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A Treatise on Divine Providence

Stephen Charnock



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TO THE READER

READER,—Thou art here presented with a little piece of a great man; great, indeed, if great piety, great parts, great learning, and great wisdom, may be admitted to claim that title; and we verily believe that none well acquainted with him will deny him his right, however malevolent persons may grudge him the honour. It hath been expected and desired by many that some account of his life might be given to the world; but we are not willing to offer violence to his ashes by making him so public now he is dead, who so much affected privacy while he lived. Thou art therefore desired to rest satisfied with this brief account of him: That being very young he went to Cambridge, where, in Immanuel College, he was brought up under the tuition of the present Archbishop of Canterbury. What gracious workings and evidences of the new birth appeared in him while there, hath already been spoken of by* one who was at that time his

fellow-collegiate and intimate. Some time he afterward spent in a private family, and a little more in the exercise of his ministry in Southwark, then removed to New College in Oxon, where he was fellow, and spent several years; being then taken notice of for his singular gifts, and had in reputation by the most learned and godly in that university, and upon that account the more frequently put upon public work. Being thence (the year after he had been proctor) called over into Ireland to a constant public employment, he exercised his ministry for about four or five years, not with the approbation only, but to the admiration of the most wise and judicious Christians, and with the concurrent applause of such as were of very different sentiments from him in the things of religion. Nay, even those that never loved his piety, yet would commend his learning and gifts, as being beyond exception, if not above compare. About the year 1660, being discharged from the public exercise of his ministry, he returned back into England, and in and about London spent the greatest part of fifteen years, without any call to his old work in a settled way, but for about these five years last past hath been more known by his constant preaching, of which we need not speak, but let them that heard him speak for him; or, if they should be silent, his works will do it.

He was a person of excellent parts, strong reason, great judgment, and (which do not often go together) curious fancy, of high improvements, and general learning, as having been all his days a most diligent and methodical student, and a great redeemer of time, rescuing not only his restless hours in the night, but his very walking time in the streets, from those impertinencies and fruitless vanities which do so customarily fill up men's minds, and steal away their hearts from those better and more noble objects, which do so justly challenge their greatest regards. This he did by not only carefully watching (as every good Christian should do), but constantly writing down his thoughts, whereby he both governed them better, and furnished himself with many materials for his most elaborate discourses. His chief talent was his preaching-gift, in which, to speak modestly, he had few equals. To this, therefore, as that for which his

Lord and Master had best fitted him (neglecting the practice of physic, in which he had arrived at a considerable measure of knowledge), he did especially addict himself, and direct his studies; and even when providence denied him opportunities, yet he was still laying in more stock, and preparing for work against he might be called to it. When he was in employment, none that heard him could justly blame his retiredness, he being, even when most private, continually at work for the public; and had he been less in his study, he would have been less liked in the pulpit. His library, furnished, though not with a numerous, yet a curious collection of books, was his workhouse, in which he laboured hard all the week, and on the Lord's day made it appear he had not been idle; and that though he consulted his privacy, yet he did not indulge his sloth. He was somewhat reserved where he was not well acquainted, otherwise very free, affable, and communicative, where he understood and liked his company. He affected not much acquaintance, because he would escape visitants, well knowing how much the ordinary sort of friends were apt to take up of his time, which he could ill spare from his beloved studies, meeting with few that could give him better entertainment with their company than he could give himself alone. They had need be very good, and very learned, by whose converse he could gain more than by his own thoughts and books. He was a true son of the Church of England, in that sound doctrine laid down in the articles of religion, and taught by our most famous ancient divines and reformers; and a real follower of their piety, as well as a strenuous maintainer of the truth they professed. His preaching was mostly practical, yet rational and argumentative, to his hearers' understandings as well as affections; and where controversies came in his way, he shewed great acuteness and judgment in discussing and determining them, and no less skill in applying them to practice: so that he was indeed 'a workman that needed not to be ashamed,' being able 'by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince gainsayers.' Some have thought his preaching too high for vulgar hearers; and it cannot be denied but his gifts were suited to the more intelligent sort of Christians; yet it must withal be said, that if he were sometimes deep, he was never abstruse; he handled the great

mysteries of the gospel with much clearness and perspicuity; so that if in his preaching he were above most, it was only because most were below him. Several considerable treatises on some of the most important points of religion he finished in his ordinary course, which he hath left behind him, in the same form he usually wrote them for the pulpit. This comes out first, as a prodromus to several others designed to be made public, as soon as they can be with conveniency transcribed, which (if the Lord will, and spare life) shall be attested with our hands; and whatever any else shall publish, can be but imperfect notes (his own copies being under our revisal at the request of his friends) taken from him in the pulpit; in which, what mistakes do often happen, every one knows, and we have found by experience in the case of this very author more than once. This was thought fit to be said to secure the reputation of the dead, and prevent the abuse of the living. These sermons might have come out with the solemn ceremony of large recommendations, the author's worth being so well known to, and his preaching so highly esteemed by, the most eminent ministers about this city; but it was judged needless, his own works being sufficient to praise him.

One thing more is to be added: that such as he is here, such he is in his other pieces. So that thou hast here, reader, a specimen of the strain and spirit of this holy man, this being his familiar and ordinary way of preaching, and these sermons coming out first, not as if they were the nonsuch of what he left behind him, but because they could soonest be despatched, and to obviate the injuries might else be done by spurious treatises both to him and thee; and likewise by this little taste to gratify the appetites of such who, having been his auditors, did long even with greediness to feast themselves again upon those excellent truths which in the delivery were so sweet to them. Perhaps too it may quicken their appetites who never heard him, it may be never yet heard of him. If thou like this cluster, fear not but the vintage will be answerable; if this little earnest be good metal, the whole sum will be no less current. That a blessing from heaven may be upon this work, and upon thee in reading and studying the nature, and beauty, and ends of divine providence, and that the Lord of the

harvest (especially when so many are daily called home) would send forth more and more such labourers into the harvest, is the hearty prayer of

Thine in the Lord,

RICHARD ADAMS.

EDWARD VEAL.

A DISCOURSE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.—2 CHRON. 16:9.

IN the beginning of the chapter you find Baasha king of Israel raising walls about, and fortifying Ramah, a place about twelve miles from Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judah, intending by that means to block Asa up, because Ramah lay just upon the road between Jerusalem and Samaria, the seats of the two kings, ver. 1.

Baasha was probably afraid of the revolt of Israel to Judah, upon that reformation of religion wrought by Asa, and therefore would fortify that place, to be a hindrance, and to intercept any that should pass upon that account; and to this purpose makes great preparation, as appears ver. 6, for with the provision Baasha had made for the fortification of Ramah, Asa, after the seizing of the materials, builds two towns, Geba and Mispah.

Asa seeing Baasha so busy about this design, and fearing the consequence of it, hath recourse to carnal policy rather than to God; and therefore enters into league with Benhadad, a neighbour, though an idolatrous prince, and purchaseth his assistance with the sacrilegious price of the treasure of the temple, ver. 2, 3; and hereby engageth him to invade the king of Israel's territories, that he might thereby find work for Baasha in another part, and so divert him from that design upon which he was so bent: ver. 3, 'Go, break thy league with Baasha, that he may depart from me.'

Benhadad is easily persuaded by the quantity of gold, &c., to break his league, and make an inroad, and proves victorious, and takes many cities where the magazines and stores were laid up, ver. 4.

Baasha now, to save his country, and make head against his enemies, is forced to leave Ramah; whereupon Asa, who watched his opportunity, seizeth the materials he had left for the fortifying of Ramah, and puts them to another use, ver. 5, 6.

Hanani the seer is presently sent by God with a threatening of war, because he applies himself to a heathen prince rather than to the Lord of hosts, ver. 7; his sin is aggravated by God's former kindness to him, and experience he had given him of his miraculous providence in his success against that vast army of the Ethiopians and Lubims, or Lybians, and that upon his recourse to or reliance on God; and that he should afterwards have recourse to the arm of flesh was a disparagement to God's providential kindness, ver. 8. He further aggravates his sin by the consideration of God's general providential care of his creatures, and the particular end of it, and of all his providences, viz., the good of his church and people, ver. 9, 'For the eyes of the Lord,' &c.

Eyes of the Lord, in Scripture, signify,

1. His knowledge: Job. 34:21, 'For his eyes are upon all the ways of man, and he sees all his goings.' Heb. 4:13, 'All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.'*

2. His providence.

(1.) For good, so it notes his grace and good will; so his eyes and his heart are joined together: 1 Kings 6:3, 'Mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually,' viz., in his temple, the place which he had hallowed to put his name there for ever. Ps. 32:8, 'I will guide him with mine eye;' that is, I will counsel him, and direct him in a gracious and a favourable way. Therefore, to be cut off from the eye of the Lord, is to be deprived of his favour, Ps. 31:22, for none can be cut off from a simple knowledge of God; so Zech. 3:9, 'seven eyes upon one stone,' that is, the providence of God was in an especial manner with Christ in the midst of his passion.

(2.) For evil, so it notes his anger and vindictive justice. Isa. 3:8, 'Their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory.' Kindness and anger appear first in the eye, one by its pleasantness, the other by its redness.

'Run,' that notes diligence and care, an industrious inspection into all things. Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the ways of thy commandments,' noting speed and diligence.

In the verse we have,

I. A description of God's providence.

II. The end of it.

I. The description of God's providence.

1. The immediateness of it; 'his eyes,' his own eyes, not another's. Not like princes, who see by their servants' eyes more than by their own, what is done in their kingdoms; his care is immediate. Though angels are ministers of his providence, the guardians and watchers of the world, yet God is their captain, and is always himself upon the watch.

2. Quickness and speed of providence; 'run.' His eyes do not only walk, but run the round; they are not slumbering eyes, nor drowsy eyelids; their motion is quick and nimble.

3. Extent of providence; 'the whole earth;' all things in the earth, all the hairs on the heads of these men: the meanest worm as well as the mightiest prince; the lowest shrub as well as the tallest cedar; every cranny, corner, or chink of the earth.

4. Diligence of providence; 'to and fro.' His care is repeated, he looks this way and that way, again and again; his eyes are not confined to one place, fixed on one object, but are always rolling about from one place to another.

5. The efficacy of his providence; his care doth engage his strength; he doth not only discover dangers, but prevent them; he hath eyes to see, and power to order all things according to his pleasure; wise to see, and strong to save.

II. The end of providence; 'to shew himself strong,' &c.

1. Finis cujus, 'to shew himself strong.' Heb. to 'make himself strong,' but best translated, to 'shew himself strong.' It is not an addition of strength, but an exercise of strength that is here meant.

2. Finis cui, or the persons for whom, 'those that are perfect in heart.'

Doctrines.

1. There is a providence exercised by God in the world.

2. All God's providences in the world are in order to the good of his people.

3. Sincerity in God's way gives a man an interest in all God's providences, and the good of them.

1. For the first, there is a providential inspection and government of all things in the world by God. It is not a bare sight of things that is here meant by God's eye, but a sight and knowledge in order to the governing and disposing of them. View this doctrine at your leisure, preached by God himself, with an inconceivable elegancy, and three whole chapters spent in the sermon, Job 38, 39, 40, and by the psalmist, Ps. 147, 148.

Some observe that the society of angels and heavenly creatures is represented, Ezek. 1, by a quaternarian number, because the world is divided into four dimensions, east, west, north, and south, as intimating the extension of God's providence over all parts.*

Things are not ordered in the world *cæco impetu*, not by blind fortune, but an all-seeing Deity, who hath the management of all sublunary affairs. Τὴς μεγάλης δυνάμει τῆς προνοίας; † πάντα ὑπ' ἀρίστου νοῦ γίνεται, was the theological maxim of the Stoics.

Before I come particularly to explain the providence of God, I shall lay down some propositions as the foundations of this doctrine.

1. God hath an indisputable and peculiar right to the government of the world. None ever questioned God's right, no, nor his act, but those that were swelled with an unreasonable ambition, such as Nebuchadnezzar, who for this cause underwent the punishment of a seven years' banishment from the society of men, Dan. 4:17.

None indeed that acknowledge a God, did or can question God's right, though they may question his will and actual exercise of his right. He is the creator, and therefore is the sovereign Lord and Ruler. The world is his family, and, as a master, he hath an undoubted right to govern his own family: he gave all creatures their beings, and therefore hath a right to enact their laws, appoint their stations, and fix their ends. It is as much his property and prerogative to rule, as it is to create. Creation is so peculiarly proper to God, that it is not communicable to any creature, no, not to angels, though of a vast capacity in other things, and that because they are creatures themselves. It is as impossible for one creature, or all, to govern the world, and manage all the boisterous passions of men to just and glorious ends, as to create them. It is true, God useth instruments in the executive part of his providence; but he doth not design the government of the world only by instruments. He useth them not for necessity, but ornament. He created the world without them, and therefore can govern the world without them.

