonable succour and happy success to my too fruitless endeavours. Arm and guard me with strength from above; and suffer not the old man, the corrupt inclinations of my flesh, which refuses to be entirely subdued and brought to reason, to usurp the dominion over my better part. For this obstinate rebel renews its insurrections daily, and bids me battle, calls me to combats and hazardous engagements, which must never, never end in perfect peace and safety so long as this miserable state of mortality endures. Most

miserable indeed, since every action and accident of my life involves me in fresh dangers; since every step I take is upon snares and precipices; since every time and place is thick beset with troubles and toils, with treachery and temptation; and a numerous host of enemies ready to devour and swallow me up. For fatal uninterrupted successions of trials every moment renew their attacks; and when I have happily vanquished many, and fondly promise myself a truce, as many more immediately draw down upon me, and make fiercer and more furious attempts upon some other quarter, which I hoped had been sufficiently covered from their approaches.

And can a life, subject to such surprises and hazards, embittered with so many troubles and severe trials, encumbered with so much frailty and corruption, be valued and mightily coveted? Nay, can that deserve the very name of life which naturally breeds plagues and diseases, and exposes us to such variety of deaths? Yet stupid man hugs and embraces and esteems it his only happiness; expects ease in the midst of distraction, pursues joys in a valley of tears, and vainly sets up for the boasted perfection of pleasure, in a condition of inevitable misery, and lingering certain pain. Sometimes, indeed, the tender sense of some afflictions cuts us to the quick, and in our melancholy moods we give the world hard words, call it *deceitful*, *treacherous*, and *vain;* but even they who rail at it most liberally, and profess to hate and despise it, cannot be prevailed with to be content to leave it. The flesh and its affections have still a powerful influence, and spur men on to the pursuit and love of those very enjoyments which reason and their own experience have taught them cannot be worth their pains, nor in any degree answer their deluded expectations. For we must observe that our love and hatred of this world proceed from very different causes and principles. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," engage our affections, and these are ever present and

ever vehement with us. The calamities and griefs and pains we feel provoke our hatred and contempt, and represent life a burden and misery; and these have their intervals, and work upon us feebly and by fits. The former too strike it with inclination, and are assisted by nature; the latter have no influence upon us but what their own weight gives; all their impressions are forcible and violent, heavy and painful, and such as we submit to only because we cannot help it.

Thus sense and sinful pleasure get within us, and, which is very lamentable, debauch our reason. The present ticklings of the body cheat the mind, and vitiate our palates to that degree, that, being prepossessed with a false taste of worldly sweets, we have no relish left for that delicious entertainment with which God and religion feed and feast the pure and heavenly-minded soul. For O! those happy men who have learnt to despise and abandon earthly things, and consecrated themselves entirely to God by mortification, self-denial, and a steady course of severe virtue, these exalted spirits know and feel the truth of God and His promises; they find unspeakable charms and sensible delights in the voluntary refusal of those toys and baits which cannot be had with satisfaction, nor coveted with safety. They see and despise and pity the folly of abused mankind, discover the lurking frauds of the tempter, and that the imagined happiness and boasted pleasures of sensual and earthly men are only snares and dangers, vanity and cheat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Of Placing all our Hope and Happiness in God.

DISCIPLE. Repose thyself, my soul, in God upon all occasions, and above all other dependencies, for He is the only sure refuge, the eternal rest of the saints. Grant me Thy grace, O sweetest, kindest Saviour, to value, and love, and trust in Thee above all things. Make me to prize Thee far before health and beauty; to desire Thee more than honour and advancement, more than riches and power, more than wit and learning; to rejoice in Thee more than in pleasure and prosperity, more than in reputation and praise, more than in the largest promises, the highest deserts, the most exalted gifts, the most transporting joys, which Thou canst impart, or my heart when most enlarged is able to receive. Let me admire Thee above angels and archangels and all the hosts of heaven, above all things visible and invisible, more than all that is, or can be, which is not Thy own self.

For Thou, my God, art the best and most excellent being; in Thee alone is plenty and fulness, sweet refreshment, peaceful comfort, and ravishing delights, the perfection of beauty and charming graces, true honour and adorable greatness; in Thee, as in its proper centre, all good meets, and dwells, and hath, and doth, and will continue to abide, from and to all eternity. Give then Thyself, my dearest Jesus; for all Thou givest, and all Thou promisest to give besides, is poor and little when compared with the sight and fruition of Thee. And I have found by long experience that all Thy other favours, nay, all Nature is too short and narrow to satisfy my soul, whose unbounded desires exalt and stretch themselves far beyond all present enjoyments, and can be filled and rest contented with nothing less than Thee.

O my beloved Lord, King of the Universe, knit me to Thee with the bands of an entire and holy affection. Set me at liberty from this clog of earth, and give me wings of ardent zeal and pure devotion, that I may soar aloft, and take my flight higher than heaven itself, and find my rest in Thee. Oh! when will that happy time come when I shall be set at liberty from sin and corruption, from the body and the world, and without interruption, without alloy, and taste and feast upon the sweetness of my God? When will the necessary cares of this life cease to distract me, and leave me power and leisure to indulge those longings and pleasures which refined and unbodied spirits feel, when swallowed up in the contemplation of Thy divine excellences, and even raised above themselves, they know, and love, and retire wholly into Thee? At present I am oppressed with a load of infirmities and corruptions, and often groan under the sense of my heavy burden. The inward joys with which Thy grace supports me are mingled and embased with pains and tears, which cloud and darken and deject my mind, distract my thoughts, obstruct my eagerest wishes and endeavours, and fasten me down to earth and misery, when I would fly to Thy embraces. I cannot in this vale of sorrow enjoy my Lord, my Love; but wait with hope and long sore for that happy change which shall translate me to the spirits of just men made perfect, and render me partaker of their bliss. But let not, Lord, my sufferings and tears be lost; remember and compassionate my present wretchedness, and grant my sighs an easy and effectual access into Thy blessed presence.

Thou, Lord, art the brightness of Thy Father's glory; dart Thy reviving beams into my soul; enlighten its dark places, and scatter its discomforts. To Thee the very thoughts and inmost desires of every heart are known; by Thee the most secret and silent wishes are thoroughly understood. Oh, hear me, when I speak in this language, and pour out my supplications in sighs and griefs which

words cannot utter. Even when my tongue lies still my thoughts are in motion, and my heart within my breast burns with inarticulate ejaculations. "How long (say I to myself) how long will my Lord, my Bridegroom, delay His coming? Oh, that He would vouchsafe to enter under the roof of his unworthy and afflicted servant! Oh, that He would stretch forth His almighty hand and deliver this wretch, just ready to sink, out of all the misery and trouble which surround, oppress, and are ready to devour him! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; for without Thee, no day, no hour, is easy or comfortable; for Thou art my hope, my joy, and all my worldly plenty; but without Thee is the very extremity of poverty and want."

See how I lie in this prison of the flesh, fettered and bound up with the chain of my sin, till the pitifulness of Thy great mercy loose me, and the light of Thy countenance, breaking into this darksome dungeon, assure me of Thy favour and friendship. "Let others covet and set their affections upon such wretched objects as deluded sense thinks valuable; but as for me, I will love and long for nothing but Thee, my God, alone; for Thou, my God, alone art my hope and happiness, the only stay of my present, and the only bliss of my future and eternal state." Such is, and such shall ever be, my address and fervent prayer. Nor will I let Thee go until Thou bless me, till Thou inspire new life with Thy favour, and dwell in and converse familiarly with my soul by Thy spirit and gracious presence.

CHRIST. Behold Me here, My son, always attentive to thy prayers, always ready to extend the comfort and relief thou so zealously implorest. Thy tears and fervent desires, the sorrows of thy perplexed heart, and the strong cries of a wounded conscience, have pierced the skies, and brought Me down to thy speedy succour and comfort; for I am ever nigh to such as be of an humble and contrite spirit, and My ears are always open to the prayers of My suffering servants.

DISCIPLE. I did indeed presume, in the anguish of my soul, to beg what I am sensible I cannot deserve, and flee to Thee, my God, for help. And lo! I am sincerely disposed to forsake all and follow Thee. Nor will I ascribe to myself the glory of so zealous, so refined a temper; for Thou, Lord, didst work this good thing in me, and by Thy own preventing grace kindle and excite my very first desires. I prayed, but Thou preparedst my heart. I sought Thee, but it was by Thy impulse and direction. And for this first disposition I return Thee my most humble and unfeigned thanks; acknowledging it Thy best, Thy sole gift, that I have been able so much as to think or intend any good thing. Since then the whole of what I do or desire well is Thine; my part shall be to cherish every holy emotion, to improve the early and happy assistances of Thy grace, to submit myself without any reserve to Thy holy guidance, and, in the midst of the very best performances Thou qualifiest me for, constantly and humbly to remember my own vileness and impotence. For who, O Lord, is like unto thee? Or what in heaven or earth, which hath or boasts of any excellence, can be compared unto my God and Saviour? Thy works are just and true, Thy precepts right and equitable, Thy providence great and glorious, and all things are governed by it, after a most wise and holy and good and wonderful manner. All honour and glory and praise be therefore ascribed to Thee, eternal wisdom of Thy eternal Father; may heaven and earth, and all the creatures, set forth Thy excellencies, and in this general concert I will join; my mouth shall sing Thy astonishing works, Thy great glories; and I will never cease to praise and adore my God while I have any being!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Thanksgiving for God's Mercies.

DISCIPLE. "Open Thou the eyes of my understanding, O Lord, that I may see and obey the wondrous things of Thy law." Give me the perfect knowledge of Thy will, and possess me with a reverent and thankful sense of all Thy goodness and loving-kindness to me and to all men, that I may show forth Thy praise and publish Thy mercies. I know these are so numerous and great that I can never magnify them worthily; the least of them exceeds my power to express, and when I consider them, I am so far from any vain pretence of merit that all my thoughts are overpowered and lost in wonder. For all our advantages of mind and body, of person and fortune, those which are endowments and ornaments of Nature, and those which exalt and supply the defects of Nature, are all the effects of Thy bounty and beneficence, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh."

Thou art the common source, the universal repository, from whence our benefits are drawn down. Not to all in equal proportions, it is true; but, be the measure less or more, it is still Thy distribution. He who receives most is indebted for the whole to Thy liberality; and he who hath least could not have had that little but from Thee. He to whom thou hast dealt Thy blessings most plentifully is not from that dispensation to take an estimate of himself; his plenty will not justify any confidence or boast of his own merit, nor may he insult over his brethren, or behave himself uncomely, and disesteem or despise those from whom Thy mercies have distinguished him. For the greatness of men's deserts is most eminently discovered by a modest and mean opinion of themselves, courtesy and condescension to others, gratitude and devotion towards God. And the more they are sensible of their own wants and unworthiness, the better they

qualify themselves for fresh and greater demonstrations of Thy love and liberality. Again, the man to whom Thou hast distributed more sparingly, must not repine and be discouraged, nor fret and grudge the larger portion of his wealthier neighbour; but keep his eyes and mind wholly intent upon Thee, and admire the freedom of Thy grace, which as it cannot be obliged to any, so gives to all largely and without partial respect of persons.

For Thou art to be praised in all Thy gifts by every man, because all comes from Thee. And Thou art master of thy own favours; Thou givest without upbraiding, and withholdest without injustice; Thy wisdom knows what measures are proper and expedient for each person; and the reasons why one man differs from another lie not within the compass of our knowledge, but must be left entirely to Thy judgment to determine the fitness of them.

In this persuasion, Lord, I readily acknowledge and adore Thy mercy in suffering me to want many of those advantages which the generality of mankind set a mighty value upon. Nay, I am satisfied that men ought to be afflicted, and humble their souls with the consideration of their own wants and unworthiness, yet so as not only not to give way to sad despondencies and distrust of Thy mercy, but even from this very subject to draw matter of comfort and joy, because Thou hast so particularly declared Thy affection to the contrite and humble souls, and given them marks of more than ordinary favour.

Such were those apostles, so mean in their own and the world's esteem, whom Thou madest choice of for witnesses of thy truth and attendants upon Thy person. Those very heroes in the Christian story whom Thou hast appointed judges and rulers of the whole world in matters of religion, were recommended to that high promotion by being meek and poor in spirit, void of guile, and mortified to the world, patient in suffering, content with insolence and barbarous treatment, and proud of nothing but being thought worthy

o endure shame and pain for the name of Jesus. So distant from common men, so singular were their notions, which disposed them with joy and eagerness to embrace what others dread and detest and shun with all their industry and might. The never-failing spring of joy and comfort, which they who truly love and fear Thee, and are thankful for Thy infinite goodness, find within, flows from the constant resignation of their minds to Thy disposals, and the reflections upon Thy wise eternal purposes, which check their proneness to partiality and discontent, and make every dispensation of Thy providence welcome to them. They are abased with equal satisfaction as others are exalted; and regard not high or low, honourable or despised, according to common reputation, but consider that their station and circumstances in the world are chosen and ordained by Thee, and cannot therefore but be good, nay, better than any other because the effect of Thy divine appointment, which always knows and chooses the best. Could we but once arrive at this considerate temper of mind, the different accidents of life would cease to be either much uneasy or extravagantly pleasant. The violent shocks upon our passions would be effectually prevented, because Thy honour would take place above our own appetites and mistaken interests. Poverty and shame would be acceptable, as coming from the same hand with riches and honour. And even those things which are most agreeable to the relish and inclinations of human nature, would please and comfort us more with the consideration of their being bestowed by Thee, the author of all our happiness, than upon the account of any advantages to be had from the things themselves. The zeal for Thy honour, in the extremity of distress, should support good men more, and find greater regard from them, than all the wealth or glory or other external blessings which Thou at any time dost or canst confer upon the most prosperous of the sons of men in this world. So small is the consideration of the greatest gift, in comparison of the

wise, the good, the almighty Giver and Disposer of our fortunes, who orders all things for the best, and is in all our kindest friend and constant benefactor.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Things which make for Peace.

CHRIST. Hearken to Me, My son, and I will inform thee in the right way to true peace and perfect liberty.

DISCIPLE. Be pleased, Lord, so to do, for such instruction will prove both acceptable and profitable to me.

CHRIST. Make it thy business rather to comply with the desires and commands of others than to indulge thy own inclinations. Choose a moderate, nay, a low fortune, rather than greatness and abundance. Be humble, obedient, and condescending in all thy deportment. Let this be thy constant wish and prayer, that God would perform His pleasure, and dispose of thee and all thy affairs as to Him seems most convenient. The man that hath brought himself to this temper and spirit, be assured is in the ready way to peace of mind and true content.

DISCIPLE. The words my Lord hath spoken are few in number but full of sense, and of very comprehensive extent; and I can easily discern in this little space the grounds of great perfection in virtue. Did I but diligently observe these rules, how happily would all excessive concern and violent disorder at any accidents of human life be suppressed or quite prevented! And if at any time hereafter I find myself oppressed with immoderate cares or resentments, Thy wisdom hath taught me to discover the true cause of my trouble, and that I suffer for neglecting to comply with this doctrine. But such compliance, Lord,

Thou knowest is not the work of Nature and mere reason; and therefore I implore the mighty assistances of Thy grace, to which nothing is hard, for making those improvements, which, in the present state of corruption, are to flesh and blood impracticable. Nothing is more acceptable in Thy sight than the conquest of our infirmities, and bold advances in goodness. Put forth Thy hand, then, and what Thou hast taught me to know, enable me to perform, that I may both approve my own obedience, and (what without Thee I cannot do) successfully pursue my own happiness and salvation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Prayer against Evil Thoughts.

DISCIPLE. "Go not far from me, O Lord; my God, make haste to help me;" for corrupt imaginations are perpetually rising in my breast, and innumerable fears and horrors close my soul in on every side. The sense of my hazardous condition overwhelms me with torment and deep distress, while I see the greatness of my danger and the multitude of my enemies, but know not how to decline the one, or to fight my way through the other.

CHRIST. Remember, son, My promise: "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places."

DISCIPLE. Lord, since Thou hast applied those mystical words to my comfort, let me, I beseech Thee, experimentally find the gracious accomplishment of them in my own person: and scatter all my dark and dismal, my vain and sinful

thoughts, by shedding the light of Thy grace abroad into my heart. For in the extremity of grief and anguish, this is my hope and only support, to take sanctuary in Thy goodness, to repose all my confidence, and cast the burden of my cares upon Thee; to pour out my whole soul before Thee, and wait with patience Thy own good time for succouring me in, and giving me a happy issue out of all my afflictions.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A Prayer for Spiritual Illumination.

DISCIPLE. Shoot forth, O blessed Jesus, the bright beams of Thy heavenly and eternal light, that it may enlighten all the dark corners of my heart, and effectually scatter every cloud of ignorance and error, which now hang so thick over me. Call home my wandering thoughts, and repulse the temptations which furiously assault me. Fight Thou my battles, and subdue those fierce wild beasts, those brutish lusts, which range in this desert, and are ever striving to devour me; that by Thy power the wilderness may be turned into a palace, and instead of the violent cries and howlings of raging passions, no sounds may be heard there but songs of praise. Thou, Lord, "who commandest the winds and the waves, and they obey Thee," silence the storms within my breast; say to that troubled sea, "be still," and immediately there shall be peace and a profound calm. "Send out Thy light and Thy truth," and warm this barren soil; for such am I till mellowed and impregnated by the Sun of Righteousness. Pour down Thy grace upon me plentifully, and water me with Thy refreshing moisture, which like seasonable showers and gentle dew, may fatten my soul, and enable it to bring

forth generous fruit in great abundance. Raise and refine my mind, pressed down with the dross of earthly desires, and draw my affections up to heaven and heavenly objects; that the sweet relish of that bliss above may give me a disgust and loathing to all the nauseous pleasures here below. Deliver, or rather snatch me away with a holy violence, from all the perishing comforts of this mortal state; for thirst of happiness I find is greater than any creature can either quench, or in a good degree assuage. Unite me to Thyself with inviolable bands of holy love; so shall my soul be satisfied; for Thou alone canst answer all my longings, and the whole world without Thee is trifle, and emptiness, and nothing.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Against a Busy Inquisitive Temper.

CHRIST. My son, have a care of indulging a curious humour, and do not create to thyself unnecessary troubles, by meddling with matters of persons which are no part of thy concern. For what is this or that to thee? "Follow thou Me." What have you to do with the virtues or vices, the conduct or the indiscretions of others; how they behave themselves, what company they keep, or with what discourse they entertain one another? Why all this eager and intemperate zeal to vindicate or accuse them? You shall not answer for their miscarriages, nor be one whit the better for their excellences. Your own words and actions are the only things you will be called to account for. Therefore look well to them, and beware, lest this busy and malicious impertinence do not inflame that reckoning. Trouble not yourself to turn informer, and take not upon you to be a

judge. Leave that to Me. I know every man thoroughly, and nothing which is done under the sun can escape My observation. I am perfectly apprised of each person's condition, see every action, nay, every intention, every design; and not only what they do, but what they drive at. These things are far removed out of your sight; and therefore you cannot judge truly if you may attempt it innocently. But know, once more, that judgment is My prerogative; and therefore it were impudence and usurpation in you to attempt it, if you were qualified to judge others. Study rather to be quiet; contain yourself within your own business, and let the prying, censorious, the vain and intriguing world follow their own devices. For all which they shall assuredly be one day summoned to a severe account; for all their arts and specious colours cannot impose upon Me. Engage not with them in the same designs, nor let the empty phantom of a great reputation, the pride of numerous and honourable relations or acquaintance, or the particular intimacies and friendships of celebrated persons, engage your time and thoughts. These only serve to distract and perplex the mind, and cheat you at last with fond expectations; they lead you into a mist, and there they leave you lost and bewildered. But I would show thee the true way, and communicate My instructions freely, wert thou but at leisure to receive My secrets, and careful to observe My motions, by opening the door when I knock, and watching all opportunities of entertaining Me in thy heart.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Of Lasting Peace and True Goodness.

CHRIST. This was My promise to My disciples heretofore: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." But though peace be in every man's wishes, yet the qualifications and predispositions necessary for procuring and preserving it are the care of very few. My peace takes up its dwelling with the meek and humble. And the peace of My servants consists in steady patience, in attending diligently to My words, and following My directions. Therefore, upon every occasion, be sure to make a conscience of what you do or say; let the pleasing Me be your chief, your only concern; and the fruition of Me your ultimate, your only end and desire. Pass no rash censure upon other people's words or actions, and do not affect to be a man of business or secrets, for this will be the best expedient to make your troubles few and light. I say "few and light;" for to escape trouble altogether, and to have no affliction at all in mind, body, or estate, is not consistent with the nature of your present condition, but one of the privileges reserved for heaven and immortality.

Do not therefore imagine that you are then in perfect peace when you are sensible of no calamity or disturbance; or that a present freedom from assaults is an argument that you have no enemy, and all is safe and well with you; nor when things succeed according to your heart's desire, that this is a proof of your extraordinary virtue and perfection; nor, if your zeal and piety be fervent, and your contemplations full of delight, conclude yourself a particular favourite of God. For these are foreign and deceitful inferences, such as neither prove the sincerity nor the degree and perfection of any man's virtue. This is discovered by

quite different marks. The devoting and resigning yourself entirely to the will of God, not seeking your own, but His glory in everything you do, considering all events wisely, and receiving prosperity and adversity with evenness of temper, and such a brave unshaken perseverance in goodness, as even when the assistances and encouragements of grace are withdrawn for a season, can resolutely go on, and harden itself to undergo yet sharper trials with constancy; such lowliness of mind, as never puffs a man up with an opinion of his own merit, but in the sorest distresses can find matter of praise and thanks for that mercy, which even then inflicts much less than he deserves to suffer, and a firm hope that God will not forsake His servants; this is the way of peace, the way that leads to sure consolation and favour with God. And if, to not thinking highly of your own performances, you can add that other excellence of despising yourself and abhorring your own vileness, then be assured your peace is built upon so solid, so impregnable a foundation, that mortal man here on earth is not capable of attaining to it in greater perfection.

CHAPTER XXX.

True Freedom of Mind.

DISCIPLE. This is, indeed, the utmost perfection mortality can aspire after, to abandon all worldly thoughts, and without interruption keep the mind upon the business of the soul and heavenly contemplations; to pass through a life thick set with cares and troubles, yet free and unconcerned, provided still this unconcernedness proceed not from stupidity, heaviness of apprehension, or slothful neglect,

but from a generous liberty of soul, by which the man gets loose from all immoderate desires, and too tender love of earthly enjoyments. This faculty I earnestly covet, and beg Thee, O my God, to protect me against the cares of the world, lest the necessities of my body employ me too anxiously; and, under that pretence, my affections be ensnared, and so I entangled in multiplicity of business to the prejudice and neglect of better and weightier concerns; or lest I be enticed to sin by the pleasures of sense, or discouraged from the steady pursuit of virtue and heaven, by too tender and afflicting resentments of any calamities that may happen to me.

I speak not now of those vain superfluities which the deluded world so vehemently contend for; but beg to be preserved in these miseries and dangers. For miseries and dangers I cannot but esteem the common and unavoidable incumbrances of life, since these are heavy, and cling close about the soul, and put it under such a strait confinement, that it cannot freely obey the dispositions it feels within, of getting above concern for the world, and fixing its desires and endeavours upon spiritual objects. Thou, O my God, art sweetness inexpressible. But, that my soul may truly relish Thee, turn, I beseech Thee, all my worldly comforts into bitterness, lest they vitiate my palate, and give a disgust to heavenly things by some deluding charm of present pretended good. O! let not flesh and blood prevail in their conflicts with the spirit; let not the world and its fading glories cheat me into ruin; let not the subtle enemy of souls supplant me with his tempting wiles. Give me courage to resist when called to the combat; patience to endure when called to suffering; firmness of mind to persist immovable in my duty, when temptations and evil suggestions labour to seduce me. Exchange, if it be Thy will, the transitory and false comforts of this world for the oil of true gladness, the assistances and sweet satisfaction of Thy blessed Spirit; and instead of carnal love and sensual inclination,

let the love and desire of Thee be diffused through my whole heart, and reign unrivalled there.

Even food and raiment, and the necessaries by which life is sustained, are a grievance and obstruction to zealous and refined souls. But what must be a burden let me not make an occasion of sin, by using the creatures intemperately, by a luxurious indulgence, or inordinate appetite. Nature, I know, it is my duty to support; and therefore entirely to refuse and neglect these provisions were sin and foul ingratitude. But to enlarge our desires beyond the proper uses of these things, and let them loose upon superfluity and vanity, delicacy and delight, this the law of God hath most wisely forbidden, because it were in effect to connive at all licentiousness, by cherishing the flesh, and animating and supporting it in insolence and rebellion against the spirit. Between these two extremes there lies a safe middle way, in which I humbly implore the guidance of Thy hand; lest I decline from virtue on either side, and going astray after my own inclination or unadvised zeal, forsake my path, and fly out beyond the measures Thou hast prescribed for me.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Self-love the greatest Obstruction to Virtue and Happiness.

CHRIST. Son, if thou aim at purchasing all, know that it is not to be bought at any price less than thy all. Earth must be bartered for heaven; and where I give Myself, I expect the whole man in exchange. Think not therefore of any private reserves of interest or pleasure in bar to my entire possession; for all the world cannot do thee greater prejudice than such self-love. This sticks more close, while

other things are loose and at a distance. And all things fasten upon thee, only according as the degree of thy own love and inclination for them gives opportunity and advantage. If your mind and its affections be pure, and sincere, and moderate, nothing shall have the power to enslave you.

And what pretence can you have for suffering them to be otherwise? For who would set his love upon things which cannot be obtained without difficulty, oftentimes not with it; or if they be, cannot be enjoyed without danger? Who would court bonds and captivity, and be fond of having that which will obstruct his weightiest concern, and rob him of his liberty? Were these considerations duly attended to, it must appear prodigious folly for any man not to resign himself up entirely to Me; to waste his strength with unprofitable vexations, and labour in the fire for vanity, and create troubles which it is in his power to avoid. Obey My will then, and submit all to My disposal, and then thou art out of the reach of the world and its temptations. But if interest and private respect still govern in thy heart, all thy application will be in vain. Thou runnest away from troubles in one place to meet them in another; seeking rest but finding none, because thou always carriest thy torment about thee. For even in thy most successful attempts there will be somewhat wanting to give thee complete satisfaction; and in thy most private retirements thou wilt be dogged and haunted by some crosses. The world and its advantages can do thee no service by being enjoyed, but by being slighted and despised. This is the case, not of riches only, but of honour and reputation too. For they also make themselves wings and fly away; and thou canst never be safe or happy but by mortifying thy ambition and vainglory.

How many people please themselves with fond imaginations of ease and leisure to be good in a country or a college life? But cloisters and deserts signify nothing without the zeal and disposition of a hermit. The conveni-

ence of place is very little; and all its boasted expectations vanish, except the man be changed, as well as his residence and manner of living. And this change is not, cannot be, effected unless his mind be fixed in Me alone, as the proper, the only centre of all its affections and desires. The liberty men enjoy otherwise is very short and unfaithful; for fresh occasions of sin and trouble will quickly offer themselves, and then not only the old inconveniences will return again, but new and greater, and such as are peculiar to that new state of life upon which they have entered, and thus their very refuge becomes a fresh temptation.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A Prayer for Purity of Heart and Heavenly Wisdom.