Virtus creativa est fundamentum providentiæ, et argumentum ad providentiam . This right is founded upon that of creation, as he is the efficient cause of it. This right is also founded upon the excellency of his being; that which is excellent having a right to rule,

in the way of that excellency, that which is inferior. Every man hath a natural right to rule another in his own art and skill wherein he excels him. If it be the right of a chief magistrate to manage the concerns of his kingdom, with what reason can we deny that right to God?

2. God only is qualified for the universal government of the world. All creatures, as they were unable to create themselves, so are unable to manage themselves without the direction of a superior power, much more unable to manage the vast body of the world. God is only fit in regard of,

(1.) Power. Conservation is *continuata creatio*; that power which is fit to create, is only fit to preserve. A continued creation belongs as much to omnipotency as the first creation.

The government of it requires no less power, both in regard of the numerousness of the objects, and the strange contrariety of passions in rational creatures, and qualities in irrational; conservation is but one continued act with creation, following on from an instant to duration, as a line from its mathematical point.*

(2.) Holiness and righteousness. If he that hates right is not fit to govern, Job 34:17, then he that is infinitely righteous, and hath an infinite love to righteousness, is the fittest to undertake that task; without righteousness there would be nothing but confusion in the whole creation. Disorder is the effect of unrighteousness, as order is the effect of justice. The justest man is fittest for subordinate government among men, and the infinite just God is fittest for the universal government of the world.

(3.) Knowledge. An infinite knowledge to decry all the contrivances and various labyrinths of the hearts of men, their secret intentions and aims, is necessary. The government of the world consists more in ordering the inward faculties of men, touching the hearts, and tuning them to play what note he pleases, than in external things. No

creature hath the skill or power to work immediately upon the will of man; neither angels nor devils can do it immediately, but by proposing objects, and working upon the fancy, which is not always successful. He that created the heart, knows all the wards of it, and hath only the skill to turn it and incline it as he pleases; he must needs know all the inclinations of the creatures and their proper activities, since he alone conferred all those several principles and qualities upon them. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,' Acts 15:8, viz., the particular natures, inclinations, inward motions, which no creature fully understands; he needs no deputy to inform him of what is done, he is everywhere, and sees all things. Worldly governors cannot be everywhere essentially present.

God is so perfect in his knowledge of all things, that he cannot be imposed upon by the evil suggestions and flatteries of men or angels.

In nature it is so: the eye guides the body, because that is the chief organ of sensitive knowledge; the mind, which is the seat of wisdom, guides the whole.

(4.) Patience. Infinite patience is requisite to the preservation and government of the world, in the circumstances wherein it hath stood ever since the fall. What angel, though the meekest, or can all the angels in heaven, be masters of so much patience as is needful for this work of governing the world, though for the space of one day? Could they bear with all those evils which are committed in the world in the space of twenty-four hours? Might we not reasonably conceive, that they would be so tired with the obliquities, disorders, deformities which they would see in the acts of men (besides all the evil which is in the hearts of men, which lie without the verge of their knowledge), that they would rather call for fire from heaven to burn the world to ashes.

Averröes* thought that because of God's slowness to anger, he meddled not with sublunary concerns. This rather fits him for it,

because he can bear with the injuries of wicked men, otherwise the world would not continue a moment.

Angels, though powerful, holy, wise and patient creatures, yet being creatures, they want the infiniteness of all these qualifications which are necessary to this government. Though they are knowing, yet they know not men's hearts; though they are wise, yet they may be charged with a folly uncapable of this; though holy, yet not able in this respect to manage it to the ends and designs of an infinite holiness; though nimble, yet cannot be in all parts of the world at every turn: but the providence of God is infallible, because of his infinite wisdom; indefatigable, because of his omnipotency; and righteous, because of his goodness.

3. There can be no reason rendered why God should not actually govern the world, since he only hath a right and fitness. If God doth not actually govern it, it is either because he cannot, or because he will not.

(1.) Not because he cannot. This inability must be either for want of knowledge, or want of power. The one, if asserted, would deny his omnipotence, the other his omniscience; the one would make him a weak God, the other an ignorant God, and consequently no God.

(2.) Not because he will not; if he can and will not, it is, say some, a testimony of envy, that he maligns the good of his creatures; but not to insist upon this; this must be either because of the,

[1.] Difficulty. This cannot be. What difficulty can there be in a single word, or one act of his will, which can be done by God without any molestation, were there millions of worlds as well as this? For still they would be finite, and so governable by an infinite superior. May we not more reasonably think the forming such a mass would require more pains than the government of it? The right stringing an instrument is more trouble to a skilful musician, than the tripping over the strings afterwards to make an harmony. What difficulty can

it be to Omnipotence? Is it a greater labour to preserve and govern, than it was to create? Doth not the soul order every part of the body, and all its functions, without any pain to it? and shall not the God that made that soul so indefatigable, much more manage the concernments of the world without labour to himself? Is it not as easy with God to guide all these things by one single act of his will, as for me, by an act of my soul, to do many things without a distinct act of cogitation or consideration before? Can it be more laborious to him to govern the world, than it is to know all things in the world? He sees all things in an instant by one act of his understanding, and he orders all creatures in a moment by one act of his will. Can one act of his will be more painful than one act of his understanding? Can he with a word make this great ball? and can he not with as much ease order all to conform to the law of his own righteous will? Can a continual eruption of goodness be a difficulty to an infinite being, which we find natural to the sun, to the fountains, to the sea, to many works of that omnipotent goodness? Or,

[2.] Disparagement. Denial of God's providence over the lesser things of the world did arise from the consideration of the state of monarchs, who thought it an abridgment of their felicity and dignity, to stoop to such low considerations as the minutula of their estates might exact from them, but left them to their vice-gerents. But they consider not that the felicity of God as it respects the creature, is to communicate his goodness to as many subjects as he had made capable of his care. If it were his glory to create the world, can it be his dishonour to govern it? The glorifying his wisdom is as honourable to him as the magnifying his power; though both are eminent in creation and providence, yet his wisdom is more signal in the governing, as his power was in framing of the world.

Why was it not as much a disparagement to God to create things contemptible in our eyes, as since he hath created them to take care of them, and marshal them for his glorious ends? The sun in the heavens is a shadow of God, which doth not disdain to communicate its natural goodness, and emit its beams to the meanest creatures,

and let the little flies sport themselves in them, as well as the greatest princes, and transmits an influence upon things obscure and at a distance from it, whereby it manifests an universal regard to all. And would it not be a disparagement to an infinite goodness to be outstripped by a creature, which he hath set up for a natural communication of goodness to the rest of the world? The very consideration of the sun, and the nature of it, gives us as much an account of God as any inanimate being whatsoever. It is as much the sun's honour to produce a small insect, as the growth of the greatest plant.

Have not all creatures, a natural affection in them to preserve and provide for their own? hath not God much more, who endued all creatures with that disposition? Whatsoever is a natural perfection in creatures, is eminently an infinite perfection in God. If it be therefore a praise to you to preserve your own, can it be a disgrace to God? You may as well say it is as much a dishonour to him to be good, as to have a tender regard to his creatures. Censure him as well you may for creating them for your delight, as preserving and governing them for the same end. They are all good, for he pronounced them so; and being so, a God of goodness will not account them unworthy of his care. Are they now the products of his omnipotent wisdom? and shall not they be the objects of his directing wisdom? If they are not unworthy of God to create, how can they be unworthy of God to govern them? It would be as much below him to make them, as to rule them when they were made.

4. Therefore, God doth actually preserve and govern the world; though angels are in ministry in some particular works of his providence, yet God is the steersman who gives out his particular orders to them.

Jacob's ladder had the top in heaven, where God stood to keep it firm, its foot on earth, and the angels going up and down upon several errands at their master's beck.

As God made all things for himself, so he orders the ends of all things made by him for his own glory. For being the most excellent and intelligent agent, he doth reduce all the motions of his creatures to that end for which he made them.

This actual government of the world by God brancheth itself out in three things.

1. Nothing is acted in the world without God's knowledge. The vision of the wheels in Ezekiel presents us with an excellent portraiture of providence, there are eyes round about the wheels: Ezek. 1:18, 'Their wings were full of eyes,' &c.

The eye of God is upon the whole circle of the creatures' motion. In all the revolutions in the world, there is the eye of God's omniscience to see them, and the arm of his omnipotence to guide them. Not the most retired corner, or the darkest cell, not the deepest cavern, or most inward project-nor the most secret wickedness, not the closest goodness, but the eye of the Lord beholds it: Prov. 15:3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' He hears the words, sees the actions, knows the thoughts, registers the gracious discourses, bottles up the penitent tears, and considers all the ways of men; not a whispered oath, not an atheistical thought, though but only peeping upon the heart, and sinking down again in that mass of corruption, not a disorderly word, but he knows and marks it. The soul hath a particular knowledge of every act, because it is the spring of every act in any member, and nothing is done in this little world, but the soul knows it. Surely, then, there is not an act done in the world, nor the motion of any creature, but as God doth concur to it, he must needs know what he doth concur to. The knowledge and ordaining every thing is far less to the infinite being of God, than the knowledge and ordaining every motion of the body is to a finite soul.

Or, suppose a soul clothed with a body of as big a proportion as the matter of the whole creation, it would actuate this body, though of a

greater bulk, and know every motion of it; how much more God, who hath infinity and excellency and strength of all angels and souls, must need actuate this world, and know every motion of it! There is nothing done in the world but some creature or other knows it; he that acts it doth at least know it. If God did not know it, the creatures then in that particular knowledge would be superior to God, and know something more than God knows; can this be possible?

2. Nothing is acted in the world without the will of God. His will either commands it, or permits it: Eph. 1:11, 'He works all things after the counsel of his own will,' Ps. 135:6, 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth.'

Even the sins of the world his will permits them, his power assists in the act, and his wisdom orders the sinfulness of the act for holy ends. The four chariots in Zech. 6:2–5, by which some understand angels, are sent upon commission into the several parts of the world, and compared to chariots, both for their strength, their swiftness, their employment in a military way to secure the church. These are said to come out of the two mountains of brass, ver. 1, which signify the irreversible decrees of God, which the angels are to execute.* He alarms up the winds, when he would have Jonah arrested in his flight. He sounds a retreat to them, and locks them up in their chambers, Ps. 107:25–29. Bread hath a natural virtue in it to nourish, but it must be accompanied with his secret blessing, Mat. 4:4.

Virtute primi actus, agunt agentia omnia quicquid agunt.

3. Nothing doth subsist without God's care and power. His eyes running to and fro, implies not only knowledge, but care. He doth not carelessly behold what is done in the world, but, like a skilful pilot, he sits at the helm, and steers the world in what course it should sail. Our being we owe to his power, our well-being to his care, our motion and exerting of every faculty to his merciful providence and concurrence; 'in him we live, and move, and have our

being,' Acts 17:28. He frames our being, preserves our life, concurs with our motion. This is an idea that bears date in the minds of men with the very notion of a God. Why else did the heathen in all their straits fly to their altars, and fill their temples with cries and sacrifices? To what purpose was this, if they had not acknowledged God's superintendency, his taking notice of their cause, hearing their prayers, considering their cries? Why should they do this, if they thought that God did not regard human affairs, but stood untouched with a sense of their miseries?

If all things were done by chance, there could be no predictions of future things, which we frequently find in Scripture, and by what ways accomplished. Impossible it is that anything can be continued without his care. If God should in the least moment withhold the influence of his providence, we should melt into nothing, as the impression of a seal upon the water vanishes as soon as the seal is removed; or as the reflection of the face in the glass disappears upon the first instant of our removal from it. The light in the air is by participation of the light of the sun; the light in the air withdraws upon the departure of the sun. The physical and moral goodness [of] the creature would vanish upon the removal of God from it, who is the fountain of both.

What an artificer doth work, may continue, though the workman dies, because what he doth is materially, as to the matter of it, ready to his hands; he creates not the matter, but only sets materials together, and disposeth them into such a form and figure. But God gives a being to the matter and form of all things, and therefore the continuance of that being depends upon his preserving influence.* God upholds the world, and causes all those laws which he hath impressed upon every creature, to be put in execution: not as a man that makes a watch, and winds it up, and then suffers it to go of itself; or that turns a river into another channel, and lets it alone to run in the graff he hath made for it; but there is a continual concurrence of God to this goodly frame. For they do not only live, but move in him, or by him; his living and omnipotent power runs

through every vein of the creation, giving it life and motion, and ordering the acts of every part of this great body. All the motions of second causes are ultimately resolved into the providence of God, who holds the first link of them in his hands, Hosea 2:21, 22. More particularly, the nature of providence may be explained by two propositions.

Prop. 1. The universality of it. His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth.

1. It is over all creatures, (1.) the highest, (2.) the lowest.

(1.) The highest and most magnificent pieces of the creation.

[1.] Over Jesus Christ, the first-born of every creature. God's providence was in an especial manner conversant about him, and fixed upon him. It was by the determinate counsel of God, that he was delivered up, Acts 2:23. His providence was diligently exercised about him in his whole course. Christ answers his mother's solicitousness with the care his Father took of him: Luke 2:49, 'Wist you not that I must be about my Father's business?' Do you not know that I am about those things my Father takes care of? This exposition best agrees with his reproof, who blames them for creating so much trouble to themselves upon their missing him in the town. It is not, Why do you interrupt me in my dispute with the Jewish doctors? But 'How is it that you sought me? Do you think I am not under the care of my Father?'[†] It was particularly exercised on him in the midst of his passion, Zech. 3:9. Seven eyes were upon the stone; seven, a number of perfection, a perfect and peculiar care of God attended him.

[2.] Over angels and men. The soul of the least animal, and the smallest plant, is formed and preserved by God, but the breath of mankind is more particularly in his hand: Job 12:10, 'In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.'

First, Over good angels and men. He charges his angels with folly and weakness. They cannot direct themselves without his wisdom, nor preserve themselves without his power. God hath a book of providence, wherein he writes down who shall be preserved, and this book Moses understands: Exod. 32:33, 'Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book;' not the book of election, —no names written there are blotted out,—but out of the book of providence. As it is understood, Isa. 4:3, 'Every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem,' i.e. every one whom God designs to preservation and deliverance.* That God, surely, that hath a care of the mean animals, will not be careless of his affectionate worshippers. He that feeds the ravens will not starve his doves. He that satisfies the ravening wolf, will not famish his gentle lambs and harmless sheep. He shelters Jacob from Laban's fury, Gen. 31, and tutors him how he should carry himself towards the good man. He brought Haman out of favour, and set Mordecai in his place for the deliverance of the Jews which were designed for slaughter.

Secondly, Over evil angels and men. God's power preserves them, his patience suffers them, his wisdom orders them, and their evil purposes and performances, to his own glory. The devil cannot arrest Job, nor touch a lamb of his flock, nor a hair of his head, without a commission from God. He cannot enter into one filthy swine in the Gaderenes' herd, without asking our Saviour leave. Whatever he doth, he hath a grant or permission from heaven for it. God's special providence is over his people, but his general providence over all kingdoms and countries.

He takes care of Syria, as well as of Judea; and sends Elisha to anoint Hazael king of Syria, as well as Jehu king of Israel, 1 Kings 19:15. Though Ishmael had mocks for Isaac, yet the God of Isaac provided for the wants of Ishmael; Gen. 25:16–18, 'He causeth his sun to shine upon the unjust,' as well as 'the just,' to produce fruits and plants for their preservation.

(2.) Over the meanest creatures. As the sun's light, so God's providence disdains not the meanest worms. It is observed, that in the enumeration of the works of creation, Gen. 1:21, only the great whales and small creeping things are mentioned, and not the intermediate creatures, to shew that the least as well as the greatest are under his care. It is one of his titles to be the preserver of beasts as well as men, Neh. 9:6. He is the great caterer for all creatures; Ps. 104:21, 'The young lions seek their meat from God.' They attend him for their daily portion, and what they gather and meet with in their pursuit, is God's gift to them, ver. 27, 28. He listens to the cries of the young ravens, though they are birds of prey. 'He gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry,' Ps. 147:9. In Ps. 104. David throughout the whole reads a particular lecture of this doctrine, wherein you may take a prospect of God's providence all over the world. He acts them by a commandment and imprinted law upon their natures, and makes them observe exactly those statutes he enacts for the guidance of them in their proper operations. Ps. 147:15, 'He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth, and his word runs very swiftly,' viz., his word of providence. God keeps them in the observation of their first ordinance. Ps. 119:91, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants,' i.e. the earth and what is upon it. They observe their stations, the law God hath set them, as if they had a rational knowledge of their duty in their particular motions; Ps. 104:19, 'the sun knoweth his going down.' Sometimes he makes them instruments of his ministry to us, sometimes executioners of his judgments. Lice and frogs arm themselves at his command to punish Egypt. He makes a whale to attend Jonas dropping into the sea, to be an instrument both to punish and preserve him. Yea, and which is more wonderful, the multitude of the very cattle is brought among others as a reason of a people's preservation from destruction, Jonah 4:11; the multitude of the cattle are joined with the multitude of the infants, as an argument to spare Nineveh. He remembers Noah's cattle as well as his sons; Gen 8:1, 'God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.' He numbers the very hairs of our heads, that not one falls without his will. Not only the

immortal soul, but the decaying body; not only the vital parts of that body, but the inconsiderable hairs of the head, are under his care.

Obs. 1. This is no dishonour to God, to take care of the meanest creatures. It is as honourable for his power to preserve them, and his wisdom to govern them, as for both to create them. It is one part of a man's righteousness to be merciful to his beasts, which he never made; and is it not a part of God's righteousness, as the rector of the world, to take care of those creatures, which he did not disdain to give a being to?

Obs. 2. It rather conduceth to his honour.

(1.) The honour of his goodness. It shews the comprehensiveness of his goodness, which embraceth in the arms of his providence the lowest worm as well as the highest angel. Shall infinite goodness frame a thing, and make no provision for its subsistence? At the first creation he acknowledged whatever he had created good in his kind, good in themselves, good in order to the end for which he created them; it is therefore an honourable thing for his goodness to conduct them to that end which in their creation he designed them for; and not leave them wild disorders, unsuitable to the end of that goodness which first called them into being. If he grow out of love with the operations of his hands, he would seem to grow out of love with his own goodness that formed them.

(2.) The honour of his power and wisdom. The power of God is as much seen in making an insect full of life and spirit in all the parts of it, to perform all the actions suitable to its life and nature, as in making creatures of a greater bulk; and is it not for the honour of his power to preserve them, and the honour of his wisdom to direct these little animals to the end he intended in their creation? For as little as they seem to be, an end they have, and glorious too, for *natura nihil facit frustra*. It seems not to consist with his wisdom to neglect that which he hath vouchsafed to create. And though the apostle seems to deny God's care of brutes,—1 Cor. 9:9, 'Doth God

take care for oxen?'—it is true God did not in that law only take care of oxen, i.e. with a legislative care, as making a law only for them, though with a providential care he doth; but the apostle there doth not deny God's care for oxen, but makes an argument a minore ad majus.

2. Providence extends to all the actions and motions of the creature. Every second cause implies a dependence upon a first cause in its operation. If God did not extend his providence over the actions of creatures, he would not every where, and in all things and beings, be the first cause.

(1.) To natural actions. What an orderly motion is there in the natural actions of creatures, which evidenceth a guidance by an higher reason, since they have none of their own! How do fish serve several coasts at several seasons, as if sent upon a particular message by God? This cannot be by any other faculty than the instinct their Maker hath put into them. Plants that grow between a barren and fruitful soil, shoot all their roots towards the moist and fruitful ground, by what other cause than a secret direction of providential wisdom?* There is a law impressed upon them and their motions, that are so orderly, as if they were acted according to a covenant and agreement between them and their Creator, and therefore called 'the covenant of the day and night,' Jer. 33:20. What avails the toil and labour of man in ploughing, trading, watching, unless God influence, unless he bless, unless he keep the city! The proceed of all things depends upon his goodness in blessing, and his power in preserving. God signified this, when he gave the law from mount Sinai, promising the people, that if they kept his commandments, he would give them rain in due season, and that the earth should bring forth her fruit: Lev. 26:3, 4, 'Then will I give you rain, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit;' evidencing thereby, that those natural causes can produce nothing without his blessing; that though they have natural principles to produce such fruits according to their natures, yet he can put a stop to their operations, and make all their fruits abortive. He weighs the

waters, how much shall be poured out in showers of rain upon the parched earth. He makes a decree for the rain, and gives the clouds commission to dissolve themselves so much and no more, Job 28:23–26. Yea, he doth order the conduct of them by counsel, as employing his wisdom about these things which are of concern to the world. Job 37:11, 12, 'He scattereth his bright cloud, and it is turned round about by his counsels, that they may do whatsoever he commands them upon the face of the world in the earth.'

(2.) To civil actions. Counsels of men are ordered by him to other ends than what they aim at, and which their wisdom cannot discover. God stirred up Sennacherib to be the executioner of his justice upon the Jews, and afterwards upon the Egyptians, when that great king designed only the satisfaction of his ambition in the enlarging his kingdom, and supporting his greatness. Isa. 10:6, 7, 'I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath. Howbeit he means not so, neither doth his heart think so,'—he designs not to be an instrument of my justice,—'but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.' His thoughts and aims were far different from God's thoughts. The hearts of kings are in his hands, as wax in the hands of a man, which he can work into what form and shape he pleases. He hath the sovereignty over, and the ordering the hearts of magistrates; Ps. 47:9, 'The shields of the earth belong unto God.' Counsels of men for the good of his people are his act. The princes advised Jeremiah and Baruch, Jer. 36:19, to hide themselves, which they did, yet, verse 26, it is said the Lord hid them. Though they followed the advice of their court-friends, yet they could not have been secured, had not God stepped in by his providential care, and covered them with his hand. It was the courtiers' counsel, but God challenges the honour of the success.

Military actions are ordered by him. Martial employments are ordered by his providence. He is the great general of armies. It is observed that in the two prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, God is called the Lord of Hosts no less than a hundred and thirty times.*

(3.) To preternatural actions. God doth command creatures to do those things which are no way suitable to their inclinations, and gives them sometimes for his own service a writ of ease from the performance of the natural law he hath impressed upon them. A devouring raven is made by the providence of God the prophets' caterer in time of famine, 1 Kings 17:4. God instructs a ravenous bird in a lesson of abstinence for Elijah's safety, and makes it both a cook and a serving-man to the prophet. The whale, that delights to play about the deepest part of the ocean, approaches to the shore, and attends upon Jonah to transport him to the dry land, Jonah 2:10, The fire was slacked by God, that it should not singe the least hair of the three children's heads, but was let loose to consume the officers of the court, Dan. 3. The mouths of the ravenous lions, which had been kept with an empty stomach, were muzzled by God, that they should not prey upon Daniel in a whole night's space. God taught them an heroic temperance with so dainty a dish at their mouths, and yet they tore the accusers in a trice.

(4.) To all supernatural and miraculous actions of the creatures, which are as so many new creations. As when the sun went backward in Hezekiah's time, when it stood still in the valley of Ajalon, that Joshua might complete his victory on the Canaanites. The boisterous waves stood on a heap like walls to secure the Israelites' passage; but, returning to their natural motion, were the Egyptians' sepulchre. When creatures have stepped out of their natural course, it could not be the act of the creature, it being so much against and above their natures, but it must be by the order of some superior power.

(5.) To all fortuitous actions. What is casual to us is ordained by God; as effects stand related to the second cause, they are many times contingent, but as they stand related to the first cause, they are acts of his counsel, and directed by his wisdom. God never left second causes to straggle and operate in a vagabond way; though the effect seem to us to be a loose act of the creature, yet it is directed by a superior cause to a higher end than we can presently imagine. The whole disposing of the lot which is cast into the lap, is from the Lord,

Prov. 16:33. A soldier shoots an arrow at random, and God guides it to be the executioner of Ahab for his sin, 1 Kings 22:34, which death was foretold by Micaiah, ver. 17, 28. God gives us a certain rule to judge of such contingencies, Exod. 21:13, 'And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand.' A man accidentally kills another, but it is done by a secret commission from God. God delivered him into his hands. Providence is the great clock, keeping time and order, not only hourly, but instantly, to its own honour.*

(6.) To all voluntary actions.

[1.] To good actions. Not by compelling, but sweetly inclining, determining the will, so that it doth that willingly, which, by an unknown and unseen necessity, cannot be omitted. It constrains not a man to good against his will, but powerfully moves the will to do that by consent, which God hath determined shall be done: 'The way of man is not in himself,' the motion is man's, the action is man's, but the direction of his steps is from God. Jer. 10:23, 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.'

[2.] To evil actions.

First, In permitting them to be done. Idolatries and follies of the heathen were permitted by God. He checked them not in their course, but laid the reins upon their necks, and suffered them to run what race they pleased: Acts 14:16, 'Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.' Not the most execrable villany that ever was committed in the world could have been done without his permission. Sin is not amabile propter se, and therefore the permission of it is not desirable in itself, but the permission of it is only desirable, and honestatur ex fine. God is good, and wise, and righteous in all his acts, so likewise in this act of permitting sin; and therefore he wills it out of some good and righteous end, which belongs to the manifestation of his glory, which is that he intends in all the acts of his will, of which this is one. Wicked men are said to be a staff in God's hand; as a man manages a staff which is in his own

power, so doth God manage wicked men for his own holy purposes, and they can go no further than God gives them license.