DISCIPLE. "Establish me, Lord, with Thy free spirit," that being strengthened in the inner man, I may purge my soul from all vain anxiety, and banish idle fears, and get over the discouragement and distracting troubles of the world. Let not the wild and impatient desires of anything here, though never so alluring and seemingly valuable, perplex my thoughts, and draw me off from Thee. Give me grace to consider myself, and all below, as things full of vanity, and of very short continuance. For such indeed are all things under the sun, "vexation of spirit and altogether lighter than vanity itself;" and he who constantly looks upon them as such is the truly, the only wise man.

Impart to me then, oh my God, I beseech Thee, that heavenly wisdom which may dispose me to seek Thy kingdom and Thy righteousness; to sell all for this one pearl of great price; and to esteem myself rich in no

treasure but Thee; to love and delight in Thee alone; to take satisfaction in all things else in such degrees and in subordination to such purposes only as Thou hast appointed; and to receive every dispensation of Providence with such a spirit and temper as becomes my duty, and may render it serviceable to the ends for which Thou sentest it. Grant me such prudence and conduct in all my conversation, that I may decline and despise the insinuations of flatterers, and meekly receive the contradiction and reproaches of gainsayers and slanderers. For this is wisdom indeed, when a man is not carried about with every blast of air, but stops his ears against the syren's charms, and resolutely proceeds in a straight steady course of virtue, in despite of all the subtlety of those who labour to entice, or the malice of them who would terrify and drive him from it.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

How a Christian ought to Behave himself when Men speak Evil of him.

CHRIST. My son, if detractors and slanderers speak or think ill of thee, let not this much disturb thee. The provocation to impatience and angry resentments, which such ill-treatment usually ministers, will be much better employed against thyself. Take then this hint of improving thy humility, by reflecting how many things, which lie concealed from human sight, thy own mind is conscious of; and the more their wicked malice labours to lessen thy reputation, so much the less do thou appear in thy own esteem. If all be well within, and thy heart right with Me, the impertinent censures of busy

envious men will make no very deep impression. And when these reach thy ears, instead of recriminating and indignation, it will be wisely done to look up to Me, and not to be disordered at any judgment which men shall take upon them to pronounce concerning thee. For why should thy satisfaction be placed upon a thing which makes thee not one whit the better or the worse? If they commend and cry thee up, thy real merit is not the greater; and if they revile and run thee down, thy innocence is not the less. Seek then true honour and satisfaction from Me, from Me alone, whose sentence never swerves from equity and truth. And great shall thy content and thy quiet be, if thou neither solicitously court the favour of men, nor servilely fear their censure and displeasure. For, after all, the complaints of outward accidents, the true original ground of all disquiet is within; for inordinate affections and vain fears are the polluted fountain from whence those bitter streams of discontent and perplexed thoughts, and every confusion and disorder of a troubled mind, flow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

How God ought to be Addressed in Time of Adversity.

DISCIPLE. "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Yea, blessed by Thy name, for this very calamity with which Thy fatherly wisdom and affection hath now thought fit to chastise and try me. I cannot flee from the scourge of Thy rod; but I will fly to Thee for succour; and beg that Thou wouldst assist me with Thy patience, and turn all my sufferings to my soul's advantage. I am indeed in trouble; and cannot

but confess the present disorder which this misfortune gives me. But this is my own infirmity; and "I know not what to pray for as I ought." For what shall I say? "Lord, save me from this hour?" No, dearest Father, Thou hast not brought me to this hour had it not been for Thy glory and my own good. And therefore I will rather beg that my affliction may continue till Thy gracious purposes are accomplished in me; and when Thou seest me sufficiently humbled, that then, and not before, Thou wouldst refresh, and raise, and deliver me out of it.

For my deliverance, I am duly sensible, can come from no other hand; since I myself am weak, and poor, and blind, and know not what is best, or what to do. Grant me then, blessed Lord, a rescue in Thy own due time; and in the meanwhile strengthen me with patience, that by Thy powerful aid I may bear up against the sharpest tribulations without despondency or distraction. "Not my will, Lord, but Thine be done," shall be the constant language of my heart; my sinful heart, which acknowledges Thy mercy in the midst of wrath, and sadly reflects that Thou hast punished me much less than my offences deserve. Oh that this humble sense of my own guilt may work in me such quiet and contented submission to Thy will that I may neither unduly decline nor unthankfully murmur at the weight or the length of my sufferings, till Thou see fit to compose this storm, and restore to me the comforts of Thy favour and indulgent providence!

For, if the tempest still rage, this is not the effect of want of power in Thee to quiet it; but because a perfect calm is not yet seasonable for me. Thy mighty hand can lay it in a moment; Thou canst abate its fury, or Thou canst protect and support me under its violence and extremity. I know Thou canst; for Thou hast taught me by my own experience, and the remembrance of Thy former mercies will not suffer me to doubt the efficacy of Thy power. But in proportion as my grief and burden is greater, so much

the sweeter and more refreshing let Thy healing virtue and spiritual consolations be; and let me feel Thy gracious promise, "That Thou wilt not suffer Thy servants to be tempted above that they are able, but wilt with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it."

CHAPTER XXXV.

How the Divine Assistance should be Sought and Depended upon.

CHRIST. I am that Lord, My son, who is the stronghold of afflicted men in the time of trouble, and in whom thou dost well to take sanctuary in all thy distresses. But if thy comforts make not haste, thou dost thyself frequently obstruct and disappoint thy own expectations, by deferring thy prayers, and by slowness to ask relief. For men generally try all other comforts and remedies first, and reserve Me for their last refuge in times of such extremity, when nothing will do them service; and then My honour is concerned not only to defeat those human contrivances in which they vainly trusted, but to defer My own succours, and, by making them smart for their impious neglect, compel them to acknowledge that I am the deliverer of them that trust in Me, and that without Me no succours are strong, no counsels wise, no remedies successful. And if their sufferings find some present abatement, this only skins the wound, but is no perfect cure; and the pain it assuages will return again with doubled anguish and rage. For I alone, who gave the stroke, can heal it; and as there is no evil which the Lord hath not done, so neither is there any deliverance which the Lord hath not wrought.

But now that thy applications are come up into My ears,

and thou hast cast thyself upon My mercy, I will revive thy drooping spirits, and thou shalt, after this dark dismal storm, rejoice again in the light of My countenance. For I am ready not only to restore thy former happiness, but also to recompense thy past pains and patience by plentiful additions of more and greater blessings. And let not any adversity, though ever so grievous, prevail upon thy frailty to distrust my doing so. For can there be anything too hard for Me? Or am I like deceitful men, who soothe their dependants up with promises which they never design to perform? Have I at any time broken My word? Where then is thy faith, where thy courage? Bear bravely up and discharge thy duty. For if thou fail not to qualify thyself for receiving them, grace and consolation shall certainly approach in due time. "If the Lord tarry, yet wait for Him," for He "will surely come" and heal thee. The Lord, which now oppresses thee, is only laid there to try thy strength and virtue; nor would it weigh thee down so low if thy own folly did not make it heavier, by heaping on anxious cares for the future upon thy present sufferings. But this is to conspire against thyself, and turn thy own tormentor. "Sufficient to each day is the evil thereof," without charging it with additional troubles which no way belong to it. These are indeed impertinent and senseless at all times; for how absurd is it to exalt or deject one's self by hopes, and fears, and fond representations of distant good and evil, which have not any being in Nature, and probably may never be at all? Dismiss these empty but painful follies, the mere creatures of thy own sick fancy. For such delusions are a great reproach upon reason, and a greater yet upon Christianity, when thy mean timorous soul is mocked by such airy phantoms, and so very easily led captive by the enemy's suggestions. And such are these desponding or sanguine thoughts of what will be hereafter. Whether it be or not, he matters not; for his business is to deceive and undo men. And true or false hopes and terrors

contribute equally to this design. The love of present good and dread of approaching evils are instruments of ruin, employed by him with wonderful address; and so ruin be but the consequence, the methods and management of it are altogether indifferent to him.

Do not therefore suffer fear to deject thee, but still maintain thy Christian courage, and repose thy confidence in My mercy. I am often ready at hand when thou supposest Me at a distance; and at those times, when all is given for gone, things are so far from desperate that prosperous events and most surprising comforts are breaking in upon thee, like a glorious sun from an astonishing eclipse. 'Tis rashness therefore to conclude affairs in a lost condition because some crosses have baulked your expectations. Nor can either thy own resentment of misfortunes within, or the violence of any calamity without, give thee sufficient grounds, from the terrible face thy present circumstances wear, to pronounce that all hope of escape and better days are past. Nay, which is the most sensible and most deplorable case of any, if at the same time that I scourge thee with outward calamities, thou feel the inward supports of My grace withdrawn, which should enable thee to bear the rod; yet even so, think not thyself forsaken, or that I have utterly cast thee from My presence. The way to heaven is set with briars and thorns; and they who arrive at the kingdom travel over craggy rocks and comfortless deserts. And more it is for their advantage to have their virtue awakened and brightened and brought to the test by the smart of adversity, than that all things should go smoothly on without any manner of let or molestation.

"The heart of a man is deceitful, who can know it?" Thy very self art often under very dangerous mistakes about thy own condition. Thou art ignorant what thou art, and much more ignorant what is fit for thee. But I, who have a perfect understanding of both, see plainly that it is proper and beneficial sometimes to be left to thyself; that thus

struggling to so little purpose with the calamities that bear thee down, thou mayest be brought to a just and humble sense of thy infirmities, that this sense may check thy vanity, and show that all thy attempts which prove successful are owing entirely to another hand, and hou art in truth nothing less than that mighty man thou art apt to take thyself for. This makes My depriving thee of thy usual comforts convenient, but still 'tis in My power to restore and augment them to thee when I see that convenient too.

Nor think Me hard and unjust in these dispensations; for who shall forbid Me to do what I will with my own? I gave thee what thou couldst not claim; and I take away what thou hast no right to keep. For "every good and perfect gift is Mine," and not a debt but a favour. If then affliction comes, remember 'tis of My sending; and I, who laid the cross, can both remove and recompense it. "I kill and make alive, I bring down to the grave, and raise up from it;" and in the instant that I lay My thunder by and smile again, thy heaviness shall be changed into joy unspeakable.

In all My dealings I am just, in all am wise and good, and deserve not only thy admiration, but even thy thanks and praise. Couldst thou but rightly comprehend My methods, and the secret reasons of them, thou wouldst drink up the bitter potion with joy—with joy upon this very consideration, that I do not spare thee to thy hurt, but send afflictions in pure kindness to thee, when I foresee they will be for thy advantage. Observe the tenure of My gracious promise to My best beloved disciples: "As My Father loved Me, even so have I loved you." But both My Father's love to Me and Mine to them, was expressed, not by false and transitory joys, but by sharp and long conflicts; by being called, not to honours, but to contumelies and disgrace; not by indulging them in ease and sloth, but by inuring them to trials and difficulties; by calling them, not to rest

and peace, but to bring forth noble and generous fruit with patience. Remember well these words, My son, and then thou canst not think much to "drink of the cup that I drank of" so deeply, and to be "baptized with the baptism that I was baptized with." Thou canst not then despair, or think that God, in afflicting thee, hath abandoned all care and concern for thy benefit; since even that tender, that unparalleled, that inconceivable affection with which He loved His own dear Son, hindered not His making that "very Captain of thy salvation perfect through sufferings." And what art thou? What is the best of men in comparison of Him? What are thy agonies and trials, the very worst of thine, in comparison of His?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Of Seeking God alone.

DISCIPLE. Thy mercy, Lord, is great which hath thus far assisted me; but still I feel I want a larger portion of Thy grace, which may conduct me to such a state of perfection as may secure and set me at liberty from all the obstructions which the creatures lay in my way. For so long as I retain an affection or concern for anything in this world, I find my soul checked and restrained in her mountings to Thee and heaven. How often do I make the prophet's wish my own: "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest! Lo, then would I get me away far off," and remain at a distance from the world. Now what is more at ease, more abstracted from the world, than a true single-hearted honesty? What can boast of freedom equal to his who covets nothing upon earth? All created beings

should indeed be passed over and left behind in this flight; and a man must make a stretch even beyond himself, and abandon his own natural inclinations and defects, in order to get a distinct view of the Creator, and those perfections in Him to which no creature bears any resemblance. Now this is the very reason why so few employ their thoughts in heavenly contemplations with any sensible delight; because when they attempt it they do it unskilfully. For they bring those worldly affections along with them that damp and disgust them in the undertaking.

It is not, I confess, an easy matter, nay, 'tis not possible to flesh and blood by its own strength thus to purge the affections. Nothing less than a liberal and very powerful inspiration of divine grace can thus exalt the mind, and as it were carry the man out of himself. But till such exaltation of the soul hath disengaged one from all temporal interests, and fixed down his desires to that one object worthy of them, God Himself, all his knowledge and imagined excellences are very little worth. For whatever false notions of honour and greatness men may delude themselves with, yet still all they have poor and little souls, and dote upon that which ought to be disdained, who allow anything besides the infinite and eternal God a very honourable place in their affections and esteem. For all which is not God is vanity and nothing, and ought to be nothing regarded. How vast a difference is there between the wisdom of a mortified pious man, enlightened from above, and the pompous learning of a profound and studious divine? That knowledge which descends from above speaks its heavenly original by marvellous and noble effects, and works a greater change in the man, a greater improvement in profitable knowledge, than all that comprehension which the best capacities and the most indefatigable industry can ever attain to.

We often hear very glorious characters of divine contemplation, and the wonderful delights and transports

attending it, and these a great many appear very fond of. But when they have no regard to the necessary preparations for it their minds are full of sensible ideas, and possessed with the things of this present world; and the subduing and mortifying their desires and passions is a matter they take no care about. And while their affairs continue in this posture they are in no degree qualified for those exercises of the mind. Methinks it is a most unaccountable folly, and argues that men forget what spirit they are of when they call themselves Christians—*i.e.*, spiritual persons that have solemnly renounced the world, with its vanities, and the flesh, with its sinful lusts; who profess to believe and to seek happiness in a future state, and to place that happiness in the perfection of their souls; and yet, in reproach and contradiction of those professions, suffer body and sense to run away with them; lay out themselves entirely upon perishing and paltry advantages, while the substantial and everlasting are wretchedly neglected, and their souls so perfectly forgotten, that they scarce afford one serious thought to their most important concerns. Or if at any time they set themselves to think, some trifle presently interrupts and draws them off from any profitable recollections. Nay, they themselves fly out, and are glad to be diverted from a severe examination into their own state, which is sure if diligently pursued to present them with objects of shame and sorrow, such as will wound their sight, and soon make them weary of this necessary work. Thus we never trouble ourselves to observe which way our inclinations are disposed, or whither they tend; nor do we seriously bewail the abominable impurity of our hearts, though there be nothing but impurity there. "The way of all flesh is corrupt upon the earth," and that universal corruption, says the Scripture, brought a flood to destroy mankind and every creature. But whence do we think proceeds such corruption of manners? From the corrupt affections of men, no doubt. For if this fountain be not sweet the

action, which is but a stream and emanation from it, must of necessity be flat and bitter. For a pure heart is the groundwork of a holy life, and as naturally springs from it as the fruit from the tree.

And herein we are much to blame that so little regard is had to the dispositions of the heart, without which no true judgment can ever be made, either of ourselves or others. But this, which is in truth of greatest consequence, the very point upon which a man's whole character turns, seems to be laid aside, as a thing too nice and speculative to be very curious in. We fix our eyes upon the outward action, consider what or how much a man hath done; but with what sincerity, with what zeal, with what honest intention he did it, or whether with none of all these qualifications, we trouble not ourselves to inquire. So, again, for the estimate we make of persons, they are all foreign from the true and proper foundation of merit and respect. The riches, valour, beauty, judgment, wit, eloquence, a good style, or a sweet voice, or a knack of management in town or country business, his preferments, or his profession, these we immediately take care to be informed of, and proportion our value and respects accordingly. But a man's humility and poverty of spirit, his meekness and patience, his devotion and piety, these are seldom mentioned in the character, or recommended as motives to induce regard. Thus nature and grace have their different prospects and affections. The former looks at the outside of a man, and rates him according to things that are not his; the latter places all within, and sets not at all by external ornaments and advantages. The former builds upon a false bottom, seeks herself what she values in others, and is oftentimes deceived and disappointed; the latter reposes her whole hope and love in God, and is never mistaken, never deluded by false expectations.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Of Self-denial.

CHRIST. Thou canst not, son, be entirely free till thou hast attained to such a mastery as entirely to subdue and deny thyself. For covetous persons, and lovers of themselves, the lustful, and busy, and unsettled men, the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, are all slaves, vile and unprofitable slaves, condemned to fruitless, endless toil, seeking what they cannot find, and contriving what they cannot compass; or if they could, what they cannot long enjoy. For everything which is not of God, is soon brought to nought. Observe this short but certain aphorism, "forsake all, and thou shalt find all." Let go desire, and thou shalt lay hold on peace. Consider this rule diligently and transcribe it into thy practice, for practice will explain and prove it to thee.

DISCIPLE. This, Lord, is not the work of a single day, a maxim not fitted for weak capacities, but such as in one short sentence contains the utmost perfection of a pious and resigned Christian.

CHRIST. And why, My son, should that perfection affright or discourage thee? Call up thy zeal, aspire to true greatness of soul, and the nobler the virtue is, the more eager and generous resolution do thou express of attaining to it. Oh! that thou wert of that happy disposition which utterly discards all narrow and selfish considerations, and submits itself entirely to the obedience of My commands and the disposals of My providence! So should thy person and thy behaviour be acceptable to thy God; so shouldst thou enjoy great satisfaction and peace in thy own breast. Alas! there are still many things which must be abandoned; many, which till thou hast sacrificed to Me, the happiness thou aimest at can never be obtained. Buy, therefore, of

Me the pure refined gold, of a heavenly and refined disposition, for that shall make thee rich above all the treasures of this world. Cast off the wisdom of this generation, and do not soothe thyself with their foolish imaginations; for they pursue shadows, and take delight in vanity and nothing. Remember I have told thee that the things which are lightly esteemed must be purchased at the expense of those which this world esteems most precious. For what is more despised and mean in common reputation, what more neglected and forgotten, than that true heavenly wisdom, which renounces all merit of its own, and is content to be disregarded by the men of this world? This mortified and humble state of mind is what indeed some people profess, and in words commend; but their practice plainly condemns it, and gives the lie to all their dissembled praises. And yet this wisdom, poor and despicable as it appears to common eyes, is that pearl of great price, for which all other possessions are wisely given in exchange; that hidden treasure which is always like to continue hid, since it lies low, and few either do or care to find it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Changeableness of our Temper and how to Fix It.

CHRIST. Do not, My son, depend upon any present disposition of mind with which thou feelest thyself affected; for this is fickle, and of short duration. Variety and change is what men must be subject to, so long as they carry the frailties of flesh and blood about them; and all their endeavours cannot so fix their hearts, as to keep them constantly the same. Sometimes they find themselves

disposed to mirth, sometimes to melancholy; now they are even and serene, by-and-by all over disorder and confusion; this hour fervent and devout, the next lukewarm and cold; studious and industrious to-day, slothful and unfit for business to-morrow; serious and grave and thoughtful now, and anon again gay and trifling, light as air. But the truly wise man, who is acted by the Spirit of God, gets above this changeable region of the lower world. He suffers not himself to be carried about with every blast and impulse of inconstancy, but settles upon the basis of the one excellent end, which is always first and most in his thoughts, the port to which he makes, and the compass by which he steers all his designs and actions. For by this method it is very possible for a man to continue unshaken and unmoved by any gust of inclination from within, or accident from without. The natural changeableness of human affections, being yet more improved by men's own voluntary uncertainty, and proposing no constant end or rule to themselves. Now that intention which fixes upon God as its only end, will keep men steady in their purposes, and deliver them from being the jest and scorn of fortune. And this in Scripture is styled "a single eye," because it ever looks and aims but at one object.

The more intent then that eye is in this prospect, the less diverted from its mark, the firmer and more consistent men are with themselves; and the less impression does any change of wind or weather make upon such diligent and wise pilots. But still infirmity prevails in most; and if some pleasure or profit come betwixt, they retain so much tenderness for themselves and their temporal advantages, as to be diverted from the same vigorous pursuit of their first prize, and allow this fresh one a part at least of their endeavours and desires.

They love God, but they would love the world too; and in this state of divided affections somewhat resemble the Jews; who, as the evangelist observes, came to visit Martha

and Mary at Bethany, not only that they might see and hear Jesus, but that they might satisfy their curiosity in gazing upon Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. It must therefore be your great care and business to compose this distraction of thought, to fix your heart to one purpose, to seek one good, one end, so zealously, that nothing else may come into competition or partnership with it; to look upon everything which diverts you from, or cools you in this pursuit, with an eye of contempt; and constantly to keep your hope, and desire, and love (which are the spring and guide of all your actions) upon Me alone.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Happiness of them who Love God.

DISCIPLE. In having God, I have all things. "For whom can I have in heaven but Thee? and what is there upon earth that I can desire in comparison of Thee?" Oh, sweet and comfortable words! But this is a sweetness which none can taste but they who love the Word of God, and "not the world, neither the things that be in the world." My God to me is all; I need add no more. The men of purified understandings find this enough, and they of purified and heavenly affections, cannot repeat it too often. When Thou art present, affliction and death are pleasant; for in Thy favour is life and joy. When Thou art absent, life itself is a burden; for Thy displeasure is worse than death. Thou makest a merry heart, a cheerful countenance; in Thee is abundance of peace and a continual feast. Thou givest me right notions of all events, and renderest every accident a matter of joy and praise to me. Without Thee

prosperity itself is nauseous, and I loathe my very mercies. For nothing here below can please our palate, unless Thy favour and wisdom give it a grateful relish. To him that feeds delightfully on Thee, every bitter morsel is sweet; but they who want or slight that heavenly entertainment, find the most delicious dainties harsh and bitter.

They who are wise for the world and the flesh, are most defective in the true and heavenly wisdom. The carnal wisdom ends in guilt and death, and the worldly wisdom pursues vanity and empty pomp. But they who are wise indeed, conform themselves to Thy example, by a contempt of all earthly greatness and a vigorous mortification of their sensual appetites and passions; they disdain the shadow, and lay hold on the substance, pass from falsehood to truth, and from body to spirit. These are the men who love and delight in God, and find no satisfaction in the creatures, farther than as they promote the honour and serve the purposes of the great Creator. The joys they minister are subordinate and limited; not inherent and natural, but by reflection only; and everything is esteemed in proportion as it tends to its Maker's use and praise. So very unlike, so infinitely different is the pleasure we feel from the Creator and the creature; from the boundless ocean of eternity, and the narrow tract of time; from the original self-existent light, and those faint beams shot down on things here below.

Shine then, O Light everlasting, in comparison whereof all created lights are but a less degree of darkness. Convey Thyself into my benighted soul, purge and dispel the clouds of error there, purify my polluted affections, cheer my sadness, enliven my stupid mind and all its faculties, that I may rejoice and triumph, and bask in Thy bright beams. O! when will that happy, that long wished for hour approach, when I shall be filled with Thy lustre, and satisfied with Thy presence, and my God be my all in all? For, sure I am, till that blessed time, my joys must be imperfect. I feel,

alas! I feel and lament in myself some remains of the old man still. Scourged he is, but not entirely crucified; wounded and bruised, but not quite dead. My flesh, in despite of all my painful labours, continues to lust against the spirit, and a domestic war distracts and breaks the peace and good government of my mind. This cannot exercise its just dominion without perpetual broils and tumultuous insurrections. But, O Thou, "who rulest the raging of the sea, and stillest the waves thereof when they arise," come speedily to my assistance, and quell this storm. "Scatter my enemies that delight in blood, and beat them down, O Lord, my defence." Exert Thy mighty power, and get Thee honour by this conquest. For Thou, O Lord my God, art my only hope and helper; O save, or I perish.

CHAPTER XL.

This Life a State of Continual Temptation.

CHRIST. Do not suppose, My son, that in this world thou ever canst be in a condition of absolute safety. Dangers and enemies await thee everywhere. Violence and stratagems are perpetually employed for thy ruin; and therefore the weapons of thy spiritual warfare must not be laid aside; for useful they are, and always necessary, during this state of mortality. Cover thyself then with the shield of wisdom and faith; for if thou expose thy person without this defence, the fiery darts of the wicked will quickly gall and wound thee. And if dexterity and diligence in the use of thy arms be not animated by a mind fixed entirely upon Me, and a vigorous resolution of enduring the worst that can happen for My sake, the engagement will be found too hot, and that

crown of the blessed, which is the reward of perseverance, can never belong to thee. Call up thy courage then, and exert thy utmost strength as occasions of combat shall offer. For "to him that overcometh will I give the hidden manna;" but misery and destruction as the portion of faint-hearted and feeble, slothful and sleeping soldiers.

If, then, these are the conditions of thy obedience and reward, think how absurd it is for them who indulge their ease here to expect peace and happiness hereafter. In one of the two states enduring must be thy lot; and therefore tough patience, and not soft repose, is what thou shouldst labour for at present. For rest and undisturbed content have now no place on earth, nor can the greatest affluence of worldly good procure them; but their dwelling is in heaven only, and they are peculiar to the love and fruition of God alone. In obedience to His will, you should contentedly undergo labour and toil, trials and troubles, distress and anguish of heart, poverty and want, infirmities and diseases, injuries and affronts, scandal and reproach, disparagement and disgrace, punishment and torture. These whet and brighten a Christian's virtue, exercise and distinguish him. These thorns are woven into wreaths of glory; and to such faithful servants I repay for their short hardship an endless recompense; and for the shame, which is presently forgotten, laurels that never fade, crowns always bright and honours firm and immortal as My own.

These are the difficulties of the present state which men are to be upon their guard against from without. But alas! they must not hope always to enjoy peace and satisfaction within. No, even the saints of old, whose purer innocence and eminent virtues might better entitle them to this tranquillity, yet often found occasion to complain that "their heart was disquieted, their spirit desolate, and a horrible dread overwhelmed them." Doubts and scruples, temptations and fears, and cutting perplexities of heart, are frequently the lot of the most excellent persons. But in all

these straits the good behave themselves with meekness and patience, reposing their confidence in God, and humbly distrusting themselves, but supported with the hopes of divine grace and favour to comfort and assist them; and with the consideration, that the "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them." This was the case of those glorious saints who are thy patterns. And what pretence canst thou have to hope for that joy in present, which they waited long for, and purchased at the expense of sore pains and many tears and great difficulties, and thought themselves well paid even thus? Wait then thy Master's leisure, quit thyself manfully, banish impatience and distrust, persevere in faith and good works, grudge not to lay out person, life, all, for the service and glory of God, and doubt not but I will one day abundantly reward, and in the meantime I will stand by thee to sustain and deliver thee in every danger and calamity.

CHAPTER XLI.

Of Despising the Vain Censures of Men.

CHRIST. My son, repose thy soul upon God, cast all thy care there, and let it be thy great, thy only concern, to approve thyself to Him. When this is done, a man should not much regard what the world thinks of him, nor fear the censures of others, while his own conscience bears testimony to his piety and innocence. To be ill thought of is sometimes for thy good; it conforms thee to the image of thy Saviour; and if thy soul, like His, be meek and humble; if thou seek not thy own glory, but His that sent thee, the affliction will not be very grievous to be borne. The

opinions of men are as many and as different as their persons; the greatest diligence and most prudent conduct can never please them all. And therefore even St. Paul himself, than whom none ever laboured more to recommend his actions to the good acceptance of the world, "he who became all things to all men," yet found it necessary to appeal to a higher court, and declared it "a small thing with him to be judged of man's judgment." He did his utmost to promote the interest and salvation of others; but even the utmost he could do was not sufficient to screen him from the wrongful censures and perverse misconstructions of men. And therefore he removed his cause, and referred the whole matter to that God who knew his integrity; and defended himself against the calumnies and reproaches of licentious tongues with great humility and invincible patience. Sometimes he heard and passed their slanders by in silence; at other times he vindicated his own innocence, and reproved the unreasonable malice of his accusers; not so much in tenderness to his own honour, as to prevent an offence which might be taken from his forbearing to do so, and lest the weak and ignorant should conclude that too obstinate a silence was an argument of his guilt.

But what is there so terrible in the condemnation of man? For what indeed is man? He lives and flourishes to-day, but to-morrow he is gone, and his place shall know him no more. Fear God then, and His judgment, for this is omniscient and everlasting; and the more thou fearest Him, the less thou wilt be afraid of any but Him. Consider well what hurt can come to thee by injurious and reproachful treatment. Alas! they who accuse and blacken thee wrongfully are much the greatest sufferers by their own malice and injustice. Their slander and detraction can have no influence, can make no impression upon the righteous Judge above. None to thy prejudice, but a sad and fatal one to their own. For they cannot escape His judgment, who hath declared that they who "judge shall be judged; that they

shall have judgment without mercy who show no mercy; and that the same measure they mete to others He will measure to them again." Keep God then always in thy mind, and let go quarrel and contention, nor embroil thyself in troubles and differences by being over-solicitous in thy own defence. If thou at present seem to be oppressed with disgrace and ill reports, which thou hast not deserved, bear thy burden contentedly. Blemish not thy innocence by too deep resentment, nor take off from the brightness of thy crown by anger and impatience and eagerness to right thyself. Reflect on Me, who once endured such contradiction of obstinate and implacable sinners, and am now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Look up to heaven, and remember there is One who can make thy innocence as clear as the light and thy righteousness shine like the sun at noonday. One who will consider not only thy infamy and wrong, but thy manner of bearing it; and the more meek, more injured thou hast been, the kinder and more bountiful rewarder thou shalt be sure to find Me.

CHAPTER XLII.

A Christian must devote himself entirely to God before he can be Happy.

CHRIST. "Lose thy life, and thou shalt find it." Forsake thyself, and thou shalt possess Me. Esteem and have nothing, and thou shalt enjoy all things. For I will recompense thee with greater treasures, and infinitely increase thy store, when thou hast made over into My hands all that thou hast and art.

DISCIPLE. How often, Lord, must I repeat this gift, and what are the instances wherein I must forsake myself?

CHRIST. All times, My son, are seasonable; and every action, every accident of thy life, furnishes a fresh and proper occasion for doing it. I can admit of no reserves, but expect thee stripped of all, and nothing left which I have not a title to. For how canst thou be Mine and I thine, except thy own will be renounced in everything, and no property or claim any longer remaining unconveyed over? The sooner thou executist this deed, the better it will be for thee; and the more full and express, the more frank and sincere thou art in it, the more favourable will be My acceptance and the more valuable consideration shalt thou receive. Some indeed there are who pretend to give themselves, but the conveyance is so clogged with provisoes and limitations that the title they make is worth nothing. They trust themselves to God by halves, and for making their best of the world at the same time. Others again do this without exceptions; but then in difficulties and temptations they repent of their bargain and revoke the grant. These men make no considerable improvement in virtue, nor do they taste the sweets of piety, which consist in a mind at large from the world, and the friendship and familiar conversation of God. But such spiritual advantages cannot, in the nature of the thing, be imparted to any whose affections are not entirely agreeable and inseparably united to Mine. And this requires the total resignation of a man's self, and the daily offering of his whole "spirit and soul and body, a holy, lively, and reasonable sacrifice unto Me." I have often said it, and now repeat it once more, that "he who would receive all must in exchange give all." Do not then expect, or call in anything again, but give freely and cheerfully, and depend solely upon Me without doubts or demurs. Me thou shalt have in return, and with Me perfect freedom and saving knowledge. Prevail with thyself to give up all without intent or power of revocation; and pray earnestly that thou mayest gladly follow Christ in all His sufferings and lowest state; that thou mayest renounce all property, and throw

thyself naked into His embraces, that thou mayest die to the world at present, and by so doing live to Me for ever. When this is done, all vain imaginations will be banished, lust will disturb thee no more, nor passions ruffle, nor anxious cares perplex thee; excessive fears will run and hide their head, inordinate desires will sicken and die, sorrow and disquiet find no place; and if temptations try, yet can they not molest thee.

CHAPTER XLIII.

How to Govern Oneself in the Affairs of the World.

CHRIST. Be sure, My son, to take good heed that business and care never get within thee; but whatever constraint they may lay upon thy actions and outward attendance, yet keep thy mind always at its own disposal. Do business, but be not a slave to it; and remember thy prerogative is to govern and not to serve the things of the world. Thou art a Hebrew, of the spiritual seed of Abraham; assert thy native liberty. But why do I call thee a free-born son of Abraham? Thou art a great deal more, "translated out of bondage into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." Such birth, such a condition, should raise and ennoble thy soul, trample upon the present, and grasp at nothing less than eternity. Cast only now and then a disdainful glance upon this world, as a thing by-the-by; but keep thy eye immovable and directly fixed upon heaven, as thy sure prospect, thy main concern. It will not become thy quality to dwell upon trifles, or subject thyself to things temporal. These thou must make bend to thy pleasure, submit and serve thy occasions. For so their great Creator intended they should,

who is the author and lover of order, and would have every work of His contained within its proper post and station.

If thou, at any time, art entangled in difficulties, rely not upon human prudence, nor trust the false representations with which thy senses and worldly affections, or the mistaken judgment of others so disposed, would impose upon thee. But remember Moses, and go with him into the tabernacle to ask counsel of thy God. There thou shalt often meet a proper answer, have many thoughts seasonably suggested to thy mind, and return wiser, both for this and the next world, than thou wert before. For Moses always took this course in doubtful cases and important exigencies; he made prayer his weapon and refuge; by it he vanquished many dangers, the malice of enemies and wicked men escaped, detected their devilish designs, and retorted the mischiefs they intended, back upon their own heads. Now what that tabernacle was to him, thy closet and thy conscience are to thee. Neglect not then by any means to consult this oracle, and implore the directions and assistances of divine grace. For the ill consequences of acting upon thy own head without these precautions are intimated to thee by that instance of Joshua and the Israelites, who are expressly said to have been deceived by the Gibeonites, to their great prejudice; because they gave too easy credit to their flattering fair pretences, and engaged in a league without first inquiring of the Lord.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Against too great Eagerness in Business.

CHRIST. My son, commit thy affairs to My care, and I will in due time bless them with a proper and profitable issue. But wait with patience till that appointed time of Mine, and do not anticipate the methods of My providence; for I know how to convert every delay to thy advantage.

DISCIPLE. Lord, I most willingly commit my concerns to Thy management; for all that little I am capable of is very insignificant. And therefore I cannot but wish that this sense, to how little purpose all my own pains and contrivances are, might free me from anxious thoughts concerning future contingencies, and dispose me calmly to acquiesce in Thy wise and good pleasure.

CHRIST. Alas! My son, eager and greedy men covet they know not what. An object at a distance engages their desires, while they see only the fair and glittering side; but upon closer and more distinct view, enjoyment undeceives them, and they grow sick, even of their own desires. For their own desires are various and mutable, and ever veering about to some fresh object. It is therefore of some consequence for a man to forego his own inclinations, even in matters of no great importance. But he who hath attained to the faculty of doing this in any case whatsoever, is truly free and great, above the reach and envy of fortune, and at the highest pitch of human perfection. Yet even this man will find his virtues called to the test; for the old enemy of souls is ever framing some stratagem to undo good men, and lies in ambush night and day to catch an opportunity of ensnaring unwary souls. Let then his diligence provoke yours, and be not less assiduous to save than his to destroy you. For this is the purport of thy Lord's command; "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

CHAPTER XLV.

In Man dwelleth no Good Thing.

DISCIPLE. "Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that Thou visiteth him?" How can he deserve to be assisted by Thy grace, or succoured by Thy favour? What right have I, so vile a wretch, especially to complain unto my God, if He withdraw His presence, and leave me to myself? Or, if I beg and pray for comforts, what have I to allege in my own behalf? How can I take it ill, if He reject my petitions? This I am sensible is all I ought to think, or can pretend to say, that I have nothing, and am nothing, and in my own nature tend to and pursue after vanity and nothing. A miserable creature, faint and feeble, incapable of so much as one good desire, till animated and strengthened by Thee. Fickle and mutable, subject to infirmities innumerable, and perpetual decays; but Thou, my God, art "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;" ever happy and just and wise and good, and ordering all things for the best, after the counsel of Thy divine will. Well were it if I were but equally disposed to good and evil; but the corruption of my nature, alas! preponderates strongly to vanity and vice. I easily fall from my own steadfastness, and am carried about with every shifting wind of time and chance and passion.

And yet thus weak and veering as I am, Thy helping hand can comfort and confirm me. Thy powerful grace, without any human aids, can work wonders in me; can strengthen my resolutions, scatter my fears, and fill my soul with rest and sweet content. If, when I thirst after higher degrees of virtue and devotion, or if I fly to Thee for succour in distress, when all other succours fail me (and all but Thine will and must prove ineffectual), if then I could but abandon all other hopes, and repose my whole confidence in Thee alone, then might I entertain some

expectations of Thy favour; then wait with joy for the cheerful returns of grace and comfort from above. For all my successes are Thy free gift, and I myself a despicable wretch, not able to effect any good, not in a condition to merit the least of all Thy mercies.

What therefore can I have to boast of, who, till I despise and go out of myself, am not so much as qualified to receive assistance from Thee? Or how can I desire the applause and admiration of men? What! shall I pretend to glory of weakness, and inconstancy, and nothing? This were a vanity beyond example, an extravagance beyond imagination. How foolish and absurd, nay, how hurtful and destructive a vice is ambition, which, by undue pursuit of honour, robs us of true honour; and, affecting favour with men, incurs punishment and displeasure from God? For he who labours to please himself, is sure at the same time to offend Thee, and loses true substantial virtue by coveting empty praise. For true honour and virtue consists in glorying, not in ourselves, but in Thee, O Lord; in magnifying, not our own attainments or performances, but Thy free grace; and in loving and delighting in nothing, but so far only as may advance Thy honour.

"Not unto me, therefore, not unto me, but unto Thy name be the praise." May men commend and extol not my works, but Thy power, which inspired, produced and perfected them; and may this commendation devolve so entirely upon Thy grace, that not the least part of it may fall upon my concurrence with it. Far be it from me to arrogate anything to myself; for while I rejoice in Thee I find nothing in myself to glory in, but my infirmities. And in them I will gladly glory; because the greater my weakness is, the more visible and eminent is Thy strength which is so conspicuously perfect in it. Let unbelieving "Jews seek honour one of another;" but I, who profess myself one of the faithful, "will seek honour which cometh from God only." For, what is all the fame, and respect, and

greatness of this world, if put in the balance of the eternal glory, but exquisite folly, deceitful bubble, and altogether lighter than vanity itself? All honour, therefore, and praise, all might and majesty be ascribed to Thee, O blessed Trinity, my God, my light, my truth, my succour and defence, my refuge and comfort, for ever and ever! Amen.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Of despising Worldly Honour.

CHRIST. If thou seest others grow great in reputation and preferment, while thou art overlooked and despised, let this, My son, be no concern to thee. Look up to Me and set thy affections and hopes in heaven, and then the neglect and contempt of men will give thee little trouble.

DISCIPLE. Were it not, Lord, for the blindness and corruption of nature, which makes me fond of vanities and joys, I should have juster notions of these matters. For he who rightly understands himself, cannot but discern that it is not in the power of anything without to do him real prejudice; and consequently, that he can have no reasonable ground to complain of Thy providence, however it thinks fit to dispose of such matters. The consciousness of my own sins convinces me I have deserved that all the creatures should conspire and make war against me. To me belongs shame and confusion, but to Thee only honour and praise is due. And Thou hast taught me, that to bear contempt and hatred and barbarous treatment with humility and patience, is the only method of attaining inward peace and true satisfaction; the virtue which must recommend me to Thy favour, the best predisposition for light and grace, and the surest, closest band of union with Thyself.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Happiness is not to be had by the Favour or Friendship of Men.

CHRIST. He that purposes to be happy, by the affection or acquaintance of the best, the greatest man alive, will always find his mind unsettled and perplexed. For even the best and greatest are but mortals; and the effectual remedy against immoderate concern for their being taken away from thee, will be to court the favour of an eternal and immortal friend. Now, the less confidence any man reposes in any earthly comfort, so much the more he ingratiates himself with God. The better he acquaints himself with his own vileness, and the less he is in his own eyes, the higher he rises in God's esteem. But they who vainly fancy anything that is good or meritorious in themselves, put an effectual bar to divine grace. For this is given to the humble, and the Spirit of God chooses the contrite heart for the place of his peculiar residence. Wouldst thou abandon self-conceit, and wean thy heart from all fondness for the creatures, it is not to be imagined what comforts, what overflowing joys, I would infuse into thy soul. But while these employ thy thoughts and desires, thou art diverted from all higher objects, and by being too intent upon His works, losest and forgettest the Almighty Maker. Learn then to subdue thy own will, that thou mayest clearly understand and readily comply with mine. For any other object, though ever so trifling and inconsiderable in its own nature, yet, if unduly prized and immoderately loved, corrupts the mind and checks its aspiring after the chief, the only good.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Against Vain and Pompous Learning.

CHRIST. Do not, My son, suppose that the excellence of a man consists in subtilty of wit, or quaintness of expression. For the kingdom of God does not lie in elegance of speech, or fineness of parts, but in innocence of life and good works. Let My words be thy principal study; for these awaken attention, enlighten the understanding, kindle a holy zeal, provoke true contrition, and heal the wounds they make, with a spiritual balm of grace and solid comfort. Let not the growing wiser and more learned be the end thou proposest to thyself in reading; but read, that thou mayest be qualified to practise, and let thy knowledge be seen by subduing thy vices and passions. For this is improvement indeed, and will turn to better account than the nicest and most distinguishing skill in all the controversies and difficult points that ever employed the tongues and pens of wrangling logicians, philosophers, and divines. And when thou hast run through the whole compass of learning, yet all will turn at last upon one single point, and the whole profit of thy pains lies in a narrow room.

If thou wilt be knowing indeed, learn of Me; for I am the only Master that teach men knowledge. I give more perfect, more sublime understanding to babes, to the humble and sincere, than all the celebrated sons of art have ever been able to do. And those whom I instruct grow truly wise, are presently enlightened and refined, and, by an astonishing proficience in virtue, outstrip all the admired schemes of morality. Most wretched are those vain men, who with infinite toil and time lay themselves out upon the unprofitable curiosities of human wisdom, and take no pains to inform themselves in their duty to Me. The hour, alas! draws on apace, when their Master Christ shall come with

terrible pomp, and call each man to strict account, and sound every conscience to the bottom. Then "shall Jerusalem be searched with candles;" then shall the hidden things of darkness be brought to light; and no man's eloquence or subtlety of arguing shall do him any service before that all-seeing Judge. I raise the meek and man of mean sense in an instant, and teach him at once the grounds of eternal truths better than a course of many years spent in laborious study, and the most exquisite methods of schools and universities. I bring men to right apprehensions of things, without any noise of words, without the formality of systems, or vain ostentations of cavilling sophistry or regular disputing. Of Me alone men learn to despise the world, to think things present below their pains and care, to love and seek those that are heavenly and eternal, to decline honours, to bear injuries and affronts, to trust and hope in Me alone, to wish for nothing but My favour, "and to esteem all things but dross and dung, so they may win Christ."

Some disciples of Mine have made such wonderful improvements under Me as even to speak things above human comprehension, and grown wiser in solitude and cloisters than any conversation of learned men, or volumes and libraries ever so carefully perused, could have made them. But this is not every man's case; for I do not communicate to all alike. Some I instruct in common matters, others in abstruse and peculiar notions. And as the measure and quality of the matter, so the manner of imparting it is very different. To some I have showed myself in figures and parables, dreams and mystic representations; to others I have revealed the most important secrets in the most clear intelligible method. Books speak alike to all, but all are not qualified to be taught by them alike. But I, instead of dead letters presented to the outward senses, perform my business within. I fill the mind with truth, suit Myself to each man's genius and capacity,

search every corner of the heart, understand their most retired thoughts, inspire good desires, promote and finish those desires, by bringing them to action; and deal to every one the various gifts of My Spirit in such kinds and proportions as I see most useful and seasonable.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Of Meddling with the World as little as may be.

CHRIST. In many things, My son, content thyself with being ignorant, and choose to live as a man dead while among the living; one whose thoughts and affections are crucified to all the world and all the world to them. Many things are to be overlooked as if you saw them not; thy mind drawn off from the distracting variety of objects, and fastened close down to the things that make for thy peace and salvation. In controverted points, it is generally much better to content oneself with avoiding erroneous opinions, and their vicious consequences, and leave others to abound in their own sense (where their difference from thee does not apparently hazard their souls), than to engage in hot disputes and spend thy precious hours in wrangling and fierce contention. And even in disputes, not to be hot and pertinacious; for if God and truth be on thy side, and thou canst with comfort appeal to thy Judge above, thy concern will not be great for victory and approbation below.

DISCIPLE. Alas! Lord, what a wretched case is this world in! How distant from this meek and abstracted temper of mind! Trifling loss is seriously lamented. A little sordid gain engages men's time and labour and thoughts. The day is too short for their vigorous pursuits, and anxious

cares break their sleep, while all their spiritual concerns lie neglected and forgotten. Their diligence and study is determined to matters of small or no importance; and the one thing necessary is laid aside, as if it were not worth a single thought. So vain is man, so totally immersed in sensible objects and worldly cares, and so contentedly does he perish in vanity and vexation, unless Thy grace make him wiser, and raise his mind to better and eternal concerns.

CHAPTER L.

Against a Fond and Easy Credulity.

DISCIPLE. "Lord, be Thou my help in trouble, for vain is the help of man." How often have I failed of succour and true friendship, where I had most reason to expect it! How often found it where I entertained no such expectations! So vain and uncertain is all trust in man, so entirely does the safety of good men depend upon Thee alone. Blessed, therefore, and for ever admired be that good providence which orders and disposes all events to Thy impotent and fickle, Thy ignorant and silly, Thy deceitful and deceivable creatures!

Who among all the sons of men ever behaved himself with so prudent care and exact circumspection as not sometimes to be over-reached by treachery and trick, and involved in difficulties and troubles, which the most jealous foresight knew not how to descry or suspect? But he who places no confidence in human subtlety, and rests in God alone, and acts with downright honesty and a good conscience, is less subject to such inconvenience than cunning and intriguing men; or if he be surprised and

imposed upon, yet is his deliverance generally more speedy and effectual, and his comforts in the meanwhile more sensible and supporting. For Thou, Lord, never forsakest those utterly who put their trust in Thee. A faithful friend, and such as will stand by us in adversity and want, is exceeding hard to be found; but Thou art always the same, and no change of circumstances can change Thee, or abate Thy affection. Happy is the soul that is built upon the rock Christ! Were this my case, the fear of the malicious would not distract nor the calumnies of the envious disturb me.

But who can foresee all future inconveniences, or prevent all that he may foresee? And if the ills we are aware of and provide against are so grievous to be borne, how much more heavy will be those wounds whose smart and terror are doubled by surprise? We often blame ourselves for not being wiser, and have reason to condemn our too easy credulity; that especially, which greedily assents to the flatteries and commendations of men, and relies upon their mighty professions of friendship and esteem. For though they call and think us angels, yet we cannot but be conscious to ourselves that we are no better than men, frail and wretched men. Whom therefore shall I believe? Whom indeed but Thee, O Lord? For Thou art truth itself, incapable of deceiving or of being deceived. But as for men, they are all liars, weak and inconstant, frail and treacherous; especially in what they say, so exceeding fabulous and vain, that it is a point of prudence to suspend our faith; and Thou hast wisely taught us to beware of their false insinuations. Thou hast forewarned us of their treachery and malice; told us that a man's "enemies shall be those of his own kindred and household;" and that when "men say, lo, Christ is here, or lo, He is there, we ought not to believe them." The truth of these predictions I have learned by sad experience, and wish I may grow wiser at my own expense.

Be sure (says one) you keep this private which I tell

you ; and yet that very man in the next company divulges what he had imparted just before under the seal of secrecy. From such insincere dealers as these I beg to be delivered, and from their treacherous ways ; that I may neither come within their power of betraying and abusing my confidence, nor injure any who repose the like in me. Make me then, Lord, a rigid observer of truth, and religiously firm to my word ; for what I cannot but resent when done to me, it never can become me to put upon any other person. Silence indeed, and forbearing to concern oneself in the affairs of our neighbours, is not only a virtue, but a convenience and a benefit. Caution in crediting, reserve in speaking, and revealing oneself to very few, are the best securities both of peace and a good understanding with the world, and of the inward peace of our own minds. Endeavouring to approve ourselves to the Knower and Searcher of Hearts, and not suffering every blast of idle report or empty profession to carry us about, but guarding our conversation carefully, and labouring to conform every thought, word and action to the divine will ; these are a good man's safety, and satisfaction and wisdom. How sure and calm a retreat does that man make wh chooses to preserve Thy favour by making an escape from pomp and noise ' preferring Thy approbation before the loudest fame and applause, and willingly abandoning those painted follies; whose glittering outsides impose upon our senses; who prefers contrite sorrow, severe virtue, and solitary devotion, before the showy pleasures of the world, or that empty admiration which ambition and vainglory affect? Praise is indeed the consequence and encouragement of virtue ; but it is sometimes so unseasonably applied as to become its bane and corruption too. For the whole life of man is one continual temptation, and we have a subtle adversary to deal with who slips no advantage of undoing us. Our praises he improves to his own purposes, by swelling us up with them into pride and self-conceit. And many souls have perished by that

virtue, published and celebrated, which, if unknown and unobserved, had come to mighty perfection, and been infinitely happy by the advantage of secrecy and silence.

CHAPTER LI.

Of Trusting in God when Men Speak Ill of us.

CHRIST. Stand fast, My son, and be not terrified with the shock of calumny and reproach, but let Me be thy refuge and sure confidence. Alas! what are words but empty sounds, that break and scatter in the air, and make no real impression? If not report alone, but thy own conscience too reproach thee, bewail thy guilt, and reform what hath been amiss. But if upon examination thou find no ground of accusing thyself, strengthen thy mind in innocence, look upon this wrongful judgment as a suffering for God's sake, and bear it accordingly with patience and contentedness. He expects that thou "should resist even unto blood" when called to it; but how will the man be able to endure wounds and blows, who is not yet a match for words and affronts? Inquire a little into the true grounds of such impatience, and thou shalt find it a symptom of a soul sick and indisposed. For how can it be otherwise accounted for, than that thou art yet carnal, and retainest a greater regard for the opinion of men than can be well consistent with a person who hath renounced the world and professes to dedicate himself entirely to God? Whence is reproof so grating and uneasy? Whence that solicitous care to contrive excuses? Whence that forward zeal in thy own vindication, if not from a dread and abhorrence of that contempt to which thy supposed miscarriages would expose thee? Fondness of honour and reputation

lies at the bottom, and inordinate desire to recommend thyself to man's esteem; which shows thou art not yet so humble, so resigned, but that a principle of vanity lurks still within; nor is the world yet dead to thee, or thou to the world.

Attend diligently to My instructions, and the censures of ten thousand men will not be able to disturb thee. Let them proceed in their envy and malice, and blacken Thy name after the most spiteful manner that hell itself can practise or invent, yet what art thou the worse? Can all this change thy person? Or hath thy head one hair the less for it? Do but compose thy mind, and resolve to despise it, and all blows over. These scandals vanish and fly away like motes in the sun, and are neither more nor less than what resentment makes them. To be provoked with every slanderous word argues a littleness of soul, a want of due regard for God; but the brave generous mind, whose all is in God, and who refers himself entirely to His judgment, is above the terrors and discouragements of men, and lays no stress upon their notions of things. For their notions are frequently rash and false; they seldom do, and sometimes cannot, enter into the real merits of the cause; but to Me all hearts are open, and from My piercing eyes no secrets are hid. I know distinctly both in what manner and with what intention everything is done. The person who receives and does the wrong are both under My cognizance; and even the wrong itself is done by My permission, that by this means the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. I shall not fail to make a just and clear decision between the guilty and the innocent, and call both to account hereafter, however I may think fit to try them in the meanwhile, and keep those things in the dark at present which then shall be notorious to all the world. And what mistakes soever may prevail now, My judgment will be according to equity and truth, and My sentence, once pronounced, can never be reversed. Few indeed are capable of discerning

the justice of My providence, in suffering innocent men to be traduced and their honest actions misunderstood. But I do nothing without wise reasons, and neither am nor can be mistaken in My methods, how much soever short-sighted and inconsiderate men are confounded about them.

Appeal then in all these cases to My determination, and let the matter rest so fully there as not only to disregard what others think concerning thee, but even in some measure to distrust thy own judgment concerning thyself. Consider that I think many things fit for My servants, which they can by no means imagine convenient for themselves. This very reflection preserves a good man's temper in every accident of life, because he knows that every accident falls out thus by My direction. This buoys his spirits up against the insults and injuries of calumny and detraction, and keeps them from swelling into pride and immoderate joy, when his innocence is cleared and his virtue commended. He knows that God sees not as man sees; for man judges according to outward and fallible appearances, but God searches the reins and the heart, and judges righteous judgment.

DISCIPLE. O Lord, Thou "righteous Judge, strong and patient," who understandeth the frailty and the wickedness of men, be Thou my strong rock, my trust and defence. For even in my own conscience I dare not be too confident, since many things which to me are either unknown or forgotten Thou hast a perfect knowledge and exact remembrance of. I ought therefore in all reproofs and reproaches to submit with patience, even "though my heart condemn me not;" because Thou who permittest these things, "are greater than my heart, and knowest all things." Thus reason and religion both convince me I ought to behave myself; but if at any time passion and frailty have exceeded in too nice and tender a sense of these things, pardon, I beseech Thee, what is past, and enable me to be more resigned for the time to come. Thy mercy alone will avail

me more than all my laboured excuses; and pardon is what I rather choose than the most confident testimony of my own conscience. For though I "should know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; for He that judgeth me is the Lord;" the Lord who will one day "bring to light the hidden things of dishonesty," even those which have escaped the committer's own observation. And therefore, "if Thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme to mark what is done amiss, no flesh living could be justified in Thy sight."