Secondly, In ordering them. God governs them by his own unsearchable wisdom and goodness, and directs them to the best and holiest ends, contrary to the natures of the sins, and the intentions of the sinner. Joseph's brothers sold him to gratify their revenge, and God ordered it for their preservation in a time of famine. Pharaoh's hardness is ordered by God for his own glory and that king's destruction. God decrees the delivering up Christ to death; and Herod, Pilate, the Pharisees, and common rout of people, in satisfying their own passion, do but execute what God had before ordained: Acts 4:28, 'For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' Judas his covetousness, and the devil's malice, are ordered by God to execute his decree for the redemption of the world. Titus the emperor, his ambition led him to Jerusalem, but God's end is the fulfilling of his threatenings, and the taking revenge upon the Jews for their murdering of Christ. The aim of the physician is the patient's health, when the intent of the leeches is only to suck the blood. God hath holy ends in permitting sin, while man hath unworthy ends in committing it. The rain, which makes the earth fruitful, is exhaled out of the salt waters, which would of themselves spoil the ground and make it unfruitful. 'The deceiver and the deceived are his,' Job 12:16. Both the action of the devil the seducer, and of wicked men the seduced, are restrained by God within due bounds, in subserviency to his righteous will. For 'with him is strength and wisdom.'

Prop. 2. As providence is universal, so it is mysterious. Who can trace the motions of God's eyes in their race? 'He makes the clouds his chariot,' Ps. 104:3, in his motions about the earth, and his throne is in the dark. He walks upon the wings of the wind, his providential speed makes it too quick for our understanding. His ways are mysterious, and put the reason and wisdom of men to a stand. The clearest-sighted servants of God do not see the bottom of his works, the motion of God's eyes is too quick for ours.

John Baptist is so astonished at the strange condescension of his Saviour to be baptized of him, that he forbids it, Mat. 3:14; man is a weak creature, and cannot trace or set out the wisdom of God.

But this mysteriousness and darkness of providence adds a lustre to it, as stones set in ebony, though the grounds be dark, make the beauty and sparkling the clearer.

1. His ways are above human methods. Dark providences are often the groundwork of some excellent piece he is about to discover to the world. His methods are like a plaited picture, which on the one side represents a negro, on the other a beauty. He lets Sarah's womb be dead, and then brings out the root of a numerous progeny. He makes Jacob a cripple, and then a prince to prevail with God; he gives him a wound and then a blessing. He sends not the gospel till reason was nonplussed, and that the world, in that highest wisdom it had at that time attained unto, was not able to arrive to the knowledge of God. 1 Cor. 1:21, 'After that the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.'

2. His ends are of a higher strain than the aims of men. Who would have thought that the forces Cyrus raised against Babylon, to satisfy his own ambition, should be a means to deliver the Israelites, and restore the worship of God in the temple? God had this end, which Isaiah prophesied of, and Cyrus never dreamt of: Isa. 44:28, 'That saith of Cyrus, Thou art my shepherd, and shalt perform all my pleasure, even saying that Jerusalem shall be built,' &c.; and this a long time before Cyrus was born, Isa. 45:1. Pharaoh sent Israel away in the very night, at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, the time prefixed by God. He could not keep them longer because of God's promise, he would not because of God's plagues. God aims at the glorifying his truth, in keeping touch with his word. Pharaoh designs not the accomplishing God's will, but his deliverance from God's judgments.

There is an observable consideration to this purpose, how God's ends are far different from man's, Luke 2:1, 4, in the taxing the whole world by Augustus. Augustus, out of pride, to see what a numerous people he was prince of, would tax the whole world. Some tell us he had appointed the enrolling the whole empire twenty-seven years before the birth of our Saviour, and had proclaimed it at Tarracon, in Spain. But soon after this proclamation, Augustus found a breaking out of some stirs, and thereupon deferred his resolution to some other fit time, which was the very time of the birth of Christ. See now God's wise disposal of things, in changing Augustus's resolution, and deferring it till the forty-fourth year of his reign, when Christ was ready to come into the world! And this by giving occasion, yea, necessitating Mary to come from Nazareth, where Joseph and Mary dwelt, who perhaps being big with child, without this necessity laid upon her by the emperor's edict, would not have ventured upon the journey to Bethlehem. There she falls in travail, that so Christ, the seed of David, being conceived in Nazareth, should be born at Bethlehem, where Jesse lived, and David was born. How wisely doth God order the ambition and pride of men to fulfil his own predictions, and to publish the truth of Christ's birth of the seed of David, for the names of Joseph and Mary were found in the records of Rome in Tertullian's time.

3. God hath several ends in the same action. Jacob is oppressed with famine, Pharaoh enriched with plenty, but Joseph's imprisonment is in order to his father's relief, and Pharaoh's wealth; his mistress's anger flings him into a prison. Joseph is wronged, and hath captivity for a reward of his chastity. God makes it a step to his advancement, and by this way brings him from a captive to be a favourite. What is God's end? Not only to preserve the Egyptian nation, but old Jacob and his family. Was this all that God aimed at? No; he had a further design, and lays the foundation of something to be acted in the future age. By this means Jacob is brought into Egypt, leaves his posterity there, makes way for that glory in the working of the future miracles for their deliverance, such an action that the world should

continually ring of, and which should be a type of the spiritual deliverance by Christ.

4. God has more remote ends than short-sighted souls are able to espy. God doth not eye the present advantage of himself and his creature, but hath an eye to his own glory in all, yea, in the very last ages of the world. In small things there are often great designs laid by God, and mysteries in the least of his acts. Isaac was delivered from his father's sword, when he was intentionally dead, to set forth to the world a type of Christ's resurrection, and a ram is conducted thither by God, and entangled in the thickets, and appointed to sacrifice, whereby God sets forth a type of Christ's death.* He useth the captivities of the people, to enlarge the bounds of the gospel.

The wise men were guided by a star to Christ as King of the Jews, and come to pay homage to him in his infancy. When was the foundation of this remarkable event laid? Probably in Balaam's prophecy, Num. 24:17. 'I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel,' &c. transmitted by tradition to those wise men, and perhaps renewed by Sibilla Chaldœa, and confirmed in their minds by the Jews, whilst in the Babylonish captivity they conversed with them. Thus God many ages before in this prophecy had an end in promoting the readier entertainment of Christ among this people, when he should be born; what the wise men's end was, the Scripture doth not acquaint us; but, however, their gifts were a means to preserve our Saviour, Joseph, and Mary, from the rage of a tyrant, and affording them wherewithal to support them in Egypt, whither they were ordered by God to fly for security. So God, 2 Kings 7:1, 2, 17, threatens by the prophet the nobleman for his scoffing unbelief, that though he should see the plenty, that he should not taste of it. See how God doth order second causes, naturally to bring about his own decree! The king gives this person charge of the gate; whilst the people crowd for provision to satisfy their hunger, they accomplish the threatening, which they had no intentions to do, and trod him to death. Now I come to shew that there is a providence.

Obs. 1. The wisdom of God would not be so perspicuous, were there not a providence in the world. It is eminent in the creation, but more illustrious in the government of the creatures. A musician discovers more skill in the touching an instrument, and ordering the strings, to sound what notes he pleaseth, than he doth in the first framing and making of it. Isa. 28:29, 'This also comes from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.' All God's providences are but his touch of the strings of this great instrument of the world. And all his works are excellent, because they are the fruit of his wonderful counsel, and unsearchable wisdom, which is most seen in his providence, as in reading the verses before. His power is glorified in creating and upholding this fabric. How shall his wisdom be glorified but in his government of it? Surely God will be no less intent upon the honour of his wisdom than upon that of his power. For if any attribute may be said to excel another, it is his wisdom and holiness, because those are perfections which God hath stamped upon the nobler part of his creation. Inferior creatures have more power and strength than man, but wisdom is the perfection of a rational creature. Now it is God's wisdom to direct all things to their proper end, as well as to appoint them their ends, which direction must be by a particular providence, especially in those things which know not their end, and have no reason to guide them. We know in the world it is not a part of wisdom to leave things to chance, but to state our ends, and lay a platform of those means which direct to an attaining of them. And wisdom is most seen in drawing all things together, and making them subservient to the end he hath fixed to himself; and, therefore, one of the great things that shall be admired at last, next to the great work of redemption, will be the harmony and consent of those things which seemed contrary, how they did all conspire for the bringing about that end which God aimed at.

Obs. 2. The means whereby God acts discover a providence. He acts,

1. By small means. The considerable actions in the world have usually very small beginnings. As of a few letters how many thousand words are made! of ten figures, how many thousand numbers! And a

point is the beginning of all geometry. A little stone flung into a pond makes a little circle, then a greater, till it enlargeth itself to both the sides. So from small beginnings, God doth cause an efflux through the whole world.

(1.) He useth small means in his ordinary works. The common works of nature spring from small beginnings. Great plants are formed from small seeds. The clouds which water the great garden of the world are but a collection of vapours. The noblest operations of the soul are wrought in an organ, viz. the brain, composed of coagulated phlegm. Who would imagine that Saul, in seeking his father's asses, should find a kingdom?

(2.) In his extraordinary works he useth small means. Elisha, that waited upon Elijah, and poured water upon his hands, shall do greater miracles than his master. And the apostles shall do greater works than Christ, John 14:12, that the world may know that God is not tied to any means that men count excellent; that all creatures are his, and act not of themselves, but by his spirit and power.

In his extraordinary works of justice. He makes a rod in the hands of Moses to confound the skill of the Egyptian magicians. He commissioned frogs and flies to countercheck a powerful and mighty people. When Benhadad was so proud as to say, the dust of Samaria should not suffice for handfuls for his army, God scattered his army by the lacqueys of the princes,—1 Kings 20:14, 'The young men of the princes of the provinces,'—about two hundred thirty-two, ver. 15. The little sling in the hand of David a youth, guided by God's eye and hand, is a match fit enough for a blasphemous giant, and defeats the strength of a weaver's beam.

In his extraordinary works of mercy.

[1.] In the deliverance of a people or person. A dream was the occasion of Joseph's greatness and Joseph's preservation. He used the cacklings of geese to save the Roman Capitol from a surprise by

the Gauls. He picks out Gideon to be a general, who was least in his father's esteem, Judges 6:15; and what did his army consist of, but few, and those fearful, Judges 7:6, 7; those that took water with their hands (which, as Josephus saith, is a natural sign of fear) did God choose out to overthrow the Midianites, who had overspread the land as grasshoppers, to shew that he can make the most fearful men to be sufficient instruments against the greatest powers, when the concernments of his church and people lie at stake.

God so delights in thus baffling the pride of men, that Asa uses it as an argument to move God to deliver him in the strait he was in, when Zerah the Ethiopian came against him with a great multitude, when he was but a small point and centre in the midst of a wide circumference: 2 Chron. 14:11, 'Lord, it is nothing with thee to help with many or with few.' Hereby God sets off his own power, and evidenceth his superintendent care of his people. It was more signally the arm of God for Moses to confound Pharaoh with his lice and frogs, than if he had beaten him in a plain field with his six hundred thousand Israelites.

[2.] In the salvation of the soul. Our Saviour himself, though God, the great redeemer of the world, was so mean in the eyes of the world, that he calls himself 'a worm, and no man,' Ps. 22:6. He picks out many times the most unlikely persons to accomplish the greatest purposes for men's souls. He lodgeth the treasures of wisdom in vessels of earth; he chose not the cedars of Lebanon, but the shrubs of the valley; not the learned Pharisees of Jerusalem, but the poor men of Galilee: 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, he ordains praise to himself.'

The apostles' breeding was not capable of ennobling their minds, and fitting them for such great actions as Christ employed them in. But after he had new moulded and inflamed their spirits, he made them of fishermen, greater conquerors of the world, than the most magnified grandees could pretend to.

Thus salvation is wrought by a crucified Christ: and that God who made the world by wisdom, would save it by the foolishness of preaching. And make Paul, the least of the apostles as he terms himself, more successful than those who had been instructed at the feet of Christ, 1 Cor. 15:9, 10.

2. By contrary means. God by his providence makes contrary things contribute to his glory, as contrary colours in a picture do to the beauty of the piece. Nature is God's instrument to do whatsoever he pleases; and therefore nothing so contrary but he may bring to his own ends; as in some engines you shall see wheels have contrary motions, and yet all in order to one and the same end. God cured those by a brazen serpent, which were stung by the fiery ones; whereas brass is naturally hurtful to those that are bit by serpents.*

(1.) Afflictions. Joseph is sold for a slave, and God sends him as a harbinger; his brothers sold him to destroy him, and God sends him to save them. Paul's bonds, in the opinion of some, might have stifled the gospel; but he tells us that they had fallen out to the furtherance of the gospel, Phil. 1:12.