CHAPTER LII.

Nothing too much to Suffer for Eternal Life.

CHRIST. Let not, My son, thy labours or sufferings for Me and thy duty, or any other sort of hardship or tribulation in this world, so far damp thy courage, but that My promise still should be a sure anchor-hold of hope; and this reflection ever ministers comfort, that I am able to recompense thee, not only beyond what is reasonable to expect, but even impossible for thee to wish or imagine. Thy toils will not continue very long, nor will thy pain and trouble always torment thee. Wait but a little longer, and look forward and see how glorious a prospect opens itself; how swiftly the end of all thy sufferings approaches; and how suddenly sorrow and tumult vanish away. Even time itself is not of everlasting continuance; but that which is bounded within so very narrow a space as this short span of life cannot in any fair computation be counted long or great. Proceed then in thy duty with vigour and undaunted resolution; ply thy work hard in my vineyard, and fill the station I have appointed thee to; thy wages are certain and valuable, for I Myself will "be thy exceeding great reward."

Persist in writing, in reading, in singing, meditation, in devout prayer, in fortitude and patience. For the things prepared for them that love God are richly worth these and greater conflicts; all thou must do, all thou canst suffer, are in no degree worthy to be compared with them. The day is coming, and fixed in My unalterable decree, adorned with the triumphs of joy and peace: that mighty revolution, when these alternate successions of day and night shall cease, and everlasting uninterrupted light shall shine for ever. There shall be lustre infinite, satisfaction unbroken, inconceivable, rest eternal, and above the power of any future danger. There shall then be no place left for that melancholy wish: "O that Thou wouldst deliver me from the body of this death!" no occasion for that complaint: "Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Meshech, and to have my habitation in this barren wilderness." For even "the last enemy" shall be subdued, "and death itself destroyed." Salvation then and life shall reign for ever; sorrow and anguish, sighs and tears shall flee away; a crown of rejoicing put upon every head, and thou shalt be happy in the sweet society "of saints and angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and the assembly of the first-born."

Oh! couldst thou now but see the heavens open, and with the ken of mortal eye behold the bright and everlasting crowns of my chosen! Were thy heart large enough to admit a just idea of their trophies and glories whom once the world despised, and thought not worthy to live upon the earth, thou then wouldst gladly embrace their sufferings and reproaches, abandon all thy vain desires of worldly greatness, and disdain the perishing pleasures of the present life. Humility and patience would then appear in all their native beauties; and even affliction and ignominy display such charms as must attract thy love, and make thee esteem the reproaches of Christ greater treasures and gain than all the majesty and honour and most celebrated reputation that a mortal state is capable of.

Attend then seriously to these important truths. For they, if considered and believed in good earnest, will stop thy mouth and effectually silence all thy complaints. For sure the sufferings of a moment cannot be thought too dear a price for eternal happiness in exchange. Surely the kingdom of God is no trifling concern. And when the losing or attaining this lies before thee, nothing can be too much to prevent that loss, nothing a hard bargain for that infinite advantage. Grovel then upon the earth no longer, but stand erect, and lift thy eyes and heart to heaven. See there the blessed effects, the mighty success, of all those sharp conflicts which my saints while in the body underwent, the end of all their trials and adversities, their painful severities and pious labours. These mortified afflicted men, once reputed the "filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things," the common mark of insolence and malice, are now in perfect joy, their sorrows swallowed up in transporting bliss and comfort, their dangers changed into secure peace, their labours into ease and sweet repose, their persecutions and wrongful accusations before the bar of men into thrones of glory, where they sit and judge the world, and live and rejoice and reign with Me for ever.

CHAPTER LIII.

The Joys of Eternity and Miseries of this present Life.

DISCIPLE. Oh, blessed mansions of the heavenly city! Oh, bright and glorious day of eternal light and bliss! A day that never declines, a sun that never sets, nor is obscured by any succeeding night; but a state always cheerful, always fixed and secured from change and sorrow, from

danger and decay. How do I pant and thirst after that happy hour, when this blessed morning shall dawn and shed its beams, and with a wondrous lustre put an end to all the darkness and miseries of mortality? It does indeed already shine in the hearts and hopes of these good men, whose conversation is even now in heaven; but even theirs is but a distant prospect, and such as, while they sojourn here, presents things only in a glass. The citizens and inhabitants of those blessed regions see it with their naked eye; they feel and enjoy its sweetness, and are all enlightened with its rays, while the distressed sons of Eve endure and groan under their exile, and cannot but lament the bitterness of this imperfect gloomy day which men on earth call evil—a day but short, and, which is worse, dismal and uncomfortable. For who can worthily express the pains, the perplexities of body and soul, which are the necessary, the inseparable incumbrances of man's present condition? A condition, wherein he is polluted with so many sins, entangled in so many difficulties, beset with so many misfortunes, oppressed with so many fears, distracted with so many cares, disturbed and diverted from his main concern by so many impertinences, deluded with so many vanities, confounded with so many errors, wasted and worn out with so much labour and trouble, assaulted by temptations, emasculated by pleasures, and tormented with great variety of necessities and want?

Oh! when will there be an end of this so complicated misery? When may I hope to be enlarged and released from this bondage of sin? When shall my thoughts and desires centre and be for ever fixed in Thee, my God, alone? When may I hope to attain true joy in Thee, without any allay of bodily suffering, without any distraction of mind? When shall I rest in firm untroubled peace? Peace from accidents and temptations without, peace from guilt and misguiding, from the solicitations of lust and the violence of passion within? When shall I see my Jesus

face to face, and contemplate the beauties of His kingdom and glorious Godhead? When will my dearest Saviour be my all in all, and receive me to those blissful habitations prepared for them that love Him, and that are loved by Him, before the foundation of the world?

Behold! I am here desolate and poor, a stranger and alone in an enemy's country, where wars rage and never cease, and terrible distresses come thick and strong upon me every day and hour. Be Thou my comfort in this exiled and desolate condition. Assuage my pain, and incline Thy favour to Thy servant, whose parched and languishing soul "gaspeth unto Thee as a thirsty land." Thou only art able to do this; for what the mistaken world calls comforts, are but so many fresh additions to my burden. I long most earnestly to enjoy, but cannot yet attain my wish. Fain would I grasp and cling to heavenly things, but am detained and fastened down to earth by vanities below and unmortified affections. My mind labours to get above these; but even when the spirit is willing I find the flesh extremely weak, and my sensual prevails over my better and heavenly inclinations.

Thus am I, wretched man, involved in a perpetual war, and live in contradiction to myself, my own hindrance and torment, moving different ways, and pursuing different ends and prospects at one and the same time. How great is my concern and conflict when I set my mind to meditate and pray, and in the midst of this exercise am interrupted by a clutter of worldly and carnal imaginations crowding in upon me? "Go not far from me, O my God, neither cast away Thy servant in displeasure." Scatter these dark and gloomy clouds, which intercept my vision of Thee, by the brightness of Thy lightning; thunder upon them from heaven, "cast out Thine arrows and discomfit them." Recollect my broken and scattered thoughts, help me to forget the things of this world, to reject and despise and effectually drive away all sinful imaginations. Assist

me, Thou substantial truth, and root me fast, that no blast of vanity may shake and unsettle my heart. Diffuse Thy heavenly sweetness through my soul, and chase away all nauseous, unsavoury, and impure affections, for these cannot stand before Thee.

Particularly, dearest Lord, I implore Thy compassion upon my infirmities; and in Thy mercy impute not to me my many wandering thoughts in prayer. For there, I must confess, my distractions are great and frequent; and I am often least of all in that place where I stand or kneel; thus, while my body is before Thy footstool, my mind is carried away I know not whither. And this is a very melancholy reflection, such as gives me occasion to suspect and deeply bewail myself. Since where my thoughts are, there properly and indeed am I; and where my thoughts frequent and delight to dwell, there, without doubt, is the object of my affection and concern; and that, which either natural disposition or long custom renders most delightful, that, to be sure, is most familiar, and comes continually uppermost. All this I gather from that observation, which Thou, Eternal Truth, hast left us, that "where our treasure is, there will our heart be also."

This then is the rule by which I try and sound the bent of my heart. If I love heaven, the thoughts of it will be frequent and pleasant to me; but if I love the world, the effect of this will be that I shall feel excess of joy in prosperous events, and be as immoderate in my grief for those that are otherwise. If I love the flesh, wanton and carnal imaginations will often return upon me, and be entertained with satisfaction; but if I love the spirit, I shall find in spiritual objects a grateful relish, and dwell upon them with true delight. For this my own senses and experience assure me, that what I love most I am best pleased to be entertained with, greediest to hear and forwardest to talk of, most careful to remember, and to preserve deep and lasting impressions of upon my mind. And therefore, though I

cannot attain to it so fully as I wish and strive, yet I can plainly perceive, and do truly value and admire, the happiness of them who can abandon all and stick to Thee alone; that commit a holy violence upon their natural inclinations, crucify the flesh, and with a pure bright zeal and a clear conscience, can offer holy, fervent prayers, a spiritual and unblemished sacrifice: where all without are forbidden entrance, and all within is composed. These men, so firmly intent upon Thee and their devotions, are fit to praise Thee with those angels whose refined excellences they so happily aspire after, and to whose blessed society Thou wilt one day exalt and admit them.

CHAPTER LIV.

Of the Desires of Eternal Life and the Happiness of Them who Strive Manfully.

CHRIST. My son, when thou feelest thy soul inflamed with an eager desire of eternal happiness, and thinkest long to be released from this prison of the body, that thou mayest be blessed with a nearer and more distinct view, a perfect, full and uninterrupted fruition of My brightness and majesty, set open all the avenues of thy soul, and greedily receive the holy inspiration. Express thy humblest thanks to God, and be duly sensible of His goodness, who deals so bountifully with thee, visits thee with His mercy, supports and strengthens thee with His grace, and raises those affections up to heaven which have a fatal innate tendency to immerse thy soul in earth and flesh and sense. For, do not mistake the matter, no reasonings or endeavours of thy own have power to effect so good a work, or to create those spiritual inclinations; the finger of God is in them, and they are owing to no less noble a cause than the free and bountiful donation of divine grace

and favour, the design of which is to advance and exalt thy virtues, to make thee humble and modest, with reflections upon the strength of another made perfect in thy weakness, to fit thee for future trials and sorer conflicts, to engage thy affections and encourage thy perseverance, in the faithful service of so gracious, so good a Master.

Nor let thy spirits be dejected, son, if this be not done with all that zeal and entire resignation of a heart perfectly undivided which thou couldst wish. For as in common fire there will always be some smoke, so in those holy flames many men are sincerely desirous of heavenly things, who yet cannot quite divest themselves of carnal affections, nor be absolutely free from all temptations. And therefore some other prospects will often interpose, as well as that of promoting God's glory only, by those good actions for which the assistances of His grace are sought and earnestly implored; of this thy own experience convinces thee by sundry instances, in which thou seest no reason to suspect thy own integrity. Nor will all that be condemned at the last day which was attempted with a mixture of some desire to promote thy own advantage. Only take care that this desire prevail not so far as to incline thee to prefer what may contribute to thy profit or delight, before those things which will procure My favour and acceptance, and be for Mine and for religion's honour. For with a wise, considerate Christian, My will takes place above his own desires, or any the most inviting object; and if it reign not in his heart alone, yet it always sits supreme, and overrules the rest. "I know all thy desires, and thy groanings are not hid from Me." Thou wouldst this instant be admitted into the glorious liberty of the sons of God; the blissful and eternal mansions of thy heavenly Father's house are thy longings and delight; and "as the hart panteth after the water-springs, so doth thy soul pant and thirst after Me." But as yet thou art not ripe for these joys; that happy hour is not come; for this life is the time of warfare and action and

trial, and not of rest and joy and triumph; and thou must be content to wait with patience till the kingdom of God shall come in perfection.

The condition of mortals upon earth is that exercise and discipline; the joys they feel are comforts and supports, not full and perfect happiness; they are given not to satisfy, but only to sustain them. And therefore receive them as they are, and use them to their proper purposes; that by them thy constancy and patience may be preserved from sinking under the weight of any difficulties, which either the doing or suffering things, to which frail and corrupt nature is averse, may at any time expose thee. For the change of a man's self is a very laborious undertaking, and yet this must be done. The flesh with its lusts must be crucified, a new heart and a new spirit introduced, many things done which offer violence to a man's inclinations, many foregone and let alone to which he is strongly disposed. Others thou shalt often observe crowned with success, when thy own no less painful endeavours are defeated and disappointed; others looked upon as oracles, when thy better and wiser advice is disregarded and despised. Others will suffer long, and at last obtain their desire; thou perhaps, though equally patient, equally fervent and zealous in thy application, dismissed with a repulse; others be great, in fame or general esteem, while thy more deserving virtues are passed over in silence; others caressed, preferred, trusted in matters of consequence, and looked upon as useful and necessary, while thou art reputed a useless and insignificant person. These mistaken or partial judgments of men will grate hard upon human nature; but even these will turn to good account, if borne with meekness and modesty and silence. For these are the very methods by which God brings the fidelity of His servants to the touch; 'tis thus that He discovers whether they have gained a conquest over nature and themselves. And no sort of mortification is of happier consequence than that which exposes men to the sight and suffering of things

to which their own minds are most violently averse. Especially when what they cannot but conceive most unfit, most absurd and odd, constrains them to go against their own sense, and submit to a higher power, without any reserve to the private judgment of their own reason in the case. This is indeed hard, and a perfection of submission not easy to be compassed; but did men well consider how vast the advantages of a temper so resigned are at present, how glorious the reward of it hereafter, and how quickly the troubles it exposes them to will end in that reward, the comforts of such discipline would be sensible and great, and they would even enjoy their afflictions and temptations, sustained with so pure, so bright a prospect of the mighty, the approaching recompense.

For this short empty pleasure, which now thou choosest for My sake to decline, shall be compensated with solid and everlasting joy in heaven, and there thy largest wishes shall be gratified. There shall be plenty of everything that is good. Fruition perfect and secure, free from the least allay of fear, or possibility of future losses. Between thy will and Mine shall then be perfect harmony; no opposition there, no obstruction; but everything shall conspire to fulfil all thy heart's desire, and render thy happiness as exquisite as a finite nature is capable of. Thy present ignominy, borne with patience, shall there be paid with brighter glory, thy mourning weeds exchanged for robes of light and joy; and he who sits here in the lowest place, shall there be seated on an eternal throne. Let it not then be grievous to thee to humble and submit thyself to the capricious humours of men with whom thou conversest in this world; but rather so compose thy mind, and order all thy actions, as readily and meekly to comply with the commands of thy superiors, the desires of thy equals, the requests of thy inferiors; to do for all what lawfully thou mayest, and to endure patiently whatever they shall, but ought not, to do to thee. Let vain men

pursue vanity, leave them to their own methods. Let them place their glory and happiness in such objects as their own mistaken judgments shall determine them to. Let them admire, and above all things covet, celebrated names and popular applause; but do thou place thy excellence and honour in the contempt of thyself, thy diligence in discharging My commands, thy zeal in seeking and advancing My honour and kingdom; and let this be first and chief in thy desires: "That whether thou live, thou mayest live unto the Lord; or whether thou die, thou mayest die unto the Lord; so that whether by life or death the Lord Jesus may be magnified in thy body."

CHAPTER LV.

An Act of Resignation to God in Time of Adversity.

DISCIPLE. Blessed be that wisdom and goodness, O Holy Father, which performs all Thy will: for what Thy will decrees, cannot be otherwise than good and wise. Give me grace, I beseech Thee, to rejoice, not in myself or any other, but in Thee alone; for Thou art my only hope and crown, my joy and glory. All I have is received at Thy bountiful hand; bountiful to a most unworthy creature, who neither could procure nor deserve the least of all Thy mercies; and Thou, by giving and completing, hast not lost Thy property and right in all which, by Thy means, I enjoy or do. For what am I, alas! but a weak, helpless wretch, acquainted with misery from my very cradle, and wasted with trouble and vexation; my face is grown old with tears, and my heart perplexed and broken with doubts and sorrows and vehement passions. I beg and long most earnestly for the blessing of peace, that

peace and inward consolation which Thy children feed and feast upon. If Thou shalt fill my soul with this, it will overflow with joy and praise, and continually breathe out holy hymns to the honour of Thy name. But if Thou turn away Thy face, as sometimes Thou seest fit to do, I find myself unable to run in the way of Thy commandments; and, prostrating myself in the anguish of my soul, I beat my breast and wring my hands for the loss of that light and comfort, that strength and protection, which I enjoyed while under the shadow of Thy wings, and defended from the assaults of sorrow and adversity.

Righteous Father (then say I), the time is come when Thou art pleased to try me, but even at this time, and at all others, praised be Thy name. Dearest Father, it is very meet, that now Thou callest me to it, I should suffer in obedience to Thy will. Most Honoured Father, this is the hour, even that important hour, which Thou from all eternity hast ordained, to be the season of my outward oppression and discomfort, becoming the instrument of endless life and joy to me; but though this heaviness may endure for a night, yet light and glory will return in the morning. This, Holy Father, is Thy own appointment, and what Thou willest Thou never willest in vain. For even this suffering in the present life is a mark of Thy favour and friendship; the returns, the instruments, the manner and continuance of my afflictions, are all of Thy permitting, for nothing is or can be done without Thy providence and direction, without some wise and excellent design. Even I myself am sensible, "how good it is for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes," and utterly discard all pride and carnal confidences. The shame and self-reproach I laboured under, hath taught me to expect relief from God and not from man. And all my afflictions put me upon contemplating the unsearchable depths of Thy providence, which, with a wonderful temper of justice and equity, layeth these burdens upon bad and good, without

any nice or discriminating marks of love or hatred in this present world.

I will therefore render the most unfeigned thanksgiving to my God, for that in marvellous kindness He hath not spared the rod when it was convenient for me; I acknowledge His mercy, even in the pains and crosses and sorrows I have endured, whether of mind or body, or estate; and yet much more, for those refreshments and remedies which Thou alone hast afforded me. For vain is all the help of man; but Thou art the true, the powerful physician of souls; Thou "woundest and healest; Thou bringest down to the gates of hell, and raiseth up again." Thy chastisement shall teach me wisdom; Thou shalt beat me with the rod, and I shall not die. Behold me, Lord, most willingly submitting to Thy discipline; oh, strike and spare not, so Thou bend my stubborn heart, and bring down my high spirit, and make me tractable and obedient. I, Lord, and mine are at Thy disposal; put forth Thy hand and touch them as Thou pleasest. For this I know, that how grievous soever these temporal crosses may be, yet better it is to feel the weight of Thy hand here than hereafter. All things are naked and open to Thee, even the inmost recesses of our hearts; Thou knowest the things that will be before they are, and needest not that any should inform Thee what is done upon earth. Thou seest what will contribute most to my improvement in goodness; how great and good effect distresses have to scour the rust from our inactive minds and brighten all our virtues. Take then, my God, Thy own measures; I only beg that Thou wouldst not disdain and give me over, and think me unworthy Thy care, for those blemishes and misdemeanours of my life, which none are better acquainted with, which none indeed are thoroughly acquainted with, but Thou, the searcher of hearts alone.

Work in me, I intreat Thee, a true amendment, instruct me in all things fit for me to know, dispose me to love all

things worthy of my affection, to think that everything deserves my praise in proportion as it pleases Thee, to esteem nothing highly but what is precious and honourable in Thy sight, to look with a generous disdain upon all that Thou thinkest vile, and never be reconciled to what Thou hatest. Let me not, I beseech Thee, judge by outward appearances, the seeing of the eye, or the hearing of the ear, which are subject to infinite delusions and mistakes; but give me a right judgment in all things, whether they relate to this or another state, to the outward or the inner man; and, above all, let it be my special care to inform myself in Thy will concerning me. Men who form their judgment upon sense often err; men who set their affections upon the sensible objects of this world are frequently disappointed and miserable; for is a man, for instance, one whit the better because He is grown great in other men's esteem? Is common opinion the standard of merit? Nothing less. Here every man abuses his fellow, the cheat imposes upon another as great a cheat, the vain puffs up the vain, the blind misleads the blind, the weak supports the weak; and all the while, by empty and deserved commendations, each brings a true reproach upon the other, while he extols him against sense and reason. For, after all, these praises are but words without any significance, nothing more than air and empty sound; for every man is just so much, so good, and neither more nor less, than he is in Thy esteem only.

CHAPTER LVI.

A Man must be Content with meaner Acts of Virtue when he is indisposed for greater.

CHRIST. Do not suppose, My son, that thy zeal can always be equally bright, or thy mind capable of transports and intent contemplation upon heavenly objects at all times. Thou carriest about with thee a load of infirmity and corruption, which will often damp the clearest flames of devotion, darken thy mind, and check its noble flights, and make thee know and feel that mortal flesh and blood is a heavy but inseparable incumbrance upon a rational and religious soul. While men are in the body there is no remedy, but they must feel and groan under the weight. And groan they ought indeed, when they consider how great an interruption this is to their attendance upon and entire dedication of their time and thoughts to God and heavenly objects. These they must be content to dwell upon as much as may be, by snatching all those happy intervals which leisure and a good temper of mind allow them.

But when the soul is indisposed for nobler exercises, when cares and infirmities press it down, let it not be inactive Variety is here of use, and works of a meaner rank in the scale of virtue must be recurred to, that thou mayest be still employed, still waiting for the happy hour when I shall return and visit thee with larger measures of My grace. Bear with meekness the present discomfort and incapacity, the dry and barren state of thy soul, till I send My refreshing dews, and infuse a principle of fruitfulness for a product in greater plenty and perfection. For I can soon make thee to forget thy past troubles, and satisfy thy mind with the abundance of peace. I will open for thee the spacious plains of Scripture, that thou mayest be enlarged, and run the way of My commandments in liberty, and with a soul

full of joy and inward exultation, say, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

CHAPTER LVII.

A Man should think Correction, not Comfort, his due.

DISCIPLE. Lord, I must needs with shame confess myself altogether unworthy Thy comforts or any part of that care Thou art pleased to take of my soul; and therefore I have no pretence to complain of hard usage or injustice when Thou withdrawest Thy grace and leavest me to myself. Whole seas of tears could not so cleanse my polluted soul as to render it pure enough to merit the blessed influences of Thy Spirit. Scourges and vengeance are the portion of a wretch who, by so many and so grievous transgressions, hath offended Thy majesty. The more therefore I reflect upon my own sinfulness, the clearer and juster notions I have of Thy free undeserved mercy. For merciful Thou art, even to astonishment, whose bowels thus yearn over the work of Thy own hands; who thus to all the world hast manifested the riches of Thy grace in the vessels of mercy, and extendest Thy liberality to those who have no right to challenge, no recommendation to induce Thee to it.

But if we could pretend to comforts, yet how could we expect such divine, such incomparable sweet and noble marks of Thy favour, so very unlike, so much above any human helps or encouragements? For how could I expect the bread of life from heaven? Good works I know of none I have to plead; but the slightest recollection even amazes and confounds me with sins innumerable brought to

my remembrance. My vehement proneness to evil, and shameful sloth and backwardness to reformation and goodness, are of themselves so evident, that should I labour to cloak them, the attempt must needs be vain; for Thou, the searcher of hearts, art privy to them; Thou canst disprove me, and no advocate is to be found who could offer anything in my vindication. What then can I justly lay claim to but hell and everlasting flames? I own, with grief and shame, that reproach and contempt are my due; and that I am unworthy to be named among Thy sons, or even Thy meanest servants. Nature indeed starts back, and cannot, without reluctancy, acknowledge its own vileness and guilt; but I will offer violence to my native pride, and freely confess my sins, that Thou mayest show Thy justice and faithfulness in a full and free pardon of the faults I do freely confess.

But where shall I find words fit for so miserable a condition, or how shall so scandalous a creature apply to Thee for pardon? I know no other terms than these that become my mouth: "Lord, I have sinned, I have done wickedly. Mercy, Thou Judge of quick and dead—mercy, or I perish. Respite Thy sentence yet a little while, and grant me some time at least to bewail my misery, before I be swallowed up in darkness, and go into a land black with the terrors of the shadow of death. What other reparation dost Thou expect? What other can indeed be had from men laden with guilt and infirmity, than that they should seriously bewail and humble themselves for their mighty and manifold provocations? Hence all our hopes of remission spring; here the first seeds of a reconciliation took root; the joy of a peaceful conscience is sown in tears; the acknowledgment of our weakness is the first step towards repairing our loss, the first defence against the wrath to come; and in these melancholy solitudes the gracious God and penitent soul meet and embrace each other. A broken and a contrite heart is reputed a sacrifice,' and Thou in

marvellous condescension preferrest it before the odours, the sweetest incense, or whole hecatombs of burnt-offerings. Of this that precious ointment, whose perfumes, when it anointed Thy holy feet, filled the whole house, was an emblem; for Thou, Lord, never didst or wilt despise a soul afflicted with a sense of sin. Contrition and humility are our sanctuary against the rage and malice of our spiritual adversary; the tears of penitence are that purifying stream which washes off the stains and blemishes of our defiled souls."

CHAPTER LVIII.

The Grace of God dwells not with Worldly-minded Men.

CHRIST. The tokens of My love are of a nobler kind than that they should submit to be rivalled by the blessings of this world; for heavenly comforts disdain to mix with those of earth. If then, My son, thou desirest to be filled full of My benediction and grace, all that obstructs its free possession of thy heart must be effectually discarded. Covet retirement, and prefer private conversation with God before all the diversions of human society. Esteem no company so delightful as thy closet and thy devotions, and there by fervent prayers pour out thy soul alone, that thy zeal may be quickened, and thy peace of conscience secured. Let the whole world be mean in thy esteem, and account it a greater honour to be called and chosen of God, than any advantages of fortune or advancement can confer. For be assured thy soul cannot admit of two such different affections as the love of Me and transitory pleasures. The most intimate acquaintance and dearest friends must not stand in competition with Me; but they who will be Mine in good earnest

must follow the Apostle's advice, and behave "themselves as strangers and pilgrims in a world which must shortly be dissolved." And when the time of this or their own dissolution approaches, the joy and holy trust of that mind, which sits loose to all here below, is more blessed than words can express.

But to live thus abstracted and disengaged from the world, is a perfection not attainable by every common man; nor can the sensual person taste the delights or enjoy the liberty of a true spiritual state. For this requires a distance to be kept from all external objects, that those things human nature loves most tenderly should be renounced; nay, even that himself should be so, for each man is his own worst enemy, and the most threatening dangers rise from within. He that hath gained an entire conquest over himself, will find no mighty difficulties to subdue all other opposition; and this is a complete victory indeed. And when the sensual appetite submits readily to the rational powers, and those powers again as readily submit to My will, this man is master of himself and all the world. But they who would aspire to this perfection, must set out with resolution, and early lay the axe to the root of the tree; that no darling sin, no corrupt or inordinate affection, may be left standing. For all that bitterness and sin, which is necessary to be hewn down in order to an entire reformation and heavenly purity of heart and life, are but so many branches of that corrupt stock, the irregular love of a man's own self. And when that stock is killed and cut down, profound peace and uninterrupted happiness are the consequence of such mortification.

The only reason why so many continue still entangled in sensual affections, and find themselves unable to soar above themselves and the incumbrances here below, is that very few have attained to the skill of dying to their own inclinations, and divesting themselves of narrow and selfish designs. For he who affects to converse freely with God, must first

abandon all carnal and immoderate desires, and get loose from those entanglements which clog and fasten down the soul to earth. They who will retain a fondness of any created being by minding temporal things, show that they are content to set up their rest short of heaven and God Himself. "Set therefore thy affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; for no man is sufficient for the service of two masters, nor canst thou love Me and Mammon both."

CHAPTER LIX.

The different Motions of Nature and Grace.

CHRIST. Be careful, My son, to distinguish between nature and grace, and nicely to observe their different tendencies and prospects. For these are so very distant, so contrary to each other, and yet withal so intricate, that they require a spiritual and enlightened understanding exactly to discern them. In the general desire of good all mankind agree. This is the spur and spring of every word and action; but that which produces so very different effects from the same original cause is, that men often mistake shadows for substance, and are imposed upon by false appearances of good.

Nature acts craftily, allures, ensnares, cheats those that attend to her wiles, and proposes the gratifying herself for the end of all she does. Grace deals candidly and sincerely, complies with no evil, puts no cheat upon men, does all with regard to God, and rests in Him, as its supreme and only end. Nature declines death and sufferings, hates trouble and sorrows, subjection and obedience; grace is exercised in perpetual mortification and self-denial, chooses to be overruled, to submit; nay, restrains even lawful and

innocent liberties; does not affect dominion and superiority, but chooses to live in a state of humility and subjection, and esteems no hardship, no compliance uneasy for the sake of God and a good conscience. Nature is selfish, and always computes what profit every action may bring to the person that does it; grace overlooks all private gain, and labours chiefly to promote the public good. Nature delights in honours and preferments, in a celebrated name, and the commendation of men; grace ascribes all the honour and praise to God, and thinks that things done well are well rewarded by His acceptance and approbation. Nature dreads ignominy and contempt, but grace accounts it matter of great joy to be exposed and vilified in a good cause. Nature is pleased with ease and indulgence and bodily rest; grace is ever active, and undertakes business and toil with cheerfulness. Nature is charmed with beauty and curiosity, and disdains things that are mean and vulgar and common; grace is delighted with such as are plain and low in the esteem of the world, disdains not those that are unpalatable, nor thinks herself the worse for the want of outward gaieties and ornaments. Nature aims at transitory enjoyments, is fond of wealth and increase, tenderly affected with losses and disappointments, and provoked to the last degree with insolence and reproach; grace keeps eternal advantages in view, neglects the fading and perishing, bears losses with evenness of temper, endures contempt and scandal patiently. For these she considers are things of no mighty concern to one whose heart and treasure are in heaven, a place where they are safe, and no misfortune can reach them. Nature is niggardly and griping, and chooses rather to receive than give; grace bountiful and kind, despising sordid gain and parsimony, content with a little, distributes liberally and cheerfully, and esteems "it more blessed to give than to receive."

Nature inclines to creature-comforts, to fleshly delights, to worldly vanities and pomps, to wandering and idle diver-

sions; grace fixes the heart upon God and goodness, concerns itself with the world as little as may be, hates fleshly lusts, checks and confines roving imaginations, and affects privacy and solitude. Nature is much delighted with sensual pleasures; grace feels no pleasure but in God alone, and prefers that before all the delights that the objects of sense can afford. Nature does nothing without some prospect of interest, and for every kindness expects as good or better returns, either of things in kind, or at least of favour and applause for its pretended generosity, and sets a very high value upon all the obligations it lays; grace desires no recompense in this world, but looks upon God as her reward; nor are the supplies and conveniences of life any further of consideration with her, than as a comfortable subsistence in this world may be serviceable in promoting and facilitating the endeavours after another.

Nature values herself upon a diffusive interest, and multitude of relations and friends, quality and noble blood, and therefore fawns upon or favours men in power, courts and caresses the rich, commends and is partial to persons of the same condition or opinion or party; grace is charitable and kind even to enemies, is not exalted by great or numerous friendships, and thinks the descent and family of a man a very despicable thing, unless his virtue be as much more eminent than those of his inferiors, as his birth and rank is above theirs. Grace favours the poor rather than the rich, and is more concerned for the hard fortune of an innocent person than of a great one; pays its respects to true intrinsic worth, not to the mere signs and trappings of it, which often only show where it ought to be, not where it really is; encourages the good in virtue, instead of flattering and soothing up the mighty in their wickedness and folly, and labours indefatigably to conform those who profess themselves God's children to the likeness of their heavenly Father's excellences, by propagating all manner of piety and goodness.

Nature is easily provoked to discontent by hard circumstances; grace bears want and poverty with meekness and much patience. Nature's ends and designs constantly centre in herself; but grace considers her original, and thinks that all should return thither from whence at first it came, arrogates nothing to itself, is not assuming, does not contend for praise or preference, is not dogmatical and peremptory in her own opinions, but in all searches after truth, submits her own reason and judgment to the incomprehensible wisdom of God. Nature affects to be knowing, to understand and penetrate the profoundest and darkest mysteries, makes ostentation of all her new discoveries, and pretends to experiment and demonstration, labours to distinguish herself to be thought wiser than the rest of the world, and would be extolled and admired for all that is spoken, or written, or done; grace thinks it not advisable to lay out time or thought upon new or unprofitable curiosities, but considers that the ruin of mankind is owing to that busy desire of knowing what God thought fit to conceal from them; that this inquisitive pretending temper is a sprout from that old root of bitterness; that established truths may be depended upon, but new and fanciful notions are almost no sooner entertained than they are disproved and exploded again; that men should therefore check that vain pleasure which tickles their itching minds upon these occasions; abandon vainglory, labour rather to conceal than to publish their advantages; and make usefulness and virtue and God's honour the only end of all their knowledge and studies. For to Him alone all thanks and praise must of necessity be due, who gives men all they have of His own mere motion and free mercy.

And such is grace: a light superior to nature, which should direct and preside over it; the peculiar gift of God, the distinguishing character of His chosen, the sure pledge of everlasting salvation; for it raises a man's affections from earth to heaven, and changes him from flesh to spirit. And

because these two principles are acted by such different motives, proceed in such different methods, and pursue such differing ends; therefore, in proportion as nature is weakened and subdued, the larger measures of grace are imparted, the more men's virtues are improved, and the glorious image of God renewed in their hearts by holy and heavenly dispositions.

CHAPTER LX.

The Weakness of corrupt Nature and Efficacy of Divine Grace.

DISCIPLE. Thou hast indeed, my God, created me in Thy own image, after Thy likeness, and commanded "me to be holy, as thou Thyself art holy." Oh, grant me, I beseech Thee, that favour and assistance which Thy own Word hath taught me is so important, so absolutely necessary to salvation, that I may vanquish my own nature, whose inclinations are now so degenerate, so corrupt, that they have a strong and constant tendency to sin and death. For I feel and lament a "law of sin in my body, warring continually against the law of my mind," drawing me to compliance with the fleshly and sensual appetite, and disabling me from any resolute resistance against its fatal motions, except Thy divine grace pour in fresh succours, and help me to stand in the day of battle. Lord, I have need, not only of Thy grace, but of very plentiful and powerful communications of it, to turn the bias of nature, which from my very infancy preponderates to evil. For this infection is derived from the first parent of mankind, and is the punishment of his offence diffused upon his whole posterity, so that the human nature, which came pure and good out of Thy creating hand,

is tainted and perverted, and all the motions now remaining draw the wrong way and bend to sin and earth.

The little power left in us to do good is like a very small spark covered with a huge heap of embers; light of reason clouded with a thick noisome mist of darkness and error. And though by this all the distinctions of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, are not utterly lost, yet the power of performing what our better sense approves is gone; the light of truth is dim and feeble, and the integrity of our minds and affections is blemished, and diverted from attending to it impartially. Hence it comes to pass, that though sometimes I am delighted with Thy law in the inner man, and fully convinced that "Thy commandment is holy, and just, and good," condemning wickedness, and warning me of the rocks and precipices which, in steering my course through the waves of this troublesome world, I must be watchful to avoid; yet still with "the flesh I serve the law of sin," and find a greater disposition to follow lust and sense than to be governed by reason and religion. Hence I so often feel the "will to do well," but "how to perform what I thus will, I find not." Hence I often make and repeat good resolutions with great sincerity; but for want of Thy assistance to counterpoise my infirmities, quickly fall from my steadfastness, and am beaten off with the very approach of difficulty and opposition. Hence I discern the way I should walk in; but when I am informed of my duty, and endeavour to raise myself above the world and its temptations, a fatal innate weight draws me down again, and checks my soul in its intended flights to heaven and Thee.

How absolutely needful then, my God, is Thy grace to help me in beginning, in carrying on, in accomplishing every good work; since without it I can do nothing, and yet with it can do even all things; yet not I, Lord, but Thou, who art in me and strengthenest me. Oh, gift truly divine, without which no desert of man, no endowments or

qualifications of nature, are of any worth or significance at all; sciences and arts, riches and power, beauty and strength, wit and eloquence, what are they, Lord, or what to be accounted of, if not seconded, assisted, exalted, perfected by grace? These are accomplishments distributed promiscuously to good and bad; but grace is a gift peculiar to Thy children and chosen, and such as renders the happy men that have it worthy of eternal life and happiness. A gift so singularly excellent that neither the gift of prophecy, nor the power of working miracles, nor the understanding of sublimest and most abstruse mysteries, nor faith, nor hope, nor any other virtue or privilege, can recommend us to God without it.

O blessed efficacy of grace, which makes the poor in spirit rich in virtue and good works; and that men are so enriched, humble and poor in spirit. Come, heavenly gift, descend from above, shed thyself into my soul, and fill every dark corner there with light and comfort; rouse and shake off my sloth, moisten the dry soil, and command fruitfulness out of that barren ground. Vouchsafe me, Lord, this blessing; for this alone is sufficient for me, though Thou shouldst think fit to deny or withdraw all that nature can either bestow, or is most fond of acquiring. Give me but this defence, and no temptation shall confound me, no calamity dismay or make me afraid. For this alone is strength and courage, wisdom and protection, stronger than all my enemies, and wiser than all human counsels and contrivances; the teacher of truth, the mistress of holy discipline, the light of the soul, the solace of troubles, the resolver of doubts, the balm of my wounds, the dispeller of melancholy, the banisher of fear, the cherisher of devotion, the parent of contrition, the spring of holy tears, and of all those streams that wash and purge polluted consciences. What am I without this but dry stubble, a rotten trunk, dead to good works, useless and unprofitable, and fit for nothing but to be trodden under foot, and cast into the fire? Let therefore,

O my God, I most humbly and heartily entreat, O let this grace and favour of Thine "always prevent and follow me, and make me continually to be given to all good works, that in all my actions begun, continued, and ended in Thee, I may glorify Thy holy name, and finally by Thy mercy obtain everlasting life. Amen, Amen."

CHAPTER LXI.

Self-denial enforced from Christ's Example.

CHRIST. The more, My son, thou forsakest thyself, the nearer approaches thou makest toward Me. As the desires and intemperate love of things without must be discarded in order to the peace of one's own breast, so even the love of one's own self must be laid aside in order to a perfect union with God. Learn therefore absolutely to deny thy own will for Mine, without contradiction or complaint. Follow Me, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Without the way can be no walking; without the truth no knowledge; without the life no living. Keep then in this way, for it is unalterable; believe in this truth, for it is infallible; hope for and aspire to this life, for it is true, happy, and eternal life. Continue in My way, and thou shalt know the truth, and the truth shall make thee free, that thou mayest inherit everlasting life. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." If thou wilt know the truth, believe My words. If thou wilt be perfect, sell that thou hast. If thou wilt save thy life hereafter, despise it here. If thou wilt be exalted in heaven, abase thyself upon earth. If thou desire to reign with Me, take up the cross with Me. For none but they who imitate My cross, are in the right way to happiness and true glory.

DISCIPLE. This way, O Lord, is strait and rugged, such as the world declines, and cannot endure to think of. Therefore I beg Thy grace would enable me to despise the world, and dissent from the general opinion of men, in compliance with Thy command and example. "For the servant is not greater than his lord, nor the disciple above his master." Let Thy servant then be guided in Thy steps, for with Thee is life and true holiness. And all I read or hear from any other hand, gives me no refreshment, no true delight.

CHRIST. "If thou knowest these things, My son, happy art thou if thou do them." For practice, and not knowledge, shall inherit the blessing. "He that keepeth My commandments, and doth them, he it is that loveth Me, and I will love him in return, and manifest Myself to him, and set him upon a throne with Me in My Father's kingdom."

DISCIPLE. Lord, make me a partaker of this gracious promise. The cross which I have received from Thy hand, I will bear with constancy even unto death. The life of a true Christian is indeed one continued cross, but since this is the way that leads to Paradise, it is by no means fit that I should depart from it, or repent of my holy resolutions and good beginnings.

Come then, my Christian brethren, let us advance boldly. Courage, for Christ is with us; He does not only lead us on, but will enable us to follow Him. For His sake we have taken up the cross, and for His sake we must persevere in bearing it. Behold, the King and Captain of our salvation marches at our head, ready to fight our battles. Let us, like gallant soldiers, follow; let us abandon our fears, and manfully prepare to die in the field; and not stain our honour and lose our crown, by flinching from that service and those hardships which He hath made our duty and our glory.

CHAPTER LXII.

Against being Dejected with Temptations.

CHRIST. Judge not, My son, of thy favour and acceptance with God by such false measures as the warmth of thy devotion and the delight which results from the discharge of thy duty. For I am better pleased with humility and patience, and deep contrition of heart in a disconsolate and afflicted state, than with an eager zeal and the most exalted acts of an easy and prosperous piety. And whence is it, dost thou think, that every little scandal which detracts from thy reputation so sensibly affects thee? Were it yet more to thy disparagement, yet could it not be worth thy concern. This is not the first injury of this kind, nor is it like to be the last, if thou live longer among men. And what is not new or strange, ought not to surprise thee. I know thy courage and pretended bravery, while danger keeps its distance. Thou canst discourse like a philosopher and a Christian, and give excellent advice to thy friends when they labour under any distress; but when their case happens to be thy own, and some unexpected calamity comes home to thee, thy prudence and resolution forsake thee quite, and thou standest no less in need of the counsel and support which thou were wont so freely to impart to others heretofore.

Let this experiment remind thee of thy own frailty, which, by such instances, appears not to be proof against the slightest misfortunes. For even these instances are greatly for thy advantage, and bring thee to a right and perfect understanding of thy own condition. Grow wiser at least at thy own expense; and as thy calmer reason shows they ought to be, so let thy behaviour manifest that these tender resentments of temporal evils are banished out of thy mind. If thou canst not entertain adversity

with absolute indifference, yet let it not drive thee to despondency and wicked distrust; and however the first onset may disturb thee, yet rally quickly, and let it not long overpower thee. And though perhaps thou art not arrived to that perfection "of counting it all joy when thou fallest into divers temptations," thou canst not be excused from undergoing them with meekness and resignation and patience. If thou art not yet got even thus far, but some indecent reflections rise up in thy mind, yet let not this secret indignation break out into irreverent expressions, but "set a watch upon thy tongue, and keep the door of thy lips." Resolve at least that "thy mouth shall not offend," and though thy heart be hot within thee, yet let not any passionate complaints burst out which may cast imputations upon the honour of God, impeach the justice and goodness of providence, or give offence to thy weaker brethren. For by thus manning and guarding well the outworks, thy inward commotions will in time be composed, thy sorrow by degrees shall turn into joy, and the favour and mercy of God be inclined to relieve and comfort thee, in recompense to thy reverence and submission to His good pleasure.

"As I live, saith the Lord, I will help thee speedily, and comfort them who earnestly seek Me, who put their trust in My salvation." Call up thy Christian fortitude, and sink not under thy burden, but prepare for greater trials. If thy former troubles have overwhelmed thy spirits, prevailed over thy temper and thy virtue, let not the remembrance of your former trials discourage thee. "The Lord knoweth whereof thou art made, He remembereth that thou art but dust." A man, and not God; flesh, and not angel, or unbodied spirit; how canst thou then expect to continue in an undisturbed state of goodness? How should thy virtue be above the shocks and shakings of temptation, when even the angels kept not their first estate, and man in Paradise so soon fell from innocence? I am thy sole protection, who raise the souls dejected with sorrow,

preserve those who acknowledge and bewail their own weakness, and glorify with Myself the humble Christians who are ashamed of their follies and miscarriages.

DISCIPLE. Blessed be Thy mercy, for the gracious words which drop from Thy mouth, soft as the gentle dew, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. What would become of me, in the extremity of my distress and anguish of my soul, did not Thy promises and seasonable instructions refresh and comfort me? But be it as Thou wilt; for I cannot think it any great matter how long or boisterous my voyage is, so Thou at last conduct me safe to that peaceful haven where good men are at rest. Let my afflictions be ever so great, so Thou grant a happy issue, and turn my sufferings to good effect. Be my condition in this life adverse or prosperous, no prosperity will profit, no adversity harm me, but in proportion to the state in which I die. And if I go well out of the world, my continuance in it cannot be so troublesome that I should have cause to repent or complain. Order my affairs then as Thou pleasest; but always, O my God, remember me for good. Lead me in the right and ready way to Thy kingdom, dispose my every action towards the attainment of salvation, and "let me so pass through things temporal, that I finally lose not the things eternal."

CHAPTER LXIII.

Against Prying into Things too high for us, and pretending to Fathom the Depths of God and Providence.

CHRIST. Do not, My son, take upon thee to dispute or determine anything concerning abstruse and difficult points, nor too curiously inquire into those mysterious dispensations

which God hath purposely concealed from thee. Concern not thyself about the amazing distributions of grace or providence; why one man is forsaken and in disfavour with God, another so surprisingly indulged by Him; this person exercised with afflictions and sorrows, or that so gently dealt with, so unaccountably exalted. These are things out of thy sphere; and all the parts and penetration, the acutest wit and acquired improvements of man, are much too short and feeble to enter into the reasons of the divine counsels. If therefore such curiosities return upon thee, look upon them as the suggestions of the devil, by which he labours to disquiet and unsettle thee. If men, impertinently busy, require a solution of such difficulties, content thyself with that general answer of the prophet: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and just are Thy judgments; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether; His righteousness standeth like the strong mountain," fixed and immovable, eminent and conspicuous; and "His judgments are like the great deep:" a vast and dark abyss, such as we cannot see to the bottom of, or fathom with the short line of a finite understanding.

My methods and dealings are to be admired and had in reverence, not saucily criticized upon by My own creatures. For no creature can have a capacity proportioned to them; and what men cannot comprehend they should not presume to take into examination.

As little ought they to inquire and dispute concerning the merits or the preference of good men; which of the saints excels in virtue, or is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. For these are questions in which men are no ways concerned, such as engender strife and debate, and turn to no good account. They cherish arrogance and pride, envy and faction, while men break into parties, and each contends for the pre-eminence of him whose order and patronage he is devoted to, or whom his own vain imagination inclines him most to honour. The effect of this is

very visible, and the mischiefs that spring from such an impertinent zeal exceeding numerous and lamentable: the controversy, neither possible to be decided, nor worth deciding if it were. And if those saints have any knowledge of what passes here below, this indiscreet and partial zeal cannot but be highly displeasing to them. For I am not a God of contention and faction, but of order and peace and love. And these are the genuine products of true modesty and humility, such as esteems others better than itself, but inconsistent with that bold assuming temper which is restless and discontented if any other be preferred before it. It may be affection and honest zeal may dispose some men to be more liberal in their respect on this or that side of the differing parties; but do not such consider that such affection is not the effect of grace or religion, but merely of human infirmity? These are such prepossessions as I can never be capable of; for all the saints are equally Mine. My hand made them men; My assisting grace made them saints; I enriched them with virtues, and crowned them all with glory. I know what each have done, what occasions they had, what improvements they made. I foreknew them before time was; they chose not Me, but I them; and singled them out of the common crowd. I drew them with the cords of love and mercy, conducted them through great variety of trials and afflictions, sustained them with uncommon comforts and recruits, enabled them to persevere, and rewarded the constancy Myself had given. I know the first and last; and My fatherly, My inexpressible affection extends to them all. For all are instruments of My praise and glory, so many monuments and eternal trophies of My goodness, freely advanced to what they are by My bounty and favour, without any right or antecedent merit of their own. He therefore who despises the least of these, is guilty of disrespect to the greatest; for this contempt reflects at last on Me, the author of their virtues and their happiness; and therefore in Me alone should all the

honour pretended to be paid to them centre. Their interests and properties are no longer separate; for charity hath made them one, and knit them into the same mystical body, whose honours and advantages and inclinations and joys are inseparably the same. Nay, which is the utmost perfection of charity, they all conspire in loving Me more than themselves, or any merits or respects of their own; for, being in that happy state exalted above themselves, they are entirely taken up with the love and honour of God. This is their happiness and utmost end Nothing can divert them to meaner prospects, no mixture of self comes in betwixt to damp the pure flames of this everlasting love.

Away then with these vain curiosities, these eager disputes, concerning the condition of the blessed; which betray a prevalence of carnal and sensual appetites, such as have no notions higher than particular gains and separate interests. Nature and partiality incline such dispositions to act and desire, and love and hate, upon private and personal considerations, and then they fondly transfer the same ideas and the same behaviour from earthly to heavenly objects. Alas! The difference is the widest in the world, and nothing in nature so distant as the silly imaginations of such novices in matters of another world from those juster apprehensions which minds, enlightened from above, entertain upon these occasions. Be not too curious then, My son, in matters above thy capacity; but rather let it be thy care and constant thought how thou mayest be found, though it be but the least, in the kingdom of heaven. For couldst thou understand all mysteries and all knowledge, couldst thou distinctly view the several orders and places of each angel and spirit above, yet what would this avail, farther than as it excited in thee less for thy own and greater zeal for My honour? The man who seriously reflects upon the multitude of his own sins, and the defects and worthlessness of his own virtues—how few, how poor, how far short they are of

the perfection of those bright examples heretofore—employs his mind upon a subject which God likes much better than such empty speculations of them who have set those examples.

This is a controversy which they themselves never trouble themselves about. For they ascribe nothing to any deserts of their own, but acknowledge the whole of what they have and are to be the sole effect of My infinite liberality and love And their happiness and honour is complete by the joy they take in the fruition of God and His glory. The more exalted any of these are, the more modest they are; the more dear, and the more like to Me. Thus much is intimated by that vision, where they are said to "cast their crowns at the feet of God, and falling down upon their faces before the throne, and before the Lamb, to worship Him that liveth for ever and ever."

How absurd is it to see men zealously contending who is greatest in the kingdom of God, who are not solicitous in the meanwhile to know, what much more nearly concerns them, whether they shall have any place at all there themselves? And yet to be least there is to be great, for even the least are sons and heirs of God. "A little one shall become a thousand, and the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner of an hundred years old shall be accursed." When the disciples inquired who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, this was the answer made to that demand: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Woe to them who disdain to imitate the humility and meekness of little children; for strait and low is the gate of heaven, such as the towerings of ambition and swellings of bloated vanity can never stoop to or enter at. Woe to the rich, who have their consolation in this world; for while the poor are admitted into Paradise, they shall

stand weeping and wailing without. But rejoice, ye meek, and humble, and poor, for yours is the kingdom of God, if ye heartily embrace and obey the truth, and be rich in patience and good dispositions.

CHAPTER LXIV.

God is all the Good Man's Hope and Confidence.

DISCIPLE. In whom, O Lord, is my hope, while here below; or what, of all the things under heaven, can minister peace and comfort to my soul? "Truly my hope is even in Thee," and my joy and trust in Thy mercy alone. When were my affairs in ill condition with Thee; or what can prevent my being exquisitely miserable without Thee? Poverty for Thy sake is infinitely rather to be chosen than all the riches and greatness in the world in exchange for Thy favour; and earth and exile with that favour more blissful than heaven without the fruition of Thee. For heaven is heaven by Thy blessed presence; and where that does not reside, all is death and the grave and hell. Thou art my desire and my portion, and therefore to Thee my sighs and groans, and cries and prayers, continually ascend. I have no other stay or refuge who can send seasonable and suitable relief to all my dangers and necessities; but Thou alone art my hope and trust, my effectual comforter and faithful friend.

Others pursue their own private ends and advantages, but Thou seekest my improvement and happiness, and orderest all things for my good. Even my temptations and afflictions are appointed to do me service. These are the methods by which the fidelity of Thy chosen is brought to the test;

and even the harsher dispensations ought as much to engage my affections, and excite my gratitude and praise, as the brightest comforts and most desired prosperity. In Thee therefore, O my God, I rest my soul; Thou art my sanctuary, where I deposit the burden of all my griefs and troubles. For there alone can they and I be safe, since all things else are feeble and uncertain, neither able nor always disposed to comfort or protect me. Friends cannot do what they wish; great men will not or cannot help; the wise, without Thee, mistake their measures; books are but insignificant diversion, and yield no solid consolation; wealth cannot buy ease and peace of mind; fortresses and coverts cannot hide me from calamity, unless Thou be with those friends, and strengthen those great men, and direct those counsellors, and instruct me by those books, and assist me in the use of wealth, and guard that strong retreat. For peace and happiness are entirely in Thee. Thou art the end, the sum, the source of all good; the perfection of life, the depth of wisdom and knowledge; and hope in Thee is the surest, the most sensible support Thy servants can have in the miseries of this mortal life.

To Thee therefore lift I up my eyes, O Father of Mercies, and lover of men. Comfort my soul in trouble, and purify it with Thy grace, that it may be a clean and holy habitation such as Thy glorious Majesty does not disdain to dwell in. Let no impurity be left in this temple; but purge it thoroughly from everything which may offend those eyes that cannot behold iniquity or uncleanness. Look upon me in Thy great goodness, and, after the multitude of Thy mercies, hear the prayer of Thy poor servant, now wandering in a distant and desolate wilderness. Oh, keep my soul and deliver me, lead me safe through this vale of sorrow and danger, and conduct me by the way of peace and holiness to my own home, even my heavenly country, the land of promise, the presence and eternal fruition of my God!

BOOK IV.

OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

CHAPTER I.

The Reverence due to this Holy Sacrament.

THE INVITATION.

CHRIST. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Take, eat, this is My body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

DISCIPLE. These, blessed Jesus, are Thy words on which my soul securely rests itself, because my Saviour, who is eternal truth, hath spoken them. These the gracious and condescending invitations which I find scattered in holy Scripture, as occasions offered for making them. These therefore I will receive with holy gratitude, with humble but entire confidence, and grave them upon my soul in deep and indelible characters. For though they be Thine, as the author, yet do I claim a property in them, and justly call them mine too, as a person for whose benefit and salvation Thou wert pleased to utter them. Most gladly therefore will I receive them at Thy mouth, that the authority of the divine Speaker may make the more effectual impression. And stupid I must be beyond imagination, if encouragement so sweet, so kind, do not awaken and very sensibly affect me.