(2.) Sins.† God doth often effect his just will by our weakness; neither thereby justifying our infirmities, nor blemishing his own action. Jacob gets the blessing by unlawful means, telling no less than two lies to attain it,—I am Esau, and this is venison,—but hereby God brings about the performance of his promise, which Isaac's natural affection to Esau would have hindered Jacob of.

The breach of the first covenant was an occasion of introducing a better. Man's sinning away his first stock, was an occasion to God to enrich him with a surer. The loss of his original righteousness made way for a clearer and more durable. The folly of man made way for the evidence of God's wisdom, and the sin of man for the manifestation of his grace; and by the wise disposal of God, opens a way for the honour of those attributes which would not else have been experimentally known by the sons of men.

3. Casual means. The viper which leapt upon Paul's hand out of the bundle of sticks was a casual act, but designed by the providence of God for the propagation of the gospel. Pharaoh's daughter comes casually to wash herself in the river, but, indeed, conducted by the secret influence of God upon her, to rescue Moses, exposed to a forlorn condition, and breed him up in the Egyptian learning, that he might be the fitter to be his kindred's deliverer. Saul had been hunting David, and at last had lodged him in a place whence he could not well escape, and being ready to seize upon him in that very instant of time, a post comes to Saul, and brings the news that the Philistines had invaded the land, which cut out other work for him, and David for that time escapes, 1 Sam. 23:26, 27, 28.

Prop. 3. Reason. Such actions and events of things are in the world, which cannot rationally be ascribed to any other cause than a supreme providence. It is so in common things. Men have the same parts, the same outward advantages, the same industry, and yet prosper not alike. One labours much, and gets little; another uses not altogether such endeavours, and hath riches flowing in upon him. Men lay their projects deep, and question not the accomplishment of them, and are disappointed by some strange and unforeseen accident. And sometimes men attain what they desire in a different way, and many times contrary to the method they had projected. This is evidenced,

1. By the restraints upon the passions of men. The waves of the sea, and the tumults of the people are much of the same impetuous natures, and are quelled by the same power: Ps. 65:7, 'Which stilleth the noise of the sea, and tumult of the people.' Tumults of the people could no more be stilled by the force of a man, than the waves of the sea by a puff of breath. How strangely did God qualify the hearts of the Egyptians willingly to submit to the sale of their land, when they might have risen in a tumult, broke open the granaries, and supplied their wants, Gen. 47:19, 21. Indeed, if the world were left to the conduct of chance and fortune, what work would the savage lusts and passions of men make among us! How is it possible that any but an

almighty power can temper so many jarring principles, and rank so many quarrelsome and turbulent spirits in a due order! If those brutish passions which boil in the hearts of men were let loose by that infinite power that bridles them, how soon would the world be run headlong into inconceivable confusions, and be rent in pieces by its own disorders?

2. By the sudden changes which are made upon the spirits of men for the preservation of others. God takes off the spirit of some as he did the wheels from the Egyptian chariots, in the very act of their rage. Paul was struck down and changed while he was yet breathing out threatenings, &c. God sees all the workings of men's hearts, all those cruel intentions in Esau against his brother Jacob, but God on a sudden turns away that torrent of hatred, and disposeth Esau for a friendly meeting, Gen. 33:4. And he who had before an exasperated malice by reason of the loss of his birthright and blessing, was in a moment a changed man. Thus was Saul's heart changed towards David, and from a persecutor turns a justifier of him, confesseth David's innocence and his own guilt: 1 Sam. 24:17, 18, 'Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil,' &c. What reason can be rendered for so sudden a change in Saul's revengeful spirit, which had all the force of interest to support it, and considered by him at that very time? For, ver. 21, he takes special notice that his family should be disinherited, and David be his successor in the throne. How suddenly did God turn the edge of the sword and the heart of an enemy from Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 18:31. Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him, and God moved them to depart from him. The Holy Ghost emphatically ascribes it to God's motion of their wills, by twice expressing it. But stranger is the preservation of the Jews from Haman's bloody designs, after the decree was gone out against them. Mordecai the Jew is made Ahasuerus's favourite by a strange wheeling of providence. First, the king's eyes are held waking, Esther 6:1, 2, and he is inclined to pass away the solitariness of the night with a book, rather than a game, or some other court pastime; no book did he fix on but the records of that empire, no place in that voluminous book

but the chronicle of Mordecai's service in the discovery of a treason against the king's life; he doth not carelessly pass it over, but inquires what recompence had been bestowed on Mordecai for so considerable a service, and this just before Mordecai should have been destroyed. Had Ahasuerus slept, Mordecai and all his countrymen had been sacrificed, notwithstanding all his loyalty. Could this be a cast of blind chance, which had such a concatenation of evidences in it for a superior power?

3. In causing enemies to do things for others which are contrary to all rules of policy. It is wonderful that the Jews, a people known to be of a stubborn nature, and tenacious of their laws, wherein they differed from all the nations, should in the worst of their captivities be so often befriended by their conquerors, not only to rebuild their city, and re-edify their temple, but at the charge of their conquerors too. The very enemies that had captived the Jews, though they knew them to be a people apt to rebel: that the people whose temple they had helped to build would keep up a distinct worship and difference in religion, which is usually attended with the greatest animosities; and when they knew it to be so strong in situation as to be a fort as well as a place of worship; that for this their enemies should furnish them with materials, when they were not in a condition to procure any for themselves, and give them money out of the public exchequer, and timber out of the king's forest, as we read, Ezra 1:1, 2, 4, 7; 4:12, 15, 19; 6:4, 5, 8, 9, 11; Neh. 2:8. And all this they looked upon as the hand of God: Ezra, 6:22, 'The Lord hath turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God.' And the heathen Artaxerxes takes notice of it. Cicero tells us, that in his time gold was carried out of Italy for the ornament of the temple. They had their rites in religion preserved entire under the Roman government, though more different from the Roman customs than any nation subdued by them. Dion and Seneca, and others, observe, that wherever they were transplanted they prospered and gave laws to the victors. And this was so generally acknowledged, that Haman's cabinet counsel (who were surely none of the meanest statesmen) gave him no hopes of

success, when he appeared against Mordecai, because he was of the race of the Jews, Esth. 6:13, so much did God own them by his gracious providence. They were also so entire in all their captivities before their crucifying of our Lord and Saviour, that they count their genealogies.

4. In infatuating the counsels of men. God sets a stamp of folly upon the wisdom of men, Isa. 44:25, 'that turns the wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness, and makes their counsels as chaff and stubble.' Isa. 33:11, 'Ye shall conceive chaff, and bring forth stubble.' Herod was a crafty person, insomuch that Christ calls him fox.* How foolish was he in managing his project of destroying Christ, his supposed competitor in the kingdom! When the wise men came to Jerusalem, and brought the news of the birth of a king of the Jews, he calls a synod of the ablest men among the Jews! The result of it is to manifest the truth of God's prediction in the place of our Saviour's birth, and to direct the wise men in their way to him. Herod had no resolutions but bloody concerning Christ, Mat. 2:3–8. God blinds his mind in the midst of all his craft, that he sees not those rational ways which he might make use of for the destruction of that which he feared: he sends those wise men, mere strangers to him, and entrusts them with so great a concern; he goes not himself, nor sends any of his guard with them to cut him off immediately upon the discovery, but leaves the whole conduct of the business to those he had no acquaintance with, and of whose faithfulness he could have no assurance. God crosses the intentions of men. Joab slew Amasa because he thought him his rival in David's favour, and then imagined he had rid his hands of all that could stand in his way; yet God raised up Benaiah, who drew Joab from the horns of the altar, and cut him in pieces at Solomon's command. God doth so order it, many times, that when the most rational counsel is given to men, they have not hearts to follow it. Ahithophel gave as suitable counsel for Absalom's design as the best statesman in the world could give, 2 Sam. 17:1, 2, to surprise David while he was amused[†] at his son's rebellion, and dejected with grief at so unnatural an action, and whilst his forces had not yet made their rendezvous, and those that

were with him were tired in their march. Speed was best in attempts of this nature. David in all probability had been cut off, and the hearts of the people would have melted at the fall of their sovereign. But Absalom inclines rather to Hushai's counsel, which was not so proper for the business he had engaged in, ver. 7–14. Now this was from God. 'For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom.' So foolish were the Egyptians against reason, in entering into the Red Sea after the Israelites; for could they possibly think that that God, who had by a strong hand and an army of prodigies brought Israel out of their captivity, and conducted them thus far, and now by a miracle opened the Red Sea and gave them passage through the bowels of it, should give their enemies the same security in pursuing them, and unravel all that web he had been so long a working?

5. In making the counsels of men subservient to the very ends they design against. God brings a cloud upon men's understandings, and makes them the contrivers of their own ruin, wherein they intend their own safety, and gains honour to himself by outwitting the creature. The Babel projectors, fearing to be scattered abroad, would erect a power to prevent; and this proved the occasion of dispersing them over the world in such a confusion that they could not understand one another, Gen. 11:4, 8. God ordered Pharaoh's policies to accomplish the end against which they were directed. He is afraid Israel should grow too mighty, and so wrest the kingdom out of his hands, and therefore he would oppress them to hinder their increase, which made them both stronger and more numerous. Exercise strengthens men, and luxury softens the spirit. The Jews fear if they suffered Christ to make a farther progress in his doctrine and miracles, they should lose Cæsar's favour, and expose their country as a prey to a Roman army: this caused their destruction by those enemies they thought by this means to prevent; God ordering it so, that a Roman army was poured in upon them which swept them into all corners of the earth. Priests and Pharisees sit close together in counsel how to hinder men's believing in Christ, and the result of

their consultation was to put him to death, and no man then would believe in a dead person, not capable of working any miracles, John 11:47–50, for the amusing of the people; and by this means there were a greater number of believers on him than in the time of his life, according to his own prediction, John 12:32, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.'

6. In making the fancies of men subservient to their own ruin. God brings about strange events by the mere imaginations and conceits of men, which are contrary to common and natural observation, and the ordinary course of rational consequences, 2 Kings 3:22, 23. The army of the Moabites which had invaded Israel thought the two kings of Judah and Israel had turned their swords against one another, because the rising sun had coloured those unexpected waters and made them look red, which they took for the blood of their enemies, and so disorderly run without examination of the truth of their conceit; but instead of dividing the spoil, they left their lives upon the points of the Israelites' swords. So the Syrian army are scared with a panic fear, and scatter themselves upon an empty sound, 2 Kings 7:6. Thus a dream struck a terror into the Midianites, and the noise of the broken potsherds made them fear some treason in their camp, and caused them to turn their swords into one another's bowels: Judges 7:19–22, 'The Lord set every man's sword against his fellow.'

Quest. First, If God's providence orders all things in world, and concurs to every thing, how will you free God from being the author of sin?

Answer, in several propositions.

1. It is certain God hath a hand about all the sinful actions in the world. The selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites was the act of his brethren; the sending him into Egypt was the act of God: Ps. 105:17, 'He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant;' Gen. 45:8, 'It was not you that sent me hither, but God,' where Joseph ascribes it more to God than to them. Their wicked

intention was to be rid of him, that he might tell no more tales of them to his father. God's gracious intention was to advance him for his honour and their good; and to bring about this gracious purpose, he makes use of their sinful practice. God's end was righteous, when theirs was wicked. It is said God moved David to number the people: 2 Sam. 24:1, 'The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah.' Yet Satan is said to provoke David to number the people: 1 Chron. 21:1, 'And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.' Here are two agents; but the text mentions God's hand in it out of justice to punish Israel; Satan's end, no question, was out of malice to destroy. Satan wills it as a sin, God as a punishment: God, say some, permissivè, Satan efficaciter. In the most villanous and unrighteous action that ever was done, God is said to have an influence on it. God is said to deliver up Christ: Acts 2:23, 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:' Acts 4:28, 'For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' Not barely as an act of his presence, but his counsel, and that determinate, i.e. stable and irreversible. He makes a distinction between these two acts. In God it was an act of counsel, in them an act of wickedness, 'by wicked hands;' there was God's counsel about it, an actual tradition: Rom. 8:32, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.' All the agents had several ends. God in that act aimed at the redemption of the world, Satan at the preventing it, Judas to satisfy his covetousness, the Jews to preserve themselves from the Roman invasion, and out of malice to him for so sharply reprovng them. God had a gracious principle of love to mankind, and acted for the salvation of the world in it; the instruments had base principles and ends, and moved freely in obedience to them. So in the affliction of Job, both God and Satan had an hand in it: Job. 1:12, 'The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power;' ver. 11, 'Touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face;' their ends were different: the one righteous, for trial; the other malicious, against God, that he might be cursed; against Job that he might be damned.