But alas! at the same time that Thy call inclines me to come, my own grievous transgressions fly in my face, and the terrors of a guilty conscience keep me away. Thy goodness, I own, lifts my wings, and bids me boldly attempt the raising my soul to heaven and happiness; but I feel the bitter remembrance of my sins checking those flights, laying me prostrate upon earth, reproaching my better hopes and nobler intentions with presumption, and ever weighing down my mind with the intolerable burden of heinous numberless offences, which render me unworthy the least of all Thy mercies.

In this perplexity of thought Thou hast most seasonably interposed with Thy reviving comforts, hast made that faith and trust a virtue and a duty, which I should have shunned as a crime, and, conscious of my own vileness, durst not have entertained. Thou bidst me raise my dejected looks and direct my steps to heaven; and I seriously desire (as who indeed can but desire?) life and glory. Thou exhortest me to begin to live immediately, by taking the sweet foretastes of immortality in that bread which is the food of souls. Thy kind invitation therefore I greedily attend to: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." O charming sound in the ears of a sinner! How joyful is the news to a poor, lost, impotent wretch! One who, in a due sense of his own vileness, thinks even the meanest of Thy gifts, which conduce to his bodily sustenance, too good for him! To be invited to eat of Thy most blessed body, and admitted to partake of the lively figures of Thy divine blood, the commemorations of Thy death, and sure pledges of salvation! Lord, what am I, that I should thus be suffered to approach Thee! Nay rather, that Thou shouldst come to me, and dwell under my roof! O unspeakable condescension! O unexampled kindness! Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee! and yet Thou vouchsafest to take up Thy abode with man, that is a worm! The angels are not pure in

Thy sight, and yet Thou sayest to wretched sinners, "Come unto Me, ye that travail, and are heavy laden."

I find myself at a loss whence such astonishing kindness should proceed, or what may be the meaning of so friendly an invitation. My misdeeds testify against me, and I am but too sensible that no merit of mine could induce my Lord to make it. So far from that, that even now it is made, I know not with what face I can either approach my God and Saviour, or bring Him to me, or hope to keep Him there; Him, whom I have so often, so grievously provoked, so justly made my enemy for ever. But were there no demerits of my own to discourage this attempt, yet, who am I, that the Majesty of heaven and earth should stoop so low as to enter under my roof? Behold, angels and archangels, principalities and powers, fall down and worship Thee! Behold, the brightest saints, and spirits of just men made perfect, tremble at Thy presence; and yet Thou sayest, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." Had this been spoken by any mouth but Thine, men could not have believed it. Had not Thy own command inspired this confidence, sinners durst not have attempted to move towards Thee, but would have rather used their utmost industry to flee from the presence of their Master and Judge. But be it so, we are commanded to come to Thee; and Thou vouchsafest to come to us. Yet what solemnity, what preparation, can be sufficient for Thy reception! Noah, that righteous person, employed a hundred years in building an ark by God's direction, for the saving himself and a very few souls besides; and how shall I be qualified, by the application of an hour or two only, to entertain the Maker of the Universe, and meet Him with that humble reverence which is due to so terrible, so glorious a Creator, from the vilest and most unworthy of all His creatures? Thy servant Moses, admitted into familiar conversation with Thee, by a privilege not imparted to the rest of mankind, framed an ark of cedar-wood, and overlaid it with pure gold, to be a fit

repository for the Tables of the Law; and shall I, wretched rotten trunk, take upon me, without ceremony, to receive the Almighty Maker and Giver of that law? Solomon, the wisest of princes, spent seven years in building a magnificent temple to the honour of Thy name; eight days were taken up in the dedication of it; a thousand peace-offerings were then sacrificed upon the new-erected altars; and the Ark of the Covenant, with sound of trumpet and much other holy pomp, was conducted into the place appointed to receive it. And how unlike to these great saints am I, dust and ashes, chief of sinners, and meanest of men! How shall I pretend to invite Thee, my God, into my house, who am so far from spending a number of years or days, that I can very hardly afford one poor half-hour? Nay, would to God that wretched remnant of one poor half-hour were but employed as attentively, as devoutly, as it ought to be, to provide Thee a clear and acceptable apartment in this homely cottage of my heart. How eager, O my God, how persevering was the zeal of those ancient worthies. How cold, how short is mine, when I set myself to prepare for meeting and receiving Thee. My thoughts, alas! are very rarely consistent, but a thousand wanderings and impertinent distractions intrude upon me, and hardly can I collect the powers of my soul into so composed a frame as becomes our more immediate addresses to Thee. I am not unmindful of Thy presence, then more peculiar than at other times; I reflect upon the indecency and sin of suffering my heart to divide itself; I know that when an honour so great is intended me, as that of receiving the Lord of men and angels, it ought to enlarge and devote its whole capacity to Thee. And yet I cannot fix and fill it with this one object; but, in despite of all my endeavours and self-reproaches, frailty will prevail.

Nay, the same care and reverence were much too little, where the dignity of the thing is so much greater. For what comparison can there be between an ark with its

ceremonial symbols, and the mystical body of my blessed Saviour, with all the wondrous effects of His passion? How poor and despicable were those legal sacrifices, whose greatest excellence and commendation was, that they typified and foretold that one only perfect and sufficient Sacrifice upon the cross, which in this Sacrament we at once commemorate, and apply the virtue of to ourselves? If then the patriarchs and prophets heretofore expressed their zeal and devotion, by all the marks of reverence and profound respect, to those figures of the divine presence, and shadows of good things to come, shall I be negligent in my preparations to meet my God Himself? Shall I not indeed as much exceed the great solicitude and pious affection which kings and peasants, rich and poor, universally expressed, as the spiritual participation of my Lord's body and blood, and the most precious pledges of His love and my salvation, excel the carnal dispensation of a figurative tabernacle, and the very distant and dark significations of future blessings? They adored the representation, and shall I disregard the substance, the end, the perfection of all the Levitical institutions, the sum of all God's mercies and man's hopes? If even David thought it no disparagement to his royal character to lay out his time, his study, his strength, in the service of the tabernacle, to compose psalms for the worship of God, to string his own harp, and himself join and preside in the concert; nay, even to dance before the ark, when brought up to its place; and by his own example to teach his subjects to exert their utmost might, and employ every faculty of body and soul in expressing their zeal and joy; what holy gladness then is due, what inflamed devotion to Him, whom David in spirit called Lord? What songs of praise and thanks should adorn that solemn feast, where Christ exhibits to us the heavenly manna, the food of souls? How shall we labour to omit no testimony of our reverence, no sign of a hearty welcome, and a humble sense of the unspeakable

honour this King of Heaven does us, when He vouchsafes to come home, and dwell in our hearts; and, by the consecrated elements, verily and indeed to give and unite Himself to every faithful soul?

See with what eager zeal vain men make long pilgrimages, and fly to the remotest corners of the world, only to gain a sight of the boasted relics of some celebrated saint; to be entertained with long accounts of miracles, to kiss a silken rag, or prostrate themselves before a bone set in gold! But alas! were all the legends these fond men give credit to most true, yet what is here that can deserve their mighty pains or tedious journeys? What shrine can pretend to sanctify or command veneration in any degree comparable to that saving and mystical presence of God Himself upon the altar? The poor effects of such mistaken zeal are but too manifest. Men generally go for curiosity and diversion, not for the improvement of their minds; and they return accordingly—better in no respect, except in having seen a thing much talked of, which they never had seen before. 'Tis to be hoped but few are so blind, so wretchedly deluded, to imagine that such penances and painful travels can do them service without true contrition and serious reformation of life. And where these are, much more substantial advantages may be had a great deal nearer home. For lo! the King of Saints invites us; He gives the sure and blessed fruits of righteousness and salvation to all who worthily receive Him: an invitation in compliance with which levity and sensuality, a roving head, or a gadding humour, have no part; but all is done by the wise and well-weighed grace of a steadfast faith, the comfortable assurances of a devout hope, and the affectionate zeal of a sincere and holy love.

Oh, mighty Maker of the World, whom though we plainly see in all Thy works of wonder, yet Thou Thyself remainest invisible, how astonishing are Thy dispensations to the sons of men! How sweet, how comfortable, how full of

efficacy, yet still how unaccountable to sense and reason, are the methods by which Thou art pleased to communicate Thyself to the faithful in this blessed sacrament! Here Thy chosen and worthy servants partake of that heavenly food which nourishes their souls to life immortal, while reprobate and bold intruders take empty elements void of spiritual substance and saving power. This is a mystery above our comprehension. This kindles in us holy zeal, and engages our devoutest affections. And by receiving creatures, in themselves of mean and common efficacy, we find our weaknesses strengthened, our decays recruited, and our love of Thee and virtue strangely heightened and confirmed. Who can express, who can conceive, that hidden, that amazing distinction made in this holy Supper, whose graces and good effects are so liberally distributed to the faithful; and yet unbelievers and impenitent men have no portion, no experience at all of them? Who can discover those mystical methods by which spiritual grace is conveyed with bodily sustenance? How bread and wine should be made instruments of strengthening the soul, of purging away the blemishes and reproaches of nature, healing her deformities and diseases, taking out the stains of sin and vicious habits contracted by conversing with a naughty world, subduing furious passions, rectifying and moderating irregular desires, and invigorating both the body and mind of feeble sinners at once?

Such is the new life and health and sprightly vigour which good and godly men experimentally find upon these occasions. And who then can sufficiently lament the general lukewarmness, the cold neglect, the senseless stupidity of mankind upon this occasion? How regardless are they of Christ? How hardly prevailed upon to accept their own mercy, their sanctification, their redemption, in the ways prescribed by Himself for imparting these glorious advantages? How rudely do they turn their backs upon that feast, which creates joy in heaven, and preserves earth and

its inhabitants from misery and ruin! Oh! the wretched blindness, the inflexible obstinacy and hardness of men's hearts, which will not see, or seeing will not value so inestimable benefits, which turn their very happiness into an occasion of destruction, by suffering the frequent opportunities, and the very easiness of attaining these precious privileges, to bring them into a general disesteem; which make the greatness of their Master's love, the abundant provision for their health and support, a pretence for starving in the midst of plenty.

For I can scarce persuade myself but that, if this holy Sacrament could be had in one place, and from one single hand only, men would with eager zeal repair thither, and vast crowds of people strive to partake of so rare a blessing. But now, when every church and every festival, when every priest, and almost every Lord's day, exhibits this delicious food, brings it home to our doors, and offers it to as many as are religiously and devoutly disposed to accept the gracious tenders; when every sermon exhorts, entreats, conjures us to be thus happy, we turn our backs, and slight the cheap, the easy favour. Yet manifest it is, that the kindness of our Lord is not the less, but much the greater, for putting the terms of our salvation within our own power, and leaving the whole blame and condemnation at our own doors, if we refuse to take what without our fault we can never want. And shall we then proceed to nauseate and disdain our greatest blessings? To think them less valuable for being more common? No, blessed Jesus! We will acknowledge thy unspeakable bounty; we will most thankfully confess Thee the Good Shepherd, who hast provided such rich sustenance for Thy sheep, and leadest them out into fat pastures. Blessed be Thy eternal mercy, who vouchsafest to give Thy body, not only for but to thy poor servants in this disconsolate state; who not content to sacrifice it once upon the cross, offerest it daily in the Sacrament; and hast silenced all the fears and melancholy misgivings of our

own guilt and unworthiness, by that most tender and compassionate, that most extensive and universal invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," with the burden of your sins, "and I will refresh you."

CHAPTER II.

The Love of God to the Soul manifested in this Sacrament.

DISCIPLE. Behold, Lord, thus encouraged, thus invited, I come; but I do not presume to do so, "trusting in my own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies." I feel, alas! my weaknesses and wants, and betake myself to Thee for relief; sick and diseased, I fly to the Physician of souls; hungry and thirsty, to this Fountain of living water and Bread of life; poor and needy, to the bountiful King of Heaven; a servant to his kind Master; a creature to his compassionate Creator, who hateth nothing that He hath made; and a forlorn disconsolate wretch, to Thee, the holy, the eternal, the only Comforter. But whence is this to me that my God should vouchsafe to come unto me? Or who am I, that thou shouldst communicate to me Thy own self? How shall a wicked sinner dare to appear before Thee? Or how canst Thou, who art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, endure to make such condescending approaches to a soul polluted with sin and with uncleanness? Thou seest my very inward parts, and knowest I have nothing in me that is good, nothing to invite such mercy, nothing fit for the reception of so pure, so glorious a Majesty. I will therefore most humbly confess my own vileness and Thy unspeakable goodness; I will most thankfully praise and admire and adore Thy marvellous love and exceeding

abundant grace. For this is purely Thy own act. Nothing on my part could deserve, nothing could move Thee to it. The more unworthy I am, the more conspicuous is Thy goodness, the more amazing Thy mercy and condescension. Since therefore Thou art pleased to stoop so low, be it unto me according to Thy word. Since Thou hast thought fit to command my approach, I will most gladly testify my ready obedience; and only beg that my own sinfulness may not render me odious in Thy sight, nor frustrate these inestimable mercies to me.

O sweetest, kindest Saviour, what humble reverence, what devout thankfulness can be great enough? What praise can be sufficiently expressive of that love which admits so poor, so miserable a wretch to the participation of those divine mysteries, the dignity whereof no tongue of men or angels can worthily set forth? But when I thus address myself to my Lord, and am allowed such intimate familiarities with Him, what sort of reflections ought to fill my breast? To approach Thee with all the profound respect due upon such occasions is impossible. I will therefore supply my want of ability by the earnestness of my zeal, and most humbly beseech Thee to accept those hearty desires of the inestimable benefit, by which my soul and all its faculties thirst and pant most impatiently after Thee and Thy righteousness. When Thou art the subject of my meditations, the matter is too vast for regular thought; the idea too dazzling bright for a finite understanding; and I quickly feel myself lost in wonder and astonishment. I will therefore turn my eyes inward, and entertain myself with the less pleasing indeed, but no less profitable prospect of my own unworthiness; laying my soul low before Thee, and from the sense, how little, how mere a nothing, how much worse than nothing I am, will take the measure of Thy greatness, and form ideas of Thy infinite goodness. I praise Thee, O my God, from the bottom of my heart; and extol Thy name for evermore. I despise and detest myself, and with the deepest humility put my soul into Thy hand,

that Thy favour and grace may exalt me, and make this despicable wretch something, who, without Thy mercy, is less than nothing.

O the wide extremes! O the immeasurable distance between God, the essence and perfection of holiness, and man, the very abstract of filth and sin! Yet does this God extend compassion, and look down with pity on those who are not worthy so much as to lift up their eyes to Him. Yet does He come to us, delight to be with us, promise to dwell with us, call and entreat and importune us to sit and eat deliciously with Him. He invites the naked and hungry, the beggars and vagabonds, to His own table; feeds them with angels' food, feasts them with the bread of heaven, even that "living bread which came down from heaven," on purpose "to give life unto the world."

Oh! Whence could all this mighty love proceed! What account can be given of such wonderful condescension, such tender regards, to lost unworthy creatures! What thanks, what praise, what humble adoration do those so highly obliged, so particularly favoured creatures, owe in return for them! How wise, how saving, was Thy design in the first institution of this holy Supper! How rich, how delightful a banquet hast Thou prepared for Thy guests, by ordering Thy own body and blood for the mystical entertainment of the faithful! How astonishing are the operations of Thy grace and power! How incomprehensible the methods of fulfilling Thy most true promise! Thou spakest the word in the beginning, and all things were created; and by the same almighty word Thou commandest bread and wine, and they nourish souls to life eternal.

This is indeed a subject contrived for the exercise not so much of our reason as of our faith. We are not able to account for the mighty efficacy of elements, in their own nature contemptible and weak. We know not how that God, whom the whole heavens cannot contain, should dwell in the hearts of men; but this we know, that Thou hast promised, by and with this Sacrament, to enter into and abide in all

worthy receivers; and Thy truth is sufficient to silence and vanquish all those imaginary difficulties which cavilling and curious men form to themselves about it. Come then, and enter and live and reign in me for ever; cleanse and adorn with Thy grace the place of Thy peculiar residence; preserve my heart and body free from all impurity, and remove far away whatever may be offensive to Thy holy eyes; let this vessel of mine be constantly possessed in sanctification and honour; that with a peaceful and spotless conscience I may frequently approach and eagerly receive these adorable mysteries which Thou hast appointed for the comfort and salvation of those whom the King of Heaven delights to honour; and for devout and lively commemorations of Thy own most bitter but most meritorious and precious death.

And thou, my soul, rejoice and be exceeding glad for so noble a favour, so heavenly a refreshment, so rich a consolation, to support and sweeten thy passage through this vale of tears and misery. For every time thou attendest these holy mysteries, thou "dost spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink His blood;" thou dost act as it were over again the work of thy redemption, and with great effect partake of thy Saviour's merit and sufferings. For His love continues always the same, and the excellence and worth of His propitiation is an inexhaustible spring of mercy. Come therefore hither with new exalted zeal, enlarge thy heart and its desires, and doubt not but thou shalt, at every approach, return with fresh and plentiful accessions of grace. Let not the frequency abate thy devotion; for this favour should always seem great, this feast always honourable, and the delights of it always new. And by the force of pious meditation, the mystery will affect thy wondering mind at every repetition, as if the Son of God were just that moment born from the womb of His immaculate mother; as if thy suffering Redeemer were in that instant labouring under all His agonies; and thy own eyes beheld Him hanging, and bleeding, and dying on the cross.

CHAPTER III.

The Benefit of Communicating often.

DISCIPLE. Behold, I come to Thee, O Lord, desirous to partake of Thy promises, to be enriched with Thy gifts, and feasted with that heavenly banquet which Thy compassion hath prepared for hungry and drooping souls. I know, O Lord, in Thee is all I need, all I can desire; my health and safety, my hope and strength, my honour and glory. "Quicken, therefore, and cherish the soul of Thy servant; for unto Thee, O blessed Jesus, do I lift up my soul." It is my earnest longing to receive Thee with a becoming reverence and devotion. The height of my ambition is to bring Thee home to my house; and, with Zaccheus of old, to be blessed and reckoned by Thee among the true spiritual sons of Abraham. My soul desires to be fed and strengthened by Thy body, and my heart to be entirely knit, inseparably united to Thee.

Give me but Thyself, and whatever else Thou withholdest I am satisfied. For all things besides are miserable comforters, and rather aggravate than abate my wretchedness. Without Thy consolations I am not able to subsist; and therefore I feel an absolute necessity of coming to Thee often for fresh supplies of grace and strength. My spirits languish and sink, and if I fast too long, I perish for want of seasonable recruits from this heavenly sustenance. Thy bowels heretofore yearned over the multitudes who came from far to hear Thy saving doctrine, and to be healed of their bodily distempers. Thou wouldst not send them away empty, but wert pleased to feed them by a miracle, lest they should faint by the way. Extend the same compassion towards me, and let this Sacrament sustain my fainting soul in this wilderness, barren and remote from any true comfort. For Thou art the sweet, the reviving food of sinking and

weary spirits; and they who worthily partake of this repast, are nourished unto life eternal. I am sadly sensible of my infirmities and frequent relapses into sin, and how urgent my occasions are for these repeated refreshments. I quickly cool after my warmest resolutions; my purposes of goodness sicken and languish apace; and these decays must end in spiritual death, did not my prayers, my self-examinations, my confessions and holy sorrows, preparatory to this holy feast, often return; did not this divine sustenance cleanse and renew my affections, confirm my purposes of doing well, excite and inflame my zeal and love for God and good works. Obstinate fasting would not more certainly quench all my vital heat and destroy my body, than too long abstinence from this spiritual food will waste and quite extinguish the soul and all its powers of living well.

I find and heartily bewail a fatal tendency to evil; and my experience, from my very cradle, shows me how strongly I incline to sin, and fall from bad to worse, except a remedy from above check this indisposition, and succour and support me from plunging into hell. This holy Communion is that remedy. It calls back my wandering steps, prevents my falling by relapse or neglect, and strengthens me in grace and goodness. And if, even in my studied and most laboured devotions, I am so often cold, so lukewarm at the best, how frozen should I be, how insensible and dead, were these helps laid aside, and no such application used to warm and quicken me! Though therefore my life be not so perfect that I am always in a fit disposition to communicate, yet it shall be my care, at solemn and proper seasons, not to lose the benefit of these holy mysteries, or ever to refuse my own happiness. For this is the sovereign balm of wounded consciences, the great preservative of decaying souls, the cheering comfort of the faithful, mourning their present state of banishment, and groaning earnestly for a release from the afflictions and infirmities of those mortal bodies, to which Thy providence hath for a time confined them. And the oftener

they thus remember their God, the greater is that affection and humble devotion with which they court and embrace their beloved Spouse and Lord.

But oh! how amazing is Thy love! And what is man, whom Thou vouchsafest to visit, when the great God, the Creator of the world, and Father of the spirits of all flesh, does not disdain to descend into a poor soul, and fill the hungry wretch with all His fatness? Happy that breast which is thus honoured, and unspeakable the joy with which it overflows! How glorious a master, how agreeable a guest, how pleasant a companion, how faithful a friend, how beautiful, how honourable, how charming a husband, does it entertain and embrace! Let heaven and earth, and all their boasted excellences, keep silence before Him; for if I have my Jesus I have all. For I have Him, from whom all other things derive their excellence; and their borrowed precarious perfections can minister no joy, can make no happiness, without this great original. They in themselves are nothing, they are but what He made them; and He alone is more, incomparably more and better, than all that ever was, or could be made.

CHAPTER IV.

The Pleasures of Devout Communion.

DISCIPLE. Prevent me, I most humbly beseech Thee, my Lord and my God, with the blessings and graces of Thy Holy Spirit, that Thy servant may taste Thy sweetness, and approach this precious feast with such reverence and zeal and fervent devotion as Thou wilt be pleased to accept. Oh, visit me with Thy salvation, and awaken me from spiritual sloth and slumber, that I now may vigorously apply myself

to draw and drink the living water contained in this fountain open for sin and for uncleanness. Enlighten the eyes of my mind, that I may see the wondrous things of this Thy institution; and strengthen my faith, that I may firmly and without scruple believe and expect those operations which my reason is not able to account for. And why indeed should I make any difficulty to believe what I cannot comprehend and trace the dark footsteps of; when I remember that it is not the act of finite feeble man, but the work of an Almighty God; not an invention or project of human reason, but the institution and promise of Him who worketh all things according to the wise and wonderful counsel of His own unbounded will? To fathom these depths to the bottom were an attempt impracticable, even to the refined understanding of an angel. Well then may poor short-sighted man turn giddy at the sight of this abyss, and confess the well too deep, and the cordage too short. Such and no better is the condition of the most exalted saints; and what can I, the feeblest even of men, vile sinful dust and ashes, hope to discover by my most industrious search into these heavenly mysteries?

Instead therefore of nice reasoning and unprofitable disputes, I will approach with singleness of heart, with firm and holy hope, with an undoubting faith and profound reverence. Whatever the vanity of worldly wisdom may suggest to the contrary, I will not question but Thou art present in the Sacrament, though I cannot satisfy the captious inquiries after the particular manner of that presence. Thy human and divine nature are inseparable; thus much I know, and no more but this: that Thou art so present as God, as not to contradict Thy being man. 'Tis upon this account that Thou art pleased to command my receiving Thee, and hast engaged to make me one with Thyself, by the strictest union of a holy love. Shed, therefore, I pray Thee, Thy special grace into my heart, that I may dissolve in this holy fire and become entirely Thine. Purge off my

dross, and let me no more endure the allay of any baser mixtures. For this Sacrament is the purest, the noblest refiner of souls, the health of the whole man, the restorative of spiritual decays, the cure of vice, the curb of passions, the antidote against troubles and temptations, the conveyancer of greater grace, the increase of imperfect virtue, the stay of hope, the support of our faith, and the mighty incentive of our charity.

Who can express the manifold, the astonishing benefits, which Thou frequently impartest to Thy beloved and religious servants, by communicating in this blessed Supper? Even Thou, my God, the cherisher of my soul, the repairer of my breaches by infirmity and sin, and the restorer of my inward comfort and peace. By this Thou sustainest them in sadness and affliction, and enablest them to walk upon the waves of a troublesome world. By this Thou cheerest their melancholy and distrust, and raisest up their sinking spirits with assurance of Thy gracious protection and assistance. By this Thou renewest their nature, and purifiest their affections; that they, who came at first to this table with great lothness and dulness, feel a new warmth within, and by degrees are brought to frequent it with unspeakable relish and delight. These happy and glorious effects Thou producest by such uncommon, unlikely means, that men may find experimentally their own infirmities; how little they are able to do of themselves, and how much, when strengthened by Thee. That they are cold, insensible, stupid and dead to all religious duties, is from their own disposition; that they are zealous in good works, cheerful in Thy service, devout in Thy worship, is purely Thy gift. And sure none can come hither with tolerable attention, but he must return with some improvement. For who can lie at the fountain-head, and not receive some tincture from the sweetness of the spring? Who can stand close to the fire and feel no heat? But Thou art a fountain ever full, ever overflowing. Thou art the fire, whose flames are constantly expanding them-

selves to kindle holy affections in all those who are careful to approach, and put themselves in the way of their activity.

It may be I am not worthy to drink at the head of this spring, or to take my fill of its refreshing streams; but yet at least I will apply my mouth to some of its distant pipes and spreading rills, to catch a few of the drops as they slide by, that I be not utterly barren, nor die with drought and thirst. I may not be able to approach this flame so near that it should refine and brighten me to a degree equal with the purity of the cherubim and seraphim; but yet I will not despair of being so far cherished and warmed by it, that my zeal may be exalted according to the brightness of human virtues, and my enlivened heart shall feel some glowings, if it do not flame out heavenly clear. Defects and infirmities, I know, I cannot be exempted from; but what is wanting, I beg my merciful Jesus would supply. His kindness will not fail to make all equitable allowances, and His wisdom knows where they are propet to be made. Forgiven and made up they may be, and I, unworthy as I am, may be accepted. But that unworthiness must not be made a pretence for detaining me from this Sacrament. For sure the most unworthy are comprehended, and they who see and lament that they are such, can least of all be excluded when He pronounces that general invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

The oftener I descend into myself, the more I am convinced that this description exactly suits my state. I fulfil the primitive sentence upon fallen man, and labour in the sweat of my face. The sorrows of my heart perplex and distract me, the burden of my sins presses me down, the multitude of my temptations are a perpetual torment and vexation; the variety and exorbitance of my corrupt affections entangle and confound and overpower my reason. And in the midst of these calamities and dangers

I have no succour, no defence, no supporter or deliverer, but only Thee, my God; and therefore into Thy hands, my merciful Maker and Saviour, I commit myself and all my affairs, and beg that Thou wouldst keep what is thus deposited with Thee safe unto life eternal. Oh, take me therefore into Thy custody, and, as Thou hast ordained Thy body and blood to be the food of immortality, so grant that it may have its proper efficacy upon my soul in particular, to the glory of Thy name, and the honour of so blessed an institution. And, that no neglect or unfruitfulness of mine may obstruct its kindly and powerful operations, grant, I beseech Thee, my God and Saviour, that I never may be guilty of such disrespect as wilfully to turn my back upon Thy table, but may earnestly long for, heartily rejoice in, and diligently comply with, every opportunity of receiving this mighty blessing; and may so frequent and so improve under Thy merciful dispensation, that I may constantly return, with greater care and zeal, more settled resolutions, more irreconcileable hatred against sin, and more fervent love for God and goodness, than before. So shall I approach nearer to Thee indeed, and each Sacrament prove a fresh advance toward heaven. So shall my soul be filled with the treasures of Thy mercy, the delights of Thy secret ones, and the ravishing foretastes of that bliss, which shall be always growing, till it be consummated at last in that eternal feast above, the marriage-supper of the Lamb in Thy kingdom. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

The Dignity of the Sacrament and Honour of the Priesthood.

CHRIST. If thou seest the table richly furnished, and art desirous to feast upon these dainty meats, let that desire be duly tempered with reverence and holy fear. For know, that if thou hadst the purity of an angel, or the mortified piety of John the Baptist, yet even thou couldst not deserve so divine a blessing, but oughtest to acknowledge it a mighty favour and condescension that thou art admitted to receive and taste, or even to touch, this blessed Sacrament. That man should consecrate those elements, and by pronouncing a set form of words introduce a new efficacy, and give them a mystical power which Nature neither did nor could provide them with before; that the persons present should eat the bread of angels, and be filled with heavenly food, by virtue of such consecration; these are not the effect of any extraordinary merit in them who sanctify, or who receive, those creatures of bread and wine, but the pure and sole effect of mercy and grace. The greatness of the mystery does indeed magnify the priestly office; and men ought to pay a more than common respect to those persons whom God hath honoured with a privilege not imparted to the very angels themselves. For they who are regularly ordained in the Church, are the only persons by whose ministry God gives the body of His Son to us. They are the persons acting by His commission, they use the form appointed by Christ Himself, and have a constant mighty effect attending upon their due administration. But still our thoughts and wonder must not terminate in them, as if by their own power and holiness they could bring such things to pass. For they are only instruments; and therefore we must carry our meditations further, up as high as God Himself, for He is the first and principal cause,

He the invisible worker of this miracle of mercy. It is His word which made and governs all things, that only can command material and common elements to produce spiritual and extraordinary effects, and strengthen and refresh the souls of the faithful by the body and blood of Christ, at the same time, and with as certain operation, as their bodies are strengthened and refreshed by the bread and wine.

When therefore thou approachest the Christian altar, rest not in the testimony of thy senses, nor dwell upon the "outward and visible signs;" but let thy faith carry thee on to "the inward and spiritual grace," and exercise itself in contemplating the almighty power of God. And thou, to whom the invoking this power and its efficacious presence is committed, see that thou do it with awful reverence and godly fear; consider whose servant thou art, and what a glorious character thou hast received by imposition of the bishop's hands. For thou art ordained a priest for noble and religious purposes. The excellence of thy office consists in giving thy Master's family their portion of meat in due manner and season. Be faithful therefore in the execution of this weighty trust; proceed in it with a fervent and exemplary devotion, and let it be thy first care to offer up thyself an unreprovable sacrifice to God. Do not imagine any part of thy privilege to consist in an exemption from the duties incumbent upon common Christians. Alas! thy burden is not less, but greater; thy temptations more and fiercer, thy danger more imminent, for being thus distinguished. For it will be expected that the sanctity of thy manners, the severity of thy virtue, the conquest of thy passions, the perfection of thy holiness, the fervency and zeal of thy devotion, should distinguish thee as visibly, as eminently as thy garb and thy profession do. That thou shouldst be clothed and adorned with that righteousness, that innocence, that gravity, of which thy robe is a significant emblem; and as thou art become a leader, thou shouldst likewise be a pattern to the flock. For the conversation of

such persons should be no longer conformable to the customs and corrupt examples of the world, but conformed to the angels in heaven, or to the saints that excel in virtue upon earth.

When thou enterest into the holy place, and there puttest on the garments of thy function, consider what thou art going about, and how high a place thou hast obtained: no less than to be the representative of the great High Priest in heaven, and to minister in His stead unto His people. First, therefore, with all humility bewail thy own unworthiness, and confess thy own sins. Then, with a most extensive charity and tender compassion, bewail and intercede for the sins of others. Look upon thyself as a mediator between God and transgressors; to offer up their prayers, confessions, and thanksgivings to Him; and to hand down His pardon and blessing to them. And be not slothful or unthinking, careless or cold in this affair; for it is most important, and requires thy most diligent attention, thy most earnest importunity, thy most indefatigable perseverance, never to be abated till thou have gained thy point, and prevailed for mercy and grace by those resolute wrestlings with God. But when thou celebratest the holy Supper, remember thou art about a work which all heaven and earth are concerned in. A work which, when performed as it ought, brings honour to God, joy to the blessed angels, edification to the Church of Christ, conversion to sinners, peace to wounded consciences, comfort to the afflicted, strength to the feeble, and to thyself abundance of grace, and an exceeding great reward.

CHAPTER VI.

An Act of Preparation before the Sacrament.

DISCIPLE. Behold, Lord, with Thy wonted mercy, the doubts and confusions of my troubled breast. For when I look up to heaven, and consider the majesty of my great, my holy God, and from thence draw my eyes back upon myself, and view my own vileness and horrible sinfulness, I am all perplexity and distraction and horror. Thou biddest me come, and if I refuse or neglect to comply with that gracious invitation, I forsake my own mercy, and deprive myself of life and happiness. But if I come unworthily, I am equally miserable, and shall be punished for the high indignity of bringing so polluted a guest to so pure and heavenly a feast. What course then shall I take to be safe, when danger and death threaten on either hand? I will even fly to Thee, my God; and instead of consulting with flesh and blood, or hearkening to the deceitful insinuations of my too rash or too timorous reason, will ask counsel of Thee, my infallible and only oracle in distresses.

Teach me, I beseech Thee, the right way, and lead me in such methods of holy preparation as may be proper and suitable to so exalted an act of religion. I know that these approaches to Thee in the blessed Sacrament are exceeding beneficial and delightful; but make me know withal in what manner Thou must be approached, to render that which is desirable in itself safe and profitable to me in particular. Give me, I beseech Thee, a due sense of the greatness of the mystery, and the excellence of Thy mercy in it; and consequent to that, fill my soul with pure and holy affections, with earnest longings, with godly sorrow, with sincere and steadfast resolutions, with profound reverence and ardent devotion, that my heart may be a clean, though homely, receptacle for my Saviour, such as

He will not disdain; and I so well disposed a guest at this divine feast, this spiritual sacrifice, that Thou mayest bid me welcome to Thy table, and the food I receive there may nourish me up to health and life eternal. Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

Of Self-examination.

CHRIST. Above all keepings, keep thy heart; and whether priest or private Christian, take good heed that at thy coming to My holy table, thy devotion consist not in outward gesture and pomp and show only. I am not to be imposed upon with such empty formalities, but require an upright, humble, and devout mind; a mind low and prostrate as thy body, a steadfast faith, and pure intention, and unfeigned zeal for God's honour. Therefore, before thou presume to approach, examine well how thou art qualified. Search every corner of thy conscience, and do thy utmost to purge and cast out all remains of the old leaven. Let no sin unrepented of reproach thee, no lust unmortified divide thy affections, and hinder thy free and entire resignation to My will. Conceive a just hatred and indignation against all thy sins in general; andfor those which are either too gross to be overlooked, or too habitual to be forgotten, express a particular and proportionable resentment of sorrow and shame. And if thou have time and leisure, look well into the irregularities of all thy passions, and in thy private retirements make a full confession of them between God and thy own soul.

Recollect and bewail the unhappy prevalence of worldly and carnal affections, every exorbitant desire, every ungoverned passion. Observe how the motions of evil con-

cupiscence abound and domineer; how unguarded thou art in thy outward behaviour, and the general course of thy conversation; how easily thou art seduced by vanity; how vehemently disposed to the gratifications of appetite and sense; how careless and stupid in the weightier concerns of thy soul; how apt to let thyself loose to laughter and extravagant mirth, and how exceeding loth to mourn for thy sins with a true, saving, and necessary contrition; how eagerly thou pursuest the pleasures and advantages of the body, and how heavy and slothful thou art in the exercises of mortification and godly zeal; how mighty curious and inquisitive after news and trifles, and greedy to be entertained with every pomp and beauty that can please thy sight; but how negligent and backward, how full of disregard and disdain to things of less gay appearance, but of true inward worth, and mighty consequence to thy better state; how greedy of gain; how sparing in thy alms; how tenacious of this world's goods; how inconsiderate in thy discourse, how childish and trifling, how wicked or obscene; how lavish and profuse; and what a torment it is to "set a guard before thy mouth, and keep the door of thy lips;" how affected or extravagant in thy behaviour, how eager in thy actions, how inordinate in thy appetites; but how slow and deaf to the Word of God; how negligent in hearing, and how inflexible to be persuaded by what thou hast heard; how prone to rest and ease, and how averse to labour and necessary care; how wakeful and attentive at plays or balls, and how drowsy and lifeless in prayer and holy duties; how impatient till they are done; and how full of wandering and impertinent thoughts while they are in doing; how easily diverted from thy stated hours of devotion; how lukewarm in receiving the blessed Sacrament, how unfixed in thy mind at the very time of communicating, and how barren and unprofitable afterwards; how soon provoked to anger upon every slight miscarriage, and yet how apt to give offence to others; how prone to judge and

severely censure thy brethren; how stiff and positive in those judgments and hard constructions; how insolent and immoderately exalted with good fortune, and how feeble and dejected under every cross or disappointment; how full of good intentions, and how few of those intentions have any good effect.

These, and many other defects, of which each man's own conscience can best inform him, it is thy duty to inquire into very nicely, to bewail seriously, to confess with the profoundest humility, and with firm purpose of amendment for the time to come. When this is done, then, without any secret reserve to thy own inclinations, resign thyself up entirely to God, to be governed by Him, and offer to the glory of His name "thy soul and body a holy, living, and reasonable sacrifice." Thus shalt thou come to Me worthily, and receive My mystical body to thy infinite advantage.

For there is no other satisfaction in man's power to make for his great affronts and manifold provocations against the Majesty on high; no oblation more acceptable than that of a broken and contrite, a pure and upright heart, offered to God in this Sacrament. He desires nothing but thyself, and He desires this, not for His own, but for thy sake. He who brings it let him not doubt acceptance; for God never despises or rejects a true penitent, but embraces returning prodigals with the tenderness of a father; and grants them pardon for the past and grace for the future. His word, His oath is passed. And He who cannot lie may securely be depended upon. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live;" and "at what time soever the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive: repent therefore, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, and so iniquity shall not be your ruin. For I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and your sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

CHAPTER VIII.

Christ Died for Us that we should Live to Him.

CHRIST. Behold, and take example by Me. I hung upon the cross with a naked body and stretched-out arms, and thus offered Myself to My Father for thy sins. No part of Me remained which was not given in atonement to appease the wrath of thy justly incensed Judge. And thou in like manner must think it thy duty, freely and wholly to give up thyself a clean and holy sacrifice. Every power, every affection of soul, must be consecrated to me in the blessed Sacrament. What doth the Lord require of thee, but to consult thy own interest, and save thyself, by conveying over thyself to Me? Whatever else thou dedicatest to My service is of no value, no consideration with Me; for I seek not thine, but thee.

As all the world besides would fail of procuring thy happiness and satisfaction if deprived of Me, so all thy wealth and gifts set apart for My use can never be well-pleasing in My sight unless with them thou givest thy own self. My whole person was sacrificed for thy redemption; either of My natures singly had been insufficient to propitiate for thy sins; My whole body and blood is set upon My table for thy entertainment; and what can be the meaning of all this, but that I should be entirely thine, and thou entirely Mine? But if thou art not sincere in this oblation, if it be made with any provisoes and exceptions, the offering is not perfect, the sacrifice is maimed, defective in its parts, and the union which should follow upon it must be proportionably lame and imperfect. The first thing therefore to be taken care of is the liberal and full resignation of thy person. This must recommend and sanctify all thy other acts of religion; and till thou art released from the bondage of divided affections, thou canst not attain grace and true

liberty. Hence it is, and upon no other account, that of so many professors and seemingly good Christians, so very few stand fast in the liberty with which Christ hath made them free. The condition is fixed and irreversible: "If a man forsake not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." And therefore if thou desire to be found in this happy number, enter My courts with a free-will offering, and consecrate every inclination, every faculty of thy soul. Have no love, no desires, but Mine. Submit thyself wholly to My holy will and pleasure, and study to serve Me truly in holiness and righteousness all thy days, in all the actions of thy life.

CHAPTER IX.

An Act of Self-resignation.

DISCIPLE. It is very meet, right, and my bounden duty that I should do as Thou requirest; for this, O Lord, is but to give Thee of Thy own. Heaven and earth are Thine, and all that therein is. I desire with singleness of heart to dedicate myself to Thee, never to retract the gift, but continue Thine for ever. Accept me therefore entirely devoted to Thy service, from this day forward a sacrifice of praise and perpetual thanksgiving. I call those blessed spirits to witness, who, though invisible to human eyes, constantly assist at our solemn acts of religious worship, humbly beseeching Thee, that the oblation of Thy dear Son's blessed body represented in this Sacrament may be effectual for the salvation of me and of all Thy faithful people.

I offer to Thee, Lord, my manifold sins and transgressions, my corrupt inclinations and vicious habits, which from my youth up until now have so grievously provoked Thy wrath

and just indignation, to be a whole burnt-sacrifice. Slay them, O Lord, before Thy altar, and consume them in the fire of Thy love, that not any the least spot of guilt may remain behind. Purge my conscience from their stain, and wipe out their very remembrance. Restore to me Thy grace, which my sins and wilful neglects have so often forfeited. Give "me the comfort of Thy help again, and establish me with Thy free, Thy renewing Spirit;" and having sealed a full pardon for what is past, receive me to Thy Fatherly embraces, and assure me of Thy affection by a kiss of reconciliation and peace.

What satisfaction can I make for my injuries and bold affronts to Thy righteous laws but that alone of humble confession, deep sorrow, and hearty prayers, for Thy acceptance of Thy Son's atonement? I do most heartily bewail and detest all my wickednesses, and by Thy grace will never be guilty of the like any more. I do, and will to the last minute of my life, grieve for these follies; and am desirous, by my future carriage, to testify the truth of my repentance, and make the best reparation I am able for the scandal I have given formerly. O Lord, pardon; O Lord, forgive; defer not, for Thy own sake, O my God; but let Thy mercy be glorified in sparing the soul of Thy servant, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood. Behold, I commit myself wholly to Thy mercy, and deposit my spirit in Thy hands. O deal with me according to Thy great goodness, and not after my sins and grievous wickedness.

To Thee I humbly offer all in me that is good. A very poor imperfect offering, I with shame confess it; but worthless as it is, I beg Thou wilt accept it. Supply my defects, sanctify and exalt what is debased with infirmity or impure mixtures, disdain not my sincere though weak endeavours, enable me daily to do better, and raise at last this slothful, unprofitable creature to such degrees of virtue and successful activity, as may, by the more diligent use of Thy grace, end in a blessed and bright eternity.

I also offer up to Thee the prayers and good wishes of all that have interceded for me, or desired my intercessions for them; the necessities and distresses of my friends and relations, and all that have done good to me or others for Thy sake, imploring that Thou wouldst assist them by Thy grace, comfort them in their troubles, protect them in all dangers, deliver them from punishment and death eternal; and so rescue them from evil, that they may magnify Thy good providence, and with thankful hearts rejoice in Thy mercy.

In a more particular manner accept, I beseech Thee, my most hearty prayers and peace-offerings for all who have injured me in word or deed, created me any disturbance by ill treatment, slandered or reviled me with ill language, or given me any manner of uneasiness or angry resentment. And likewise for all whom I have injured, grieved or offended by word or deed, knowingly or ignorantly, with or without design, entreating thy forgiveness for all that hath been done or taken amiss on either side. Take away, Thou who lovedst and diedst for Thy enemies, all rancour and malice, all grudges and revengeful thoughts, all passionate remembrances and dispositions to strife and debate, all that may be inconsistent with true charity, or tend to the decay of brotherly love. Have mercy, Lord, on all who sue for mercy; supply the needs of all that want; and grant us all such measures of Thy grace, and so firm perseverance in it, that we may grow up to such degrees as this mortal state is capable of here, and may receive our perfect consummation and bliss both in body and soul in thy eternal and everlasting glory. Amen.

CHAPTER X.

The Sin and Mischief of Absenting from the Lord's Supper.

CHRIST. It is by no means sufficient that men do once, or very rarely, repair to this holy Sacrament; but as their occasions and necessities are frequent, so should their care in seeking supplies be. The passions of the soul are daily in commotion, and its diseases and evil habits get round by their malignant spreading quality. The temptations of the devil are seldom intermitted, or if they be, it is only out of wicked subtlety, that even those intervals of quiet may contribute the more effectually to men's ruin. And if this be, as most assuredly it is, thy case, think then how urgent thy wants are, and how frequent thy returns ought to be to this fountain of divine grace; that here thou mayest drink living water, and quench the raging fevers of thy soul; that here thou mayest receive balm into thy wounds and apply proper remedies to thy several indispositions; that thou mayest grow more wise and wary by such recollections, more clearly understand thy own state, by those examinations which prepare thee for My table; and by repeating this holy meal, be strengthened against the assaults of the enemy, and more upon thy guard against his subtle insinuations. And one of his insinuations it certainly is to hinder and draw men off from communicating often, as being very sensible how great and happy advantages they reap by doing so, and that this is the very best course they can possibly take of securing themselves, and defeating his malicious endeavours to debauch and destroy their souls.

For this reason men are not to think it strange if they find the devil then more especially busy, when they set themselves with more than common earnestness to the preparation for or the exercise of the most solemn and exalted acts of religion. For this wicked spirit, as the history of Job intimates, is always industrious to mingle himself with

the sons of God when they appear before their heavenly Father. He contrives then to give them great disturbance, to damp their joys, and break their holy purposes, by suggesting many fears, and distracting their minds with unnecessary scruples. He terrifies them with "eating and drinking their own damnation," and keeps them back by mistaken notions of their unworthiness and danger. If he can either thus prevail for a total neglect of this Sacrament, or contrive that they shall come full of doubt and dissatisfaction, he gains his point. But be not ignorant of his devices; inform thyself rightly of thy duty, and wherein unworthiness doth truly consist; that nothing but want of sincerity and true reverence can bring thee into hazard, and then despise his vain attempts to discompose and evacuate thy good intentions. Retort his wicked craft back upon his own head, by being more vigilant, more careful, more resolved; but by no means omit this duty, nor suffer thyself to be drawn off from that communion, which is the sovereign antidote, the best preservative against sin and temptation.

If he labour to disguise his devilish arts under the specious colour of caution and humility, and want of more perfect devotion, lay aside thy unprofitable and disquieting anxieties, and flee for succour and advice to some godly pastor. Let his prudence direct thy doubting steps, and unbosom thyself freely to him; that by confessing thy sins, and opening thy case to the Physician of souls, thou mayest receive the benefit of ghostly counsel and the comfort of absolution. Know that no sin can hurt Thee, or render thee an unworthy receiver, when once confessed and seriously repented of; and that when this is done, all thy doubts and perplexities hinder the grace of God, and check thy improvement in piety and devotion. Let not any ordinary trouble or affliction deter thee from coming to thy Lord for relief, but make the greater haste to reconcile thyself to God, and purge away those offences which may have provoked and drawn down the affliction upon thee. Let not

any difference between thee and thy brethren detain thee; for there is a short and ready way of removing this obstruction, by forgiving and praying for those who have grieved or injured thee, and by reconciling thyself and asking pardon of those whom thou hast offended. And if they still be so perverse as not to be reconciled upon a due submission, yet consider their obstinacy and wickedness ought to be no obstruction to the performance of thy duty. Thou hast done thy part, and God will be sure to forgive and accept thy person, though men do not.

What benefit can a man possibly propose to himself from the putting off examination and repentance, and forbearing to come to the holy communion? Most certainly when one is diseased, the greatest wisdom is to get well again as soon as possibly he can; to expel the malignity, and discharge the venom immediately. Thus will the cure be easier, more speedy, more successful. For every delay adds to the distemper, and gathers fresh and more obstinate matter. If you omit the present opportunity upon one pretence, another, and more prevailing, may interpose, and deprive you of the next. And thus by degrees you will be wrought upon to excuse thyself again and again, and by longer abstinence become less fit, as well as less willing, to return to your duty. Whatever burden then you find upon your mind, get quit of it betimes; do not indulge your sloth and backwardness a moment; for there never can come any good of prolonging your cares and troubles, and making the common hindrances of worldly business a reason for neglecting your great, your eternal interest. This is most manifest, and experience will prove the truth of it when it is too late, that the longer you defer communicating, the less you will find yourself disposed to it; and a strange carelessness and disregard for holy exercises will insensibly creep upon your mind, and get a mighty head. But, which is a most lamentable thing to consider, many loose and dissolute, nay, many thoughtless and lukewarm people, allow themselves in this

indifference, and industriously seek pretences to defer their repentance and approaches to the Lord's table, merely to avoid, as they think, the necessity of parting with their darling lusts, and the keeping that strict guard upon their conversation, without which they must be lost to all eternity.

How cold, alas! is those men's love for Me! How feeble their devotion, who, upon such frivolous pretences, can dispense with this so necessary duty, so glorious privilege, of communicating at My table! How happy, how easy to himself, how acceptable, how dear to God, is that man, whose conduct is so strictly virtuous, whose conscience so void of stain and reproach, that he could every day most cheerfully, most safely partake of this heavenly feast, were the opportunities of doing it equal to his disposition, and might his zeal escape the censure of needless ostentation! For a man is not presently to be condemned who does not seek or embrace every possible occasion of communicating. There may be some very allowable, and others even commendable, reasons for absenting. If out of deep humility and awful reverence, or as a voluntary punishment inflicted upon a man's self for some grievous relapse, he impose this penance, or dread to come; the respect paid to the ordinance, or the holy indignation conceived against himself, may be better accepted and more becoming than receiving in such circumstances. But this must not be so far indulged, that long disuse should produce indifference and disregard for the Sacrament. For if once the soul degenerate into neglect and spiritual sloth, all possible endeavours must be used to awaken it. Not doubting but that God will be ever present with the assistances of His grace, and second thy care with success proportionable to thy vigour and diligence, and the sincerity of thy good intentions.

But one thing must always be observed, that when the hindrances to communicating are real and important and necessary, not frivolous excuses industriously sought, or

readily laid hold on, to cover impiety and negligence, the person so detained is present in wish and inclination, though not in actual attendance. And then the benefit of the Sacrament, and all the saving effects of it, are as fully imparted to him as his appearance in the congregation, and the elements themselves could have ensured them. For it is a great mistake to imagine that good men receive not the advantages of Christ's body and blood, except just then when they receive the outward and visible signs of them. Every day, every hour, furnishes opportunities of communicating spiritually; and a man thus composed can never be surprised, never find any difficulty to comply with any occasion of doing it publicly. For an innocent life and a devout mind are a constant preparation. But when the usual seasons return, and especially the solemn festivals, wherein the great and glorious mysteries of the Christian religion are commemorated, then such a one will think it his duty to join with the public assemblies in this sublimest instance of piety and thanksgiving; he will approach with a heart full of affection and reverence, and esteem this homage due, not only to himself for the comforts and advantages he may expect from it, but more especially to Me, for the honour and tribute of praise by which My name and mercies ought to be thus magnified among men. And this is a fruit which can only redound to Me by open and visible acts of worship. Whereas the other, of private improvement and mystical communion with Christ, is attained in secret, and constantly follows upon every religious meditation concerning My incarnation and sufferings, or any other of the mysterious works by which the redemption of mankind was completed, and the pious affections of Christians are cherished and inflamed.

They who reserve themselves for the feasts of the Church only, and take no care to put their souls in a due posture for receiving, except only when such solemnities call them to it, are seldom or never prepared as they ought to be. He

is the safe, the happy man, who makes it his frequent practice, and constantly offers up himself a sacrifice to his God. In the act of communicating, keep rule and order, and let not thy haste or impatience, the length of thy private devotions, or any other singularity of thy own fancy, give disturbance to the common usages and ceremonies of the congregation, whereof thou art a member. For take this along with thee, that, even in this part of worship, where zeal and devotion are most acceptable ingredients, yet these very qualifications, when indulged out of season and measure, lose all their value; and are not half so pleasing in the sight of God as unaffected modesty and a humble decent compliance with the established orders and customs of the Church, and the convenience of others, who ought not to be disturbed or incommoded for the fantastical or peculiar ways of any private person whatsoever.

CHAPTER XI.

The Benefit of Christ's Body and Blood.

DISCIPLE. O sweetest, dearest Jesus! Who can express the charms, the transports of that soul which feasts with Thee at Thy table; that table where no common food is placed, but the divine entertainment of Thy own body and blood? An entertainment delicious, above all that man can express or imagine! What satisfaction should we take to come into Thy tabernacle, and fall low on our knees before Thy footstool, to open wide our hearts for the delights of Thy house, and, with Mary Magdalen, to wash Thy holy feet with tears of love? But where, alas! is this devotion to be found? Where are those eyes overflowing with pious sorrow? Or, if that sorrow be swallowed up in

joy, yet ought we not even thus to approach Thee with dry eyes, but tears of joy should trickle down apace, when we consider our mighty privilege, and the happiness of being admitted to Thy blessed presence, and made partakers of the bliss of angels. For, as they really behold Thy face in glory, so am I sure to see and to receive Thee in the mystic elements; though covered there under a different form, and shrouded in a veil of bread and wine.

I adore Thy goodness, which thus condescends to the infirmities of human nature, and in much compassion is pleased, under these sensible representations, to hide that glorious majesty, whose native lustre is too piercing bright for me or any created being to behold in its full strength. But though my eyes see Thee not as Thou art, yet here, I know, I have Thee most effectually, and do therefore most humbly adore that divinity on earth which angels prostrate themselves before in heaven. I do it through a glass, and I gaze with the eyes of faith; they are permitted to do it "face to face, and to know even as they are known." And, though this glass be dark and dim, yet it is such as I ought to be content with, since mortality admits of nothing better; nor can I attain any higher perfection till the day of everlasting life dawn, and the thick shadows of figures are scattered by its brightness. When that which is perfect shall come, then will all use of sacraments be superseded, and for ever cease. For these are remedies and expedients accommodated to a state of frailty and imperfection, such as the blessed above have no occasion for. They are in endless and unspotted perfection, and ever rejoicing in the beams of Thy glorious presence. They see Thee as Thou art, and are transformed into the excellences they see. They taste the Word made flesh, not in the symbols of His human nature, but in the native charms of His divine; as He was the Word of God from all eternity, and shall continue so to be for ever.