God's end was the brightening of his grace, and the devil's end was the ruin of his integrity, and despoiling him of God's favour.

2. In all God's acts about sin there is no stain to God's holiness.* In second causes, one and the same action, proceeding from divers causes, in respect of one cause, may be sinful; in respect of the other, righteous. As when two judges condemn a guilty person, one condemns him out of love to justice, because he is guilty; the other condemns him out of a private hatred and spleen: one respects him as a malefactor only, the other as a private enemy chiefly. Here is the same action with two concurring causes, one being wicked in it, the other righteous. Much more may we conceive it in the concurrence of the Creator with the action of the creature.

(1.) God moves every thing in his ordinary providence according to their particular natures. God moves every thing ordinarily according to the nature he finds it in. Had we stood in innocency, we had been moved according to that originally righteous nature; but since our fall we are moved according to that nature introduced by us with the expulsion of the other. Our first corruption was our own act, not God's work; we owe our creation to God, our corruption to ourselves. Now, since God will govern his creature, I do not see how it can be otherwise, than according to the present nature of the creature, unless God be pleased to alter that nature. God forces no man against his nature; he doth not force the will in conversion, but graciously and powerfully inclines it. He doth never force nor incline the will to sin, but leaves it to the corrupt habits it hath settled in itself: Ps. 81:12, 'So I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels;' counsels of their own framing, not of God's. He moves the will, which is sponte mala, according to its own nature and counsels. As a man flings several things out of his hand, which are of several figures, some spherical, tetragons, cylinders, conics, some round and some square, though the motion be from the agent, yet the variety of their motions is from their own figure and frame; and if any will hold his hand upon a ball in its motion, regularly it will move according to his nature and figure; and

a man by casting a bowl out of his hand, is the cause of the motion, but the bad bias is the cause of its irregular motion. The power of action is from God, but the viciousness of that action from our own nature. As when a clock or watch hath some fault in any of the wheels, the man that winds it up, or putting his hand upon the wheels moves them, he is the cause of the motion, but it is the flaw in it, or deficiency of something, is the cause of its erroneous motion; that error was not from the person that made it, or the person that winds it up, and sets it on going, but from some other cause; yet till it be mended it will not go otherwise, so long as it is set upon motion. Our motion is from God,—Acts 17:28, 'In him we move',—but not the disorder of that motion. It is the foulness of a man's stomach at sea is the cause of his sickness, and not the pilot's government of the ship.

(2). God doth not infuse the lust, or excite it, though he doth present the object about which the lust is exercised. God delivered up Christ to the Jews, he presented him to them, but never commanded them to crucify him, nor infused that malice into them, nor quickened it; but he, seeing such a frame, withdrew his restraining grace, and left them to the conduct of their own vitiated wills. All the corruption in the world ariseth from lust in us, not from the object which God in his providence presents to us: 2 Peter 1:4, 'The corruption that is in the world through lust.' The creature is from God, but the abuse of it from corruption. God created the grape, and filled the vine with a sprightliness, but he doth never infuse a drunken frame into a man, or excite it. Providence presents us with the wine, but the precept is to use it soberly. Can God be blamed if that which is good in itself be turned into poison by others? No more than the flower can be called a criminal, because the spider's nature turns that into venom which is sweet in itself. Man hath such a nature, not from creation, wherein God is positive, but from corruption, wherein God is permissive. Providence brings a man into such a condition of poverty, but it doth not encourage his stubbornness and impatience. There is no necessity upon thee from God to exercise thy sin under affliction, when others under the same exercise their graces. The rod makes the child smart, but it is its own stubbornness makes it curse. In short,

though it be by God's permission that we can do evil, yet it is not by his inspiration that we will to do evil; that is wholly from ourselves.

(3.) God supports the faculties wherewith a man sinneth, and supports a man in that act wherein he sinneth, but concurs not to the sinfulness of that act. No sin doth properly consist in the act itself, as an act, but in the deficiency of that act from the rule. No action wherein there is sin but may be done as an action, though not as an irregular action. Killing a man is not in itself unlawful, for then no magistrate should execute a malefactor for murdering another, and justice would cease in the world; man also must divest himself of all thoughts of preserving his life against an invader; but to kill a man without just cause, without authority, without rule, contrary to rule, out of revenge, is unlawful. So that it is not the act, as an act, is the sin, but the swerving of that act from the rule, makes it a sinful act. So speaking, as speaking, is not a sin, for it is a power and act God hath endued us with, but speaking irreverently and dishonourably of God, or falsely and slanderously of man, or any otherwise irregularly, therein the sin lies; so that it is easy to conceive that an act and the viciousness of it are separable. That act which is the same in kind with another, may be laudable, and the other base and vile in respect of its circumstances. The mind wherewith a man doth this or that act, and the irregularity of it, makes a man a criminal. There is a concurrence of God to the act wherein we sin, but the sinfulness of that act is purely from the inherent corruption of the creature; as the power and act of seeing is communicated to the eye by the soul, but the seeing doubly or dimly is from the viciousness of the organ, the eye. God hath no manner of immediate efficiency in producing sin; as the sun is not the efficient cause of darkness, though the darkness immediately succeeds the setting of the sun, but it is the deficient cause. So God withdraws his grace, and leaves us to that lust which is in our wills: Acts 14:16, 'Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.' He bestowed no grace upon them, but left them to themselves. As a man who lets a glass fall out of his hand is not the efficient cause that the glass breaks, but its own brittle nature; yet he is the deficient cause, because he withdraws his

support from it. God is not obliged to give us grace, because we have a total forfeiture of it. He is not a debtor to any man, by way of merit, of anything but punishment. He is indeed in some sense a debtor to those that are in Christ, upon the account of Christ's purchase and his own promise, but not by any merits of theirs.

(4.) God's providence is conversant about sin as a punishment, yet in a very righteous manner. God did not will the first sin of Adam as a punishment, because there was no punishment due to him before he sinned, but he willed the continuance of it as a punishment to the nature sub ratione boni. This being a judicial act of God, is therefore righteously willed by him. Punishment is a moral good. It is also a righteous thing to suit the punishment to the nature of the offence; and what can be more righteous than to punish a man by that wherein he offends? Hence God is said to give up men to sin,—Rom. 1:26, 27, 'For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections,'—and to send 'strong delusions that they may believe a lie.' And the reason is rendered, 2 Thess. 2:12, 'that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' What more righteous than to make those vile affections and that unrighteousness their punishment which they make their pleasure, and to leave them to pursue their own sinful inclinations, and make them (as the psalmist speaks) Ps. 5:10, 'fall by their own counsels'? A drunkard's beastliness is his punishment as well as his sin. Thus God delivers up some to their own lusts, as a punishment both to themselves and others, as he hardened Pharaoh's heart for the destruction both of himself and his people.

(5.) God by his providence draws glory to himself and good out of sin. It is the highest excellency to draw good out of evil, and it is God's right to manifest his excellency when he pleases, and to direct that to his honour which is acted against his law. The holiness of God could never intend sin as sin. But the wisdom of God foreseeing it, and decreeing to permit it, intended the making it subservient to his own honour. He would not permit it but for some good, because he is infinitely good, and could not by reason of that goodness suffer that

which is purely evil, if by his wisdom he could not raise good out of it. It is purely evil, as it is contrary to law; it is good *ratione finis*, as God orders it by his providence; yet that goodness flows not from the nature of sin, but from the wise disposal of God.

As God at the creation framed a beautiful world out of a chaos, out of matter without form, and void, so by his infinite wisdom he extracts honour to himself out of the sins of men. As sin had dishonoured him at its entrance, in defacing his works and depraving his creature, so he would make use of the sins of men in repairing his honour and restoring the creature.

It is not conceivable by us what way there could be more congruous to the wisdom and holiness of God, as the state of the world then stood, to bring about the death of Christ, which in his decree was necessary to the satisfaction of his justice, without ordering the evil of some men's hearts to serve his gracious purpose. If we could suppose that Christ could commit some capital crime, for which he should deserve death, which was impossible by reason of the hypostatical union, the whole design of God for redemption had sunk to the ground. Therefore God doth restrain or let out the fury of men's passions and the corrupt habits of their wills to such a degree as should answer directly to the full point of his most gracious will, and no further. He lets out their malice so far as was conducing to the grand design of his death, and restrains it from everything that might impair the truth of any prediction, as in the parting his garments, or breaking his bones. If God had put him to death by some thunder or otherwise, and after raised him, how could the voluntariness of Christ appear, which was necessary to make him a perfect oblation? How would his innocency have appeared? The strangeness of the judgment would have made all men believe him some great and notorious sinner. How then could the gospel have been propagated? Who would have entertained the doctrine of one whose innocency could not be cleared? If it be said, God might raise him again, what evidences would have been had that he had been

really dead? But as the case was, his enemies confess him dead really, and many witnesses there were of his resurrection.

[1.] God orders the sins of men to the glory of his grace. As a foil serves to make the lustre of a diamond more conspicuous, so doth God make use of the deformities of men to make his own grace more illustrious, and convey it with a more pleasing relish to them. Never doth grace appear more amiable, never is God entertained with so high admirations, as by those who, of the worst of sinners, are made the choicest of saints. Paul often takes occasion, from the greatness of his sin, to admire the unsearchable riches of that grace which pardoned him.

[2.] God orders them to bring forth temporal mercies. In providence there are two things considerable. First, Man's will. Secondly, God's purpose. What man's will intends as a harm in sin, God in his secret purpose orders to some eminent advantage. In the selling of Joseph, his brothers intend the execution of their revenge; and God orders it for the advancement of himself, and the preservation of his unrighteous enemies, who might otherwise have starved. His brothers sent him to frustrate his dream, and God to fulfil it. Our reformation and return from under the yoke of antichrist was, by the wise disposal of God, occasioned by the three great idols of the world, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; lust, covetousness, and ambition, three vices notoriously eminent in Henry the Eighth, the first instrument in that work. What he did for the satisfaction of his lust is ordered by God for the glory of his mercy to us. And though the papists upon that account reflect upon our Reformation, they may as well reflect upon the glorious work of redemption, because it was in the wisdom of God brought about by Judas his covetousness, and the Jews' malice.

[3.] God orders them for the glory of his justice upon others. Nathan had threatened David that one in his house should lie with his wives in the sight of the sun, 2 Sam. 12:11. Ahithophel adviseth Absalom to do so, not with any design to fulfil God's threatening, but secure his

own stake, by making the quarrel between the father and the son irreconcilable, because he might well fear that upon a peace between David and Absalom he might be offered up as a sacrifice to David's justice. God orders Ahithophel's counsel and Absalom's sin to the glory of his justice in David's punishment.

The ambition of Vespasian and Titus was only to reduce Judea to the Roman province after the revolt of it. But God orders hereby the execution of his righteous will in the punishment of the Jews for their rejecting Christ, and the accomplishment of Christ's prediction. Luke 19:43, 'For the days shall come, that thy enemy shall cast a trench about thee,' &c. To conclude; if we deny God the government of sin in the course of his providence, we must necessarily deny him the government of the world, because there is not an action of any man's in the world, which is under the government of God, but is either a sinful action or an action mixed with sin.

God therefore in his government doth advance his power in the weakness, his wisdom in the follies, his holiness in the sins, his mercy in the unkindness, and his justice in the unrighteousness of men;* yet God is not defiled with the impurities of men, but rather draws forth a glory to himself, as a rose doth a greater beauty and sweetness from the strong smell of the garlic set near it.†

Quest. 2. If there be a providence, how comes those unequal distributions to happen in the world? How is it so bad with good men, as if they were the greatest enemies to God, and so well with the wicked, as if they were the most affectionate friends? Doth not virtue languish away in obscurity, whiles wickedness struts about the world? What is the reason that splendid virtue is oppressed by injustice, and notorious vices triumph in prosperity? It would make men believe that the world was governed rather by a blind and unrighteous, than by a wise, good, and just governor, when they see things in such disorder, as if the devil had, as he pretends, the whole power of the world delivered to him, Luke 4:6, and God had left all care of it to his will.

Ans. This consideration has heightened the minds of many against a providence. It was the notion of many heathens, † when they saw many who had acted with much gallantry for their countries afflicted, they questioned whether there were a superintendent power over the world. This hath also been the stumbling-block of many taught in a higher school than that of nature, the Jews: Mal. 2:17, 'Ye say, every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; and where is the God of judgment?' Yea, and the observation of the outward felicities of vice, and the oppression of goodness, have caused fretting commotions in the hearts of God's people; the Psalm 73 is wholly designed to answer this case. Jeremiah, though fixed in the acknowledgment of God's righteousness, would debate the reason of it with God: Jer. 12:1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them; yea, they have taken root: they grow; yea, they bring forth fruit.' He perceiving it a universal case,—'Wherefore are all they happy,' &c.—did not know how to reconcile it with the righteousness of God, nor Habakkuk with the holiness of God: Hab. 1:13, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity: wherefore holdest thou thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' In point of God's goodness, too, Job expostulates the case with God: Job 10:3, 'Is it good unto thee that thou shouldst oppress? that thou shouldst despise the work of thy hands? and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?' You see upon the account of holiness, righteousness, goodness, the three great attributes of God, it hath been questioned by good men, and upon the account of his wisdom by the wicked Jews.

Ans. 1. Answer in general, Is it not a high presumption for ignorance to judge God's proceedings? In the course of providence such things are done that men could not imagine could be done without injustice; yet when the whole connection of their end is unravelled, they appear highly beautiful, and discover a glorious wisdom and righteousness. If it had entered into the heart of man to think that

God should send his Son in a very low estate to die for sinners, would it not have been judged an unjust and unreasonable act, to deliver up his Son for rebels, the innocent for the criminals, to spare the offender and punish the observer of his law? Yet when the design is revealed and acted, what an admirable connection is there of justice, wisdom, mercy, and holiness, which men could not conceive of! It will be known to be so at last in God's dealing with all his members. We are incompetent judges of the righteousness and wisdom of God, unless we were infinitely righteous and wise ourselves; we must be gods, or in another state, before we can understand the reason of all God's actions. We judge according to the law of sense and self, which are inferior to the rules whereby God works. 'Judge nothing then before the time,' 1 Cor. 4:5. It is not a time for us to pass a judgment upon things. A false judgment is easily made, when neither the counsels of men's hearts, nor the particular laws of God's actions, are known to us. In general it is certain, God doth righteously order his providences; he may see some inward corruptions in good men to be demolished by afflictions, and some good moral affections, some useful designs, or some services he employs wicked men in, to be rewarded in this life.

Ans. 2. God is sovereign of the world. He is *sui juris*: 'The earth is his, and the fulness thereof,' may he not 'do what he will with his own'? Mat. 20:15. Who shall take upon them to control God, and prescribe laws to him how to deal with his creatures? Why should a finite understanding prescribe measures and methods to an infinite majesty?

Ans. 3. God is wise and just, and knows how to distribute. If we question his providence, we question his wisdom. Is it fit for us, who are but of yesterday, and know nothing, to say to an infinite wisdom, What dost thou? and to direct the only wise God to a method of his actions? His own wisdom will best direct him to the time when to punish the insolence of the wicked, and relieve the miseries of his people. We see the present dispensations, but are we able to understand the internal motives? May there not be some sins of

righteous men's parents that he will visit upon their children? some virtues of their ancestors, that he will reward even in their wicked posterity? He may use wicked men as instruments in some service. It is part of his distributive justice to reward them. They aim at these things in their service, and he gratifies them according to their desires. Let not, then, his righteousness be an argument against his providence; it is righteous with God not to be in arrears with them. Sometimes God gives them not to them as rewards of any moral virtue, but puts power into their hands, that they may be instruments of his justice upon some offenders against him: Isa. 10:5, the staff in the Assyrian's hand was God's indignation.

Ans. 4. There is a necessity for some seeming inequality, at least, in order to the good government of the world. Can all in any community of men be of an equal height? A house hath not beams and rafters of an equal bigness, some are greater and some less. The world is God's family. It is here as in a family; all cannot have the same office, but they are divided according to the capacities of some persons, and the necessity of others. Providence would not be so apparent in the beauty of the world, if all men were alike in their stations. Where would the beauty of the body be, if all the members had one office, and one immediate end? Man would cease to be man, if every member had not some distinct work, and a universal agreement in the common profit of the body. All mankind is but one great body, constituted of several members, which have distinct offices, but all ordered to the good of the whole; the apostle argues this excellently in a parallel case of the diversities of gifts in the church: 1 Cor. 12:19, 'If all were one member, where were the body?' ver, 23, 'Those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon those we bestow more abundant honour;' ver. 24, 'God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.' What harmony could there be, if all the voices and sounds were exactly the same in a concert? Who can be delighted with a picture that hath no shadows? The afflictions of good men are a foil to set off the beauty of God's providence in the world.

Ans. 5. Unequal dispensations do not argue carelessness. A father may give one child a gayer coat than he gives another, yet he extends his fatherly care and tenderness over all. According to the several employments he puts his children upon, he is at greater expense, and yet loves one as well as another, and makes provision for all. As the soul takes care of the lowest member, and communicates spirits to every part for their motions; so though God place some in a higher, some in a lower condition, yet he takes care of all: God 'divides to every man as he will,' 1 Cor. 12:11. Every man hath a several share, according to God's pleasure, of a goodness in the world, as well as of gifts in the church.

Ans. 6. Yet upon due consideration the inequality will not appear so great as the complaint of it. If the wants of one, and the enjoyment of another, were weighed in the balance, the scales might not appear so uneven; we see such a man's wealth, but do you understand his cares? A running sore may lie under a purple robe. Health, the salt of blessing, as one calls it, is bestowed upon a labourer, when many that wallow in abundance have those torturing diseases which embitter their pleasures. If some want those worldly ornaments which others have, may they not have more wisdom than those that enjoy them (the noblest perfection of a rational creature)? Prov. 3:13, 14, 'The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold:' Prov. 15:16, 'Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure, and trouble therewith.' As some are stripped of wealth and power, so they are stripped of their incumbrances they bring with them. One hath that serenity and tranquillity of mind, which the cares and fears of others will not suffer them to enjoy, and a grain of contentment is better than many pounds of wealth. It is not a desirable thing to be a great prince, attended with as many cares and fears as he hath subjects in his empire. He made a true estimate of his greatness, that said he would not stoop to take up a crown if it lay at his feet. But more particularly to the parts of the case.

1. It is not well with bad men here.

(1.) Is it well with them who are tortured by their own lusts? What peace can worldly things bestow upon a soul filled with impurity? In 2 Cor. 7:1, sin is called filthiness: Can it be well with them that have nasty souls? Is it well with them who are racked by pride, stung with cares, gnawn with envy, distracted by insatiable desires, and torn in pieces by their own fears? Can it be well with such who have a multitude of vipers in their breasts, sticking all their stings into them, though the sun shine, and the shadows drop upon them? You are spectators of their felicity, but do you understand their inward gripes? Prov. 14:13, 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful.' Can silken curtains or purple clothes confer a happiness upon those who have a mortal plague-sore poisoning their bodies, and are ready to expire? Sin is their plague, whatever is their happiness. 1 Kings 8:38, sin is called the plague of the heart. Their insolent lusts are a far greater misery than the possession of all the kingdoms in the world can be a happiness.

(2.) Is it well with them who have so great an account to make, and know not how to make it? Those that enjoy much are more in God's debt, and therefore more accountable. The account of wicked men is the greater, because of their abundance; and their unfitness to make that account is the greater, because of their abuse. Would any reckon themselves happy to be called upon to give an account of their stewardship for talents, and know not how to give a good account of one farthing? Luke 16:2, 'Give an account of thy stewardship.'

(3.) Is it well with them who are the worse for what they have? Is it a happiness to command others, and be more slaves to the worst of creatures than any can be to them? The wicked man's well-spread table sometimes proves his snare, Ps. 69:22, and his destruction is bound up in his very prosperity: Prov. 1:32, 'And the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.' Prosperity falling upon an unregenerate heart, like the sun and rain upon bad ground, draws forth nothing but weeds and vermin. Would you think it your happiness to be masters of their concerns, and slaves to their pride? Is a

stubbornness against God so desirable a thing, which is strengthened by those things in the hands of the wicked?

(4.) Is it well with them who in the midst of their prosperity are reserved for justice? Can that traitor be accounted happy, that is fed in prison by the prince with better dishes than many a loyal subject hath at his table, but only to keep him alive for his trial, and a public example of justice? God raises some for greater falls. Miserable was the felicity of Pharaoh, to be raised up by God for a subject to shew in him the power of his wrath, Exod. 9:16. It is but a little time before they shall be 'cut down as grass, and wither as the green herb,' Ps. 37:2. None would value the condition of that soldier, who, leaping into a river to save a king's crown, and putting it upon his own head, that he might be enabled to swim out with it, was rewarded for saving it, and executed for wearing it. God rewards wicked men for their service, and punishes them for their insolence.

2. Neither is it bad here with good men, if all be well considered. Other men's judgment of a good man is frivolous, they cannot rightly judge of his state and concerns, but he can make a judgment of theirs: 1 Cor. 2:15, 'A spiritual man judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of no man.' No man can make a sound judgment and estimate of a righteous man's state in any condition, unless he hath had experience of the like in all the circumstances, the inward comforts as well as the outward crosses. For,

(1.) Adversity cannot be called absolutely an evil, as prosperity cannot be called absolutely a good. They are rather indifferent things, because they may be used either for the honour or dishonour of God. As they are used for his honour, they are good, and as used for his dishonour, they are evil. The only absolutely bad thing in the world is sin, which cannot be, in its own nature, but a dishonour to God. The only absolutely good thing in the world is holiness, and a likeness to God, which cannot be, in its own nature, but for his glory. As for all other things, I know no true satisfaction can be in them, but as they are subservient to God's honour, and give us an advantage for

imitating some one or other of his perfections. Crosses in the Scripture are not excluded from those things we have a right to by Christ, when they may conduce to our good: 1 Cor. 3:22, 'Life and death, things present, and things to come, are yours, and you are Christ's.' Since the revelation of the gospel, I do not remember that any such complaint against the providence of God fell from any holy man in the New Testament; for our Saviour had given them another prospect of those things. The holy men in the Old Testament comforted themselves against this objection by the end of the wicked which should happen, and the rod cease, Ps. 73. In the New Testament we are more comforted by the certain operation of crosses to our good and spiritual advantage, Rom. 8. Our Saviour did not promise wealth and honour to his followers, nor did he think it worth his pains of coming and dying, to bestow such gifts upon his children. He made heaven their happiness, and the earth their hell; the cross was their badge here, and the crown their reward hereafter; they seemed not to be a purchase congruous to so great a price of blood. Was God's providence to Christ the more to be questioned because he was poor? Had he the less love to him because he was 'a man of sorrows,' even while he was a God of glory? Such groundless conceits should never enter into Christians, who can never seriously take up Christ's yoke without a proviso of afflictions, who can never be God's sons without expecting his corrections.

(2.) God never leaves good men so bare, but he provides for their necessity: Ps. 84:11, 'The Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' If any thing be good, an upright man may expect it from God's providence; if it be not good, he should not desire it: Howsoever grace, which is necessary for preparing thee for happiness and glory, which is necessary for fixing thee in it, he will be sure to give; we have David's experience for it in the whole course of his life, Ps. 37:5.

(3.) The little good men have is better than the highest enjoyments of wicked men: Ps. 37:16, 'A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked;' not better than many riches of the

wicked, but better than the riches of many wicked, better than all the treasures of the whole mass of the wicked world. Others have them in a providential way, good men in a gracious way: Prov. 16:8, 'Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right,' without a covenant right. Wicked prosperity is like a shadow that glides away in a moment, whereas a righteous man's little is a part of Christ's purchase, and part of that inheritance which shall endure for ever: Ps. 37:18, 'Their inheritance shall be for ever,' i.e., God regards the state of the righteous, whether good or evil, all that befalls them. God doth all with a respect to his everlasting inheritance. No man hath worldly things without their wings. And though the righteous have worldly things with their wings, yet that love whereby they have them hath no wings ever to fly away from them. How can those things be good to a man that can never taste them, nor God in them?

(4.) No righteous man would in his sober wits be willing to make an exchange of his smartest afflictions for a wicked man's prosperity, with all the circumstances attending it. It cannot therefore be bad with the righteous in the worst condition. Would any man be ambitious of snares that knows the deceit of them? Can any but a madman exchange medicines for poison? Is it not more desirable to be upon a dunghill with an intimate converse with God, than upon a throne without it? They gain a world in prosperity, a righteous man gains his soul by afflictions, and possesses it in patience. Is the exchange of a valuable consideration? God strips good men of the enjoyment of the world, that he may wean them from the love of it; keeps them from idolatry, by removing the fuel of it; sends afflictions that he may not lose them, nor they their souls. Would any man exchange a great goodness 'laid up for him that fears God,' Ps. 31:19, for a lesser goodness laid out upon them that are enemies to him?

Who would exchange a few outward comforts with God's promise, inward comforts with assurance of heaven, godliness with contentment, a sweet and spiritual life, sovereignty over himself and lusts, though attended with sufferings, for the government of the whole world?

(5.) It is not ill with the righteous in afflictions, because they have high advantages by them. That cannot be absolutely evil which conduceth to a greater good; as,

First, Sensible experiments of the tender providence of God over them. If the righteous had not afflictions in this life, God would lose the glory of his providence, and they the sweetness in a gracious deliverance from them, in ways which makes the affliction the sweeter as well as the mercy; they would lose the comfort of them, in not having such sensible evidences of God's gracious care.