When these ideas, so full of wonder, employ my thoughts,

I not only feel a generous disdain of worldly comforts, but am provoked to disesteem even those spiritual and better consolations which Thy grace at present diffuses through my soul. And all besides seems poor and despicable, so long as I am debarred the sight of my love and Lord. Thou knowest the secrets of my heart, and wilt bear testimony to the sincerity of those professions I make; when I declare that nothing less than God, whom I most earnestly long for ever to contemplate, can satisfy and fill the impatient desires of my enlarged soul. But this, I know, is a blessing not to be obtained by mortal man, and therefore I will set myself with patience to wait the time appointed for it. Thus did Thy saints of old, who now partake of the joys and kingdom of their Lord. Their faith was vigorous and their perseverance unshaken, their thirstings eager, but their patience exemplary and humble; till that coming of their Lord, which they thought long, at last released and exalted them. My hope, my faith, are now the same which theirs were then; and I trust my joy and crown shall, by Thy grace and mercy, be one day the same too. Till that day come, I will tread in their steps and support myself by the contemplation of their bright examples. Thy holy Scriptures shall be my comfort. In them, as in a glass, I will view and adorn my soul. And above all, Thy blessed body and blood shall be my spiritual sustenance. Here will I seek for strength against infirmities, here apply balm to my wounds, and physic to my diseases, and hither fly for refuge in all my fears and dangers and temptations.

Two things are plainly necessary to the preservation of life, without which no misery could be so insupportable as that of living here. The dismal confinement of this prison of flesh can only be endured by the help of food and light. Thy mercy hath not left us destitute of this provision, but kindly given Thy holy body for my refreshment and sustenance, and Thy holy Word for "a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths." To these I owe, not my

comfort alone, but even my life itself. For the Word of God is the light of the soul, and the sacrament of His death is the bread of life. These are the two tables of the Christian, resembling those of the Jewish Church heretofore; where the divine treasures are exposed and preserved. The one, like that of the shew-bread, furnished most richly with the symbols of Thy precious body; the other, like the repository of the law containing holy doctrines, prescribing true and saving faith, and leading us within the veil to the most holy place.

All honour and praise and thanksgiving be to the blessed Jesus, Light of eternal uncreated light, for the table of His heavenly doctrine, spread and adorned by the ministry of His inspired servants, the prophets, apostles, and other holy writers, taught by Himself, that they might teach us. All glory and thanks be to the great Creator and merciful Redeemer of mankind for His extensive tender love, in preparing a plenteous feast for all the world. Not like that Paschal lamb of old, a type and shadow only, but the very substance of that shadow, the accomplishment of that type, even "Christ our Passover sacrificed for us," and exhibited to us. This bread sustains, this cup cheers and rejoices the hearts of the faithful. It fills them with the overflowing delights of Paradise, is a pledge and antepast of Heaven, and allowing for the difference of condition, admits us into partnership with angels themselves. The joy of both is the same, though both cannot receive it in equal proportions.

How high and honourable is that function to which God hath permitted, nay, enjoined, to minister in these holy things; to handle and deliver this blessed bread, and give each servant his portion of life by and with it, to implore with wonderful efficacy the divine blessing, and exalt natural and common things to purposes and effects infinitely exceeding all the powers of Nature? How clean should those hands, how pure those lips, how chaste and holy that body

be, which so frequently, so familiarly converse with, and are united to, the author and perfection of all purity? Sure nothing of corrupt communication, nothing indecent, nothing idle or trifling, nothing but what may tend to edifying, ought to come out of that mouth, which so often blesses and consecrates, and takes into it the Sacrament of his dying Redeemer. How should those eyes be turned away from vanity, how immovably fixed upon heavenly objects, which see their Lord's mystical body, and invite His peculiar presence, so frequently brought upon the altar, by virtue of their being lifted up to the throne of grace, in benedictions and prayers of His own instituting.

To men of this profession under the law, no doubt that precept was in a more especial manner intended: "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." But sure the sanctity and exemplary lives of priests under the Gospel ought as much to excel those of the sons of Aaron as our ministration exceeds theirs in glory. And, therefore, grant Thy grace, O blessed God, to all who are admitted to this holy office; and Thou, who alone workest great marvels, exert Thy almighty power, in enabling every such person to serve at Thine altar, with clean hands and a pure heart, with a becoming zeal and moving devotion; such as may not only suit their own character, but be a pattern and powerful incitement to the piety of others. And if we cannot (as indeed we are still but men, and in many things offend all), if we cannot stand before Thee in pure unblemished innocence, or come not up to all those eminent degrees of perfection, which we might and ought, yet let at least our deep and godly sorrow expiate our offences, and our resolutions of entire reformation and more conspicuous piety and devotion for the time to come. Our unfeigned humility and charity unconfined, and labours indefatigable, make such reparation as Thou wilt please to accept for the miscarriages occasioned by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by our own carnal will and frailness.

CHAPTER XII.

Of Preparation to the Communion.

CHRIST. I love holiness, and I give what I love. A pure heart is the thing I delight in, and this is the place of My rest. Furnish Me thy largest room, and I will come and eat the Passover at thy house with My disciples. Purge out thy old leaven, and dress up every corner of thy heart; sweep it clean from the world and all its filth of thy sins, if thou desire that I should come and make My abode with thee. Sit as a sparrow alone upon the house-top, and mourn in thy closet for all the transgressions wherein thou hast exceeded; so will I be with thee, and comfort thee, in the bitterness of thy soul. Thy careful preparation will be the natural consequence of thy sincerity and respect for Me. For every lover provides his best apartment to entertain his friend and best-beloved; and, by his diligence to receive so desired a guest, expresses the truth and greatness of his affection.

But know withal, when thou hast done thy utmost, that even whole years bestowed in preparation cannot effect what in strict justice is My due. That thou art admitted to My table, and received kindly there, is owing, after all, not to thy own desert, but to My grace and mercy, which accepts thy weak endeavours, and passes by thy sins and unworthiness. If beggars, with their nakedness and sores, have leave to sit and feast with princes, their duty is, with humility and thankfulness, to acknowledge the mighty favour. Do then thy part, and do it in the best manner thou canst; do it diligently and heartily; come not as by compulsion, but come willingly and gladly; come not for fashion sake, but come with reverence and godly fear, and fervent zeal. When thy Saviour condescends to come to thee, refuse Him not, nor turn thy back and flee from His table. I

have invited, I have commanded thee to come; let not thy infirmities discourage thee, for they are all perfectly known to Me; and I will consider and allow for them, and what is wanting in nature shall be supplied by grace.

When thou feelest thy heart burn with love and devotion, return thy thanks to God for kindling these holy fires. I did it, not because thou art worthy of such grace, but because I had compassion on thy weakness and thy wants. When thou findest thyself cold and insensible in religious duties, double thy diligence and thy prayers,, lament thy deadness, and continue knocking. For if thou persevere, and wilt take no denial, thou shalt not ask in vain, but be fed at least with the crumbs that fall from thy Master's table. Thou standest in need of Me, but I have none of thee. It is for thy benefit, not My own, that I vouchsafe to meet thee at this Sacrament. Thou comest hither to be filled and strengthened and sanctified; to return better than thou camest, to receive increase of grace, to be one with Me, and dwell in Me; and those who come sincerely disposed to receive Me, and amend their life, I will in no wise send empty away. Do not then neglect those precious opportunities; do not absent, or come carelessly; but make Me room in thy heart, and let it be a clean and fit reception for so pure a guest, and He whom thou lovest will go home with thee to thy house.

But then observe that there is the same necessity of care and watchfulness after this Sacrament, as of prayer and preparation before it. For a constant virtuous life, and strict guard over a man's self, are the best and most effectual preparation to every sacrament, and the surest means of obtaining more and greater degrees of grace. A man who presently returns to the world, and gives himself a loose to the liberties and affections, the business and the pleasures of it, undoes what he hath taken pains to do before, and defeats the good effects of his most solemn preparation. Be not fond of variety of company and

diversions nor lavish and unwary in thy discourse; but rather choose to retire into thy chamber, and converse much with God in solitude and silence. When thou hast Him, thou hast a treasure which nothing can take from thee. I am worthy of thee all, and I expect thee all. Divide not thyself between Me and the world, but let Me be thy love, thy joy, thy desire. "So shall thy life be hid with Christ in God;" and though thou canst not live in thyself, yet thou shalt live in Me, full of tranquillity and peace, far above the disorderly passions and ruffling cares of sensual and earthly-minded men.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Soul's Desire of Union with Christ.

DISCIPLE. I hear Thy gracious words, my dearest Lord, and easily believe the inexpressible happiness of them whose souls Thy heavenly presence fills. But how, oh! how shall I attain that bliss? How shall I seek and find my God alone? how open my heart to entertain Thee, so as to exclude all other intruding guests? Oh, that no man, no creature, might from henceforth find place in my affections and desires, so as to interrupt my conversation with Thee! When shall I break loose from company and care, and enjoy and talk with Thee alone in language free and kind, as that of dearest friends; and soft and tender, sweet and charming, as the unreserved retirements and endearing whispers of the most passionate lovers? This is my earnest wish, this my constant prayer, that my heart may be knit entirely to Thee, and weaned from every earthly and sensual delight, learn to taste heavenly and eternal joys by frequent returns to Thy

holy Communion. Ah, when, my God, shall I be wholly Thine, regardless of myself, swallowed up quite in a blissful indissoluble union with Christ? "Thou, Lord, in me, and I in Thee;" and thus may we continue one for ever!

Thou verily art my beloved, my chosen, the chiefest among ten thousand, the friend of my bosom, with whom I desire to dwell all the days of my life. Thou art my peace and only comfort; without Thee I find nothing but labour and sorrow, vexation and torment and misery insupportable. Thou art a "God that hidest Thyself." Not dealing Thy blessings promiscuously, but with wise and just distinction satisfying the humble and meek with the pleasures of Thy Word, while Thou concealest Thy counsel from the wicked, and leavest them to groan and howl in the anguish and horror of their guilty souls! Oh, how great is Thy bounty! how sweet Thy mercy! who refreshest Thy hungry servants with the delicious bread which came down from heaven, that Thy faithful might eat thereof and not die. Surely there is no nation under heaven which hath God so near to them as the Lord our God is unto us, in all that we call upon Him for. For He "healeth the broken in heart, He hath respect unto the lowly;" He "lifteth the simple out of the dust, and raiseth the needy from the dunghill, to set them with princes," to equal them with angels; nay, to give them His flesh for the satisfying their hunger, and when they are thirsty, the wine of His blood to drink.

What society of men can boast of privileges worthy to be named with those of the Christian Church? What creature is there under heaven whose excellence and happiness is comparable to that of the pious and devout soul, where God takes up His residence, and sustains the heart that entertains Him with His own glorious body? O grace unspeakable! O condescension most amazing! O love immeasurable! Lord, what is man, that Thou shouldst thus visit him? Or what can he render unto his God for these inestimable benefits? Alas! I have no return

to make but a poor worthless heart. And this is yet a further instance of Thy goodness, that Thou expectest no other testimony of gratitude but myself and my sincere affection. Thus hast Thou made our duty our greatest happiness; for then shall my soul be glad, and all that is within me leap for joy, when my heart is perfectly united to my God. Then shalt Thou say, "If thou wilt be Mine, I will live and dwell with thee for ever:" and I with humble joy reply, "Disdain not, Lord, this mean and homely dwelling, for I most willingly, most thankfully embrace the offer. Lo, I am Thine entirely from this moment, and, above all things, wish and pray that the intimacy and friendship thus contracted may continue firm and inviolable, that nothing may abate our love and the delights of it, or ever part our persons any more."

CHAPTER XIV.

An Act of Exciting Devotion by the Example of others.

DISCIPLE. "Oh, how plentiful is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!" When I reflect with what ardent piety, with what affectionate devotion, with what an eager zeal, Thy saints approach this heavenly Supper, shame and confusion overwhelm me quite, conscious of my own, but lukewarm at the best, and too often perfectly stupid and frozen heart; with what indifference and coldness I approach Thy mysteries, and how unaffected with Thy mercies, how unprofitable under the gracious dispensation, I return! What a reproach is it that my heart should not be all inflamed with the excess of Thy love; that I should have no sense, no apprehension, of my greatest

happiness; no hungerings and thirstings after it? But, notwithstanding the moving examples of many excellent persons, should still continue void of all impressions, so scandalously unlike those pious souls whose zeal overflowed in tears of joy, whose hearts, as well as mouths, drink greedily at this fountain of life, whose appetites were so strong as never to be satisfied till they had filled themselves with Thy blessed body, and fed liberally and with a sort of holy luxury indulged at the celestial banquet.

A faith so eager, so exalted, plainly confessed they felt Thy gracious presence; and that their Lord was known to them, as heretofore to the disciples at Emmaus, in "breaking of bread." The burning of their hearts within them was an irrefragable testimony of it. But how far short, alas! do I come to their zeal and devotion? Look mercifully, Lord, upon my infirmities. And, if an equal portion of Thy grace be too great a favour for Thy poor unworthy servant, yet grant me such a degree, such a sense of Thy goodness and wonderful love, that I may be as sincerely, though not so strongly, affected with it. If raptures and ecstasies of delight may not be my portion, yet deny me not improvement. But let my faith be strengthened, my hope confirmed, my love so warmed with this Sacrament, that, after having once tasted this heavenly manna, I may never more desire the "onions and garlic of Egypt," nor in my heart turn back from so good a God.

I know Thy mercy and Thy power, to which nothing is impossible, nothing hard. I know Thou canst, and I hope in Thy good time Thou wilt, visit me with more abundant measures of Thy grace, and fulfil all my desire. This confidence I cherish, because my very desires are from Thee. And it is some comfort to me, that though I am sensible of my weakness and my wants, yet I long and pant after supplies and strength; that I am not content with my misery, but labour and pray against my defects, and would fain be better. And thus I will continue to do, till Thou

remove and vanquish my frailties, inspire a bright and ardent zeal, and make me a happy partaker, first of the virtuous disposition of Thy devouter saints, and then of their reward and happiness.

CHAPTER XV.

Grace is the Reward of Humility and Self-denial.

CHRIST. Since thy wishes are so commendable, and thy desires of grace sincere, I will instruct thee how thou shalt obtain it. Know, then, this blessing is suspended upon certain conditions. It must be sought instantly, asked fervently, waited for patiently, received thankfully, preserved by humility, improved with diligence, and the time and measures of it submitted entirely to the wisdom and goodness of the heavenly Giver. If thou feel few or no sparks of it in thy mind, this is a proper subject to exercise thy meekness and godly sorrow, but not to provoke despair or immoderate concern. For God frequently gives that in an instant, and with a liberal hand, which men had long expected without success; He gratifies their constancy and patience, their importunity and perseverance in prayer, with benefits, which excellent reasons moved Him to deny to their first requests, for the petitioners' mighty advantage.

Should men's earliest expectations be answered, or prevented, the mighty blessing would be too exquisite for frail nature to bear. And therefore holy raptures and exalted virtue are wisely made the slow fruit of long time and much patience. But when thy desires are not fulfilled, when thou receivest no increase, or when the grace thou once enjoyedst is insensibly withdrawn, charge not God foolishly, but

lament thy sins, as the occasion of this unhappiness. A small provocation may sometimes be a bar to great advantages. Though nothing indeed ought to be reputed small, which intercepts and hinders so valuable blessings. But be it little or great, let it be thy care to vanquish and remove this obstruction, and then thy heart's desire shall be performed.

When once corrupt self-love is subdued, and thy soul entirely submitted and resigned to God, peace and satisfaction will flow in apace upon thy mind. For nothing can be grievous and unpalatable to one who hath renounced all interests of his own, and hath no inclinations or desires left, but only that he may be made an instrument of God's glory, and have all the counsel of the divine will, which is always best, fulfilled in and upon him. This man, so weaned from private respects and all created comforts, is in a proper posture for receiving grace, and tasting the spiritual delights of contemplation and devotion. The vessel must be empty before grace can be poured in; and when it is perfectly so, God delights to fill it up to the brim. The more a man is dead to the world and himself, the more heavenly-minded, the more mortified and humble, the swifter are the motions of heavenly grace towards him, the more liberal are its distributions, the more sensible and delightful and wonderful its comforts and effects upon his heart.

Then shall he see the loving-kindness of the Lord, then shall he feel his soul and all its powers enlarged, and even stand amazed at the happy change. Lo! thus shall the man be blessed that feareth and seeketh the Lord with all his strength, and suffereth not his heart to wander after vanity. This man shall receive the blessed Sacrament with wondrous efficacy. He shall as truly be united to Christ in his soul, as the bread and wine which represent Him are incorporated with the substance of his body. And that which inclines God to be so particularly propitious and bountiful to such a one, is that resigned temper of mind

which proposes the advancement of God's honour and glory rather than his own profit, and comes more out of a sense of duty and just homage to his Saviour than with a prospect of comfort and satisfaction to himself.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Prayer for Relief in our Wants and Spiritual Distresses.

DISCIPLE. Hear me, O sweetest, kindest Jesus, whom I now approach with most hearty desires of receiving Thee into my soul. But how can I expect that Thou wilt not despise a place so unfit to entertain Thy pure, Thy glorious majesty? Thou knowest, Lord, my weaknesses and my wants; how great my sufferings, and how black my sins; how I am oppressed and afflicted, tempted and overpowered; disordered with passion, and stained with pollution. To Thee I fly for succour against my infirmities, for physic against my diseases, for support under my calamities and distresses. I cannot dissemble my condition, I need not publish it, when addressing to One who knows all things, to whom my very inward parts are naked and open; to Him who alone can give effectual relief to my sorrows and supply my crying necessities. Thy wisdom knows what succours are most seasonable and proper for my circumstances, and how very slender and low my stock of virtue is.

Behold, I stand before Thee a helpless creature, "miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and weak," imploring Thy grace, or at least some fragments of it, to this hungry, starving beggar. O let me not be famished, but revive this sinking wretch with some crumbs of heavenly sustenance. Let me not perish with cold, but warm me with Thy love;

let me not fall into the pit, but enlighten my blind eyes with the shine of Thy gracious presence. Give me a settled disrelish of worldly pleasures, and make all here below insipid and bitter to me. Reconcile me to crosses and afflictions by submission and steady patience, and lessen everything in this world, whether enjoyment or suffering, by teaching me to despise and forget it. Raise my stupid heart up to heaven and settle my affections there, that they may no longer wildly rove after the trifling objects of flesh and sense. Let me henceforth take delight in nothing but Thee, nor "spend my money and labour for that which is not bread;" for Thou alone art "meat indeed, and drink indeed;" my love and joy, my delight and exceeding great reward, my perfect and sole good.

O that, now I am approaching the throne of grace, Thou wouldst command Thy divine fire to descend from heaven into my soul! O that my sins and corrupt dispositions might be the burnt-offering consumed by it; that it might flame and burn and melt me down, purge away all my dross, and by the violence of its powerful heat, refine and change and incorporate me with Thyself! Let me not, I beseech Thee, be sent empty away; let me not return hungry and thirsty from so splendid an entertainment, but work in me mightily, and deal bountifully with Thy servant, as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy name. I hope to find a wondrous alteration, and cannot think it strange if I feel my benumbed heart all sublimated when I come to that fire which ever burns without consuming; or if I find an entire separation of all my worldly and gross affections when heated thoroughly with that love, whose excellence it is to purify the heart by the activity, and to enlighten blind understandings by the brightness of its flame.

CHAPTER XVII.

An Act of Praise.

DISCIPLE. Look down, O Lord, with favour and good acceptance upon Thy poor unworthy but sincere servant, now prostrating himself before Thine altar with a most devout zeal, and all the passionate and tender resentment of which my heart is capable; wishing still that these good affections were greater and more worthy of Thee, and that I might meet and embrace my Lord with all that perfection of holiness and eager joy, by which Thy best and dearest saints recommended their prayers and praises, and so eminently signalized themselves in the celebration of this blessed Sacrament. O God! my love and life, my only and eternal bliss, were but my power proportioned to my will, none of those excellent patterns ever expressed more awful reverence, more ardent devotion, more eager love, more humble gratitude, than I at this time am disposed and most earnestly wish to express.

I know, O Lord, how far I am from being worthy to receive at Thy hand such plentiful effusions of grace, such distinguishing marks of Thy kindness, as enabled them to be so pious and exemplary in all their addresses to Thee. But yet my heart, and all its affections, such as they are, I dedicate to Thy service. The utmost a devout mind can conceive or desire, I offer in Thy presence with all possible respect, with sincerity as unfeigned as if my zeal were much more bright and fierce. I do it without the least reserve; all I have and am is entirely Thine, most freely consecrated to Thy use, my God and Lord, my Almighty Creator, and most merciful Redeemer. Take then a full possession of one, upon so many accounts Thy own. Enter and dwell and reign in me absolute and for ever. Behold, I open my arms wide to embrace my Lord and Spouse. I desire at this

time to receive Thee into my heart with the same reverence and humility, the same respectful gratitude and love, the same faith and hope and chaste desire, with which Thy holy Mother received Thee into her virgin womb, when she returned that pious answer to the angel who brought the glad tidings of Thy mysterious incarnation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word."

And as Thy servant John Baptist, that greatest among them that are born of women, Thy messenger sent to prepare Thy way before Thee, felt the powerful influence of the divine presence, and confessed it, by leaping in his mother's womb for joy; as he, ascribing nothing to himself, did afterwards declare himself the "Bridegroom's friend, whose joy was full in hearing the Bridegroom's voice;" so do I desire to offer myself, without any exception, or regard to private interest, and to rejoice and live in Thee alone. May all the zeal and raptures, the ecstasies and heavenly visions of the saints; may all their virtues and their praises; may every creature in heaven and earth; may all that I have ever prayed for, and all that pray for me, contribute to Thy glory; and may Thy name be only and ever magnified by all and each of them.

Accept, O Lord, my hearty wishes and desires of praise and thanksgiving, as infinite as Thy majesty; for they are Thine of right, and mayest Thou be worthily blessed by them. This is, and shall be, my daily, hourly prayer. Nor will I content myself with wishing and endeavouring this singly, and in my own person, but do most seriously invite and conjure all the blessed spirits above, all Thy faithful people upon earth, to join in this most just tribute of honour, and in full consort and perfect harmony to publish Thy praise and glory in all times and places.

Come, all ye nations and countries, all kindreds and languages of the world, and bear your parts in singing forth the sweet, the saving, the holy name of Jesus. Raise your

devotions as high as human nature can go, for you never can go far enough. And you, devout disciples of this blessed Master, as oft as you receive this holy Sacrament, see that you reverently adore this mystery of love. And then be sure, with a most fervent faith and universal charity, to beseech this gracious Saviour that the effect of His death may be as general as the design of it; that He who died for all, may be glorified in the salvation of all. And may those supplications be successful in obtaining mercy for yourselves, for every sinner, and for me, the chief of sinners in particular.

And when you return from this precious heavenly feast, full of grace and joy, remember then to look back with tender compassion upon your weaker brethren, and wish that every contrite and afflicted soul may be admitted to the like comforts, may feel the same wonderful efficacy from this mysterious table; and let not me, the least and most unworthy of your brethren, who want them most of any, be denied a part in your charitable intercessions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Against the nice Disputes concerning this Sacrament.

CHRIST. If thou wouldst preserve thy faith uncorrupt, and thy devotion from distraction, content thyself with reverencing and admiring these holy mysteries, and do not indulge a busy curiosity, in bold and unprofitable inquiries concerning them. For this is the way to damp a godly zeal, and to perplex thy mind with intricate and endless doubts. Remember "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing," and His supereminent wisdom and power procures

itself just veneration, by doing more than man is able to comprehend. I do not mean by this to exact a blind obedience, but expect and commend the use of reason in the search of divine truth. Provided always that it be tempered with sobriety and modesty, with teachableness, and a due respect to what I Myself have revealed in My Word, and what My Church hath faithfully delivered in doctrines and expositions upon it.

Happy is that meekness and poverty of spirit which industriously declines the rugged thorny paths of controversy and captious disputes, and walks in the plain smooth way of duty and practical religion, which studies God's commands, and labours to understand things of a size with its capacity, without troubling itself about His doings and decrees. Too many instances there are of daring men, who by presuming to sound the deep things of religion, have cavilled and argued themselves out of all religion. These men mistake their business. For the thing required of a Christian is not penetration and subtlety of wit, nice distinctions, or sublime notions; but victorious faith, and an honest holy life; sobriety and temperance and chastity, justice and charity, piety and devotion. How oft is reason puzzled, even in matters relating to creatures inferior to thyself? And will not this reflection control and cure an expectation so extravagant and absurd, as that of being able to give a clear account of things above thee; nay, of perfectly understanding thy great, thy infinite Creator Himself? Submit thy reason to revelation, and let humility and deference to God recommend thy faith; and then, though thou canst not attain all knowledge, yet thou shalt be sure not to want any that is necessary or profitable for thee.

Many men are much dissatisfied in their minds with doubts concerning the nature of true faith, and difficulties which arise concerning My presence in the Sacrament. These doubts are not always sinful, nor always from themselves; but frequently owing to the temptations of the

devil, and industriously scattered by him with wicked artifice and malicious design. Be not therefore too anxious upon these occasions. Trouble not thyself to argue nicely, nor employ thy thoughts upon the matter, nor hold thyself concerned to be able to answer every cavil which he puts into thy head; but keep close to Scripture, and do thy duty, and the enemy will soon retreat when he finds thee neglect his attempts. Think not these inward distractions a sign that thou art forsaken of God; they are rather the contrary, and a mark of grace. God suffers them to exercise thy patience, to try thy constancy, to promote thy spiritual advantage. Wert thou a reprobate thou wouldst not thus be assaulted, for such the devil is sure of already, and temptations are thrown away upon them. They are the faithful, the sincere, the devout Christians whom he teases and torments; for in so doing he hopes to enlarge his dominion, and to seduce those who were not his before.

Proceed then in thy Christian course with resolution and patience, and still frequent the Sacrament with steadfast faith and humble reverence. Whatever there thou findest to exceed thy understanding, put it to God's account, and leave Him to make it good, though thou canst not conceive how it should be done. He will not deceive thee, but they who rely upon their own understandings are sure to deceive themselves. Remember God hath said, that "He walks and dwells with the humble, and shows His ways to the meek; that He revealeth Himself to babes;" that He opens the eyes of the honest and sincere, but hides His grace and knowledge from the proud and wise in their own sight. Reason, experience proves, may both deceive and be deceived, for it is but human; but faith has God for its foundation, and cannot err; because depending upon one who is truth itself, incapable of mistaking, or of imposing upon others.

It is therefore highly fit, and in matters of religion absolutely necessary, that these two principles should know

their order and respective stations, and each contain itself within its proper sphere. Faith (which supposes a revelation received and acknowledged) challenges the highest place; and reason ought to keep her distance, to serve and follow after, not to set bounds to, or assume and encroach and usurp over the other. For faith and charity are the two pillars upon which Christianity stands, the two governing principles of a good man's opinions and actions. And their authority and influence is in no one instance more considerable than in this of the blessed Sacrament. God is infinite and eternal, His power unbounded and incomprehensible; He "does whatsoever pleaseth Him in heaven and earth," and who can "understand His counsel, or find out all His methods?" If the works of God were such as human reason could penetrate with ease, they would lose great part of their glory; we should soon abate of our awe and veneration for their Author, if His dealings were not above the power of our tongues to express, and the utmost extent of our imaginations to conceive. "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and confess the wonders that He hath done for the children of men! For great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God Almighty! How unsearchable are Thy judgments, and Thy ways past finding out!"

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