The sweetness of the promises made for times of trouble would never be tasted: Ps. 37:19, 'They shall not be ashamed in the evil time;' that is, they shall be mightily encouraged and supported. God's people do best understand God's strength when they feel the smart of men's malice: 2 Tim. 4:17, 'The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.' He had never felt so much of God's strength if he had not tasted much of man's wickedness in forsaking him. Ps. 37:39, 'He is their strength,' when in times of trouble they experiment more of his care in preserving them, and his strength in supporting them, than at other times. Abundance of consolations are manifested in abundance of sufferings, 2 Cor. 1:5, 1 Peter 4:13, 14. A greater sense of joy and glory lights upon them in a storm of persecutions. Men see the sufferings of the godly, but they do not behold that inward peace which composeth and delights their souls, worth the whole mass of the world's goodness, and pleasures of the unrighteous.

Secondly, Inward improvements, opportunities to manifest more love to God, more dependence on him, the perfection of the soul: 1 Tim. 5:5, 'Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.' There is a ground of more exercise of trust in God and supplication to him. The poor and desolate have an advantage for the actual exercise of those graces, which a prosperous condition wants. God changeth the metal by it; what was lead and iron he makes come forth as gold: Job 23:10, 'When he hath tried me, I shall come forth

as gold.' Crosses and sufferings, which fit good men for special service here, and eternal happiness hereafter, can no more be said to be evil, than the fire which refines the gold, and prepares it for a prince's use. If there were not such evils, what ground could you have to exercise patience? what heroic acts of faith could you put forth without difficulties? how could you believe against hope, if you had not sometimes something to contradict your hopes? And if a good man should have a confluence of that which the ignorant and pedantical world calls happiness, he might undervalue the pleasures of a better life, deface the beauty of his own soul, and withdraw his love from the most gratifying as well as the most glorious object, unto that which is not worth the least grain of his affection.

Thirdly, Future glory. The great inquiry at the day of Christ's appearing will be, how good men bare their sufferings, what improvements they had; and the greater their purity by them, the greater will be their praise and honour: 1 Peter 1:7, 'That the trial of your faith,' viz., by manifold temptations, 'may be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' For a good improvement by them, they will have a public praise from God's mouth, and a crown of honour set upon their heads. Providence sends even light afflictions as so many artificers, to make the crown more massy and more bright: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'Works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' They are at work about a good man's crown while they make him smart. They prepare him for heaven, and make it more grateful to him when he comes to possess it. A Christian carriage in them prepares for greater degrees of glory. Every stroke doth but more beautify the crown.

Fourthly, Sufferings of good men for the truth highly glorifies the providence of God. This is a matter of glory and honour: 1 Peter 4:16, 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.' They thereby bear a testimony to the highest act of providence that God ever exercised, even the redemption of the world by the blood of his Son. And the church, which is the highest object of his providence in the world, takes the

deeper root, and springs up the higher; the foundation of it was laid in the blood of Christ, and the growth of it is furthered by the blood of martyrs. The carriage of the righteous in them makes the truth they profess more valued. It enhanceth the excellency of religion, and manifests it to be more amiable for its beauty than for its dowry, since they see it desirable by the sufferers, not only without worldly enjoyments, but with the sharpest miseries. This consideration hath wrought upon many to embrace the religion of the sufferers. If it reaches as far as death, they are but despatched to their Father's house, and the day of their death is the day of their coronation; and what evil is there in all this?

Fifthly, To conclude; this argument is stronger (upon the infallible righteousness of God's nature) for a day of reckoning after this life, than against providence. It is a more rational conclusion that God will have a time to justify the righteousness and wisdom of his providential government, and repair the honour of the righteous, oppressed by the injustice of the wicked. And indeed, unless there be a retribution in another world, the question is unanswerable, and all the reason in the world knows not how to salve the holiness and righteousness of God in his providential dispensations in this life, since we see here goodness unrewarded and debased to the dunghill, vice glorying in impunity, and ranting to the firmament. We cannot see how it can consist with the nature of God's wisdom, righteousness, and holiness, if there were not another life, wherein God will manifest his righteousness in the punishing sin and rewarding goodness; for it is impossible that a God of infinite justice should leave sin unpunished, and grace unrewarded, here or hereafter. The Scripture gives us so full an account of a future state, that may satisfy all Christians in this business.

The wicked rich man is in his purple, and Lazarus in his rags; yet Abraham's bosom is prepared for the one, and an endless hell for the other. Jeremiah resolves the case in his dispute with God about it: Jer. 12:3, 'Pull them out like sheep to the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.' They are but fattening for the knife of

justice; and the day will come when they shall be consumed like the fat of lambs in the sacrifice, which shall wholly evaporate into smoke; so the psalmist resolves it in Ps. 37:20, a psalm written for the present case. God laughs at their security in a way of mockery: Ps. 37:13, 'The Lord shall laugh at him, for he sees that his day is coming,'—God's day for the justification of his proceedings in the world, and the wicked man's day for his own destruction, wherein they shall all be destroyed together, Ps. 37:38; the whole mass of them in one bundle. Who then will charge God with unequal distributions at that day, which is appointed for the clearing up of his righteousness, which is here masked in the world? Who can be fond of the state of the wicked? Who would be fond of a dead man's condition, because he lies in state, whose soul may be condemned, whilst his body, with a pompous solemnity, is carried to the grave, and both body and soul, joined together at the resurrection, adjudged to eternal misery?

Quest. 2. What hath been said in this will also answer another question, Why God doth not immediately punish notorious offenders, since the best governments in the world are such as call the violators of the law to a speedy account, to keep up the honour of justice? Thus the Epicures charge God with neglects of providence, because if he doth punish wicked men, it is later than is fit and just: 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil,' Eccles. 8:11. Delay of justice is an encouragement to sin.

Ans. 1. This is an argument for God's patience, none against his providence. Should he make such quick work, what would become of the world? Could it have held out to this day? If God had instantly taken revenge upon those that thus disparage his providence, the frame of such an objection had not been alive. No man is so perfectly good but he might fall under the revenging stroke of his sword, if he pleased to draw it. Suffer God to evidence his patience here, since after the winding up of the world he will have no time to manifest it. God doth indeed sometimes send the sharp arrow of some judgment

upon a notorious offender, to let him understand that he hath not forgotten how to govern; but he doth not always do so, that his patience may be glorified in bearing with his rebellious creature.

Ans. 2. God is just in that wherein the question supposeth him unjust; he suffers wicked men to continue to be the plagues of the places where they live, and the executioners of his justice upon offenders against him, Ps. 17:13. The wicked are God's sword, Jer. 47:6. Those that God would stir up against the Philistines are called the sword of the Lord, Isa. 10:5. Asshur is said to be the rod of his anger; would it consist with his wisdom to drop the instruments out of his hand as soon as he begins to use them? to cast his rods out of his hand as soon as he takes them up? The rules of justice are as much unknown to us as the communications of his goodness to his people are unknown to the world.

Ans. 3. Let me ask such a one whether he never injured another man, and whether he would not think it very severe, if not unjust, that the offended person should presently take revenge of him? If every man should do the like, how soon would mankind be despatched, and the world become a shambles, men running furiously to one another's destructions for the injuries they have mutually received! Do we praise the lenity of parents to their children, and dispraise the mercy of God, because he doth not presently use his right? Is, then, forbearance of revenge accounted a virtue in a man, and shall it be an imperfection in God? With what reason can we thus blame the eminent patience of God, which we have reason to adore, and which every one of us are monuments of? The use is,—

Use 1. Of information.

How unworthy and absurd a thing is it to deny providence! Some of the heathens fancied that God walked his circuit in heaven, or sat with folded arms there, taking no cognizance of what was done in the world. Some indeed, upon some great emergencies, have acknowledged the mercies and justice of God, which are the two

arms of his providence. The barbarians his justice, when they saw a viper leap upon Paul's hand, Acts 28:4, they say among themselves, 'No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffers not to live.' The mariners in Jonah implored his mercy in their distress at sea; yet they generally attributed affairs to blind chance, and worshipped fortune as a deity. For this vain conceit the psalmist calls the atheist fool: Ps. 14:1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' Potiphar acknowledged it, he saw that the Lord was with Joseph, and favoured his designs: Gen. 39:3, 'And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all things that he did to prosper in his hand.'

It will not be amiss to consider this, for the root of denial of providence is in the hearts of the best men, especially under affliction. Asaph was a holy man, Ps. 73:13, saith he, 'Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' He had taken much pains with his heart, and had been under much affliction: ver. 14, 'All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.' And the consideration of this, that he should have so much affliction with so much holiness, so strangely puzzled him, that he utters that dreadful speech, as if he had a mind to cast off all cares about the worship of God, and sanctifying his heart, and repent of all that he had done in that business, as much as to say, Had I been as very a villain as such or such a man, I might have prospered as well as they, but I was a fool to have any fear of God.

Therefore we will consider,

1. The evil of denying providence.
2. The grounds of the denial of it by the heathen, which we shall find in our own hearts.
3. The various ways wherein men practically deny providence.
 1. The evil of denying it.

(1.) It gives a liberty to all sin. It give an occasion for an unbounded licentiousness, for what may not be done where there is no government? The Jews tell us* that the dispute between Cain and Abel was this: Cain said, because his sacrifice was not accepted, that there was no judge, no reward of good works, or punishment of bad, which when Abel opposed, Cain slew him. They ground it upon the discourse of God with Cain, Gen. 4:7, 8, which had been about his providence and acceptation of men, if they did well, and punishment of men if they did ill; whence they gather the discourse, ver. 8, Cain had with his brother was about the same subject, for Cain talked with Abel, and upon that discourse rose up against him, and slew him. And his discourse afterwards with God, ver. 9, seems to favour it, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Thou dost say thou art the Governor of the world, it is not my concern to look after him. Their conjecture is not improbable. If it were so, we see how early this opinion began in the world, and what was the horrid effect of it, the first sin, the first murder that we read of after the sin of Adam. And what confusion would grow upon the entertainment of such a notion.

Indeed, the Scripture everywhere places sin upon this root: Ps. 10:11, 'God hath forgotten: he hides his face; he will never see it.' He hath turned his back upon the world. This was the ground of the oppression of the poor by the wicked which he mentions, ver. 9, 10. So Isa. 26:10, 'The wicked will not learn righteousness, he will deal unjustly.' The reason is, 'he will not behold the majesty of the Lord; he will not regard God's government of the world, 'though his hand be lifted up to strike.' There is no sin but receives both its birth and nourishment from this bitter root. Let the notion of providence be once thrown out, or the belief of it faint, how will ambition, covetousness, neglect of God, distrust, impatience, and all other bitter gourds, grow up in a night! It is from this topic all iniquity will draw arguments to encourage itself; for nothing doth so much discountenance those rising corruptions, and put them out of heart, as an actuated belief that God takes care of human affairs. Upon the want of this actuated knowledge God charges all the sin of Ephraim: Hosea 7:2, 'They consider[†] not in their hearts that I remember all

their wickedness;' as if God were blind and did not see, or stupid and did not concern himself, or of a very frail memory soon to forget.

(2.) It destroys all religion. The first foundation of all religion is, first, the being, secondly, the goodness, of God in the government of the world: Heb. 11:6, 'He that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' He is the object of religion as he is the governor of the world. This denial would shut up Bibles and temples, and bring irreligious disorder into all societies.

[1.] All worship. He that hath not design to govern, is supposed to expect no homage; if he regards not his creatures, he cares for no worship from them. How is it possible to persuade men to regard him for God, who takes no care of them? Who will adore him who regards no adoration?

[2.] Prayer. To what purpose should they beg his directions, implore his assistance in their calamities, if he had no regard at all to his creatures? What favour can we expect from him who is regardless of dispensing any?

[3.] Praise. Who would make acknowledgments to one from whom they never received any favour, and hath no mind to receive any acknowledgments from them, because he takes no care of them? If the Deity have no relation to us, how can we have relation to him? To what purpose will it be either to call upon him, or praise him, which are the prime pieces of religion, if he concern not himself with us?

[4.] Dependence, trust, and hope. What reason have we to commit our concerns to him, and to depend upon him for relief? Hence the apostle saith, Eph. 2:12, the Gentiles were 'without hope, and without God in the world.' The reason they were without hope was because they were without God. They denied a settled providence, and acknowledged a blind chance, and therefore could have no sound hope; so some understand it of denial of God's government. It might

well give occasion to people to utter Pharaoh's speech: Exod. 5:2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go,' What is God that I should serve him? I have no such notion of a God that governs the world. The regardlessness of his creature disobligeth the creature from any service to him.

(3.) It is a high disparagement of God. To believe an impotent, ignorant, negligent God, without care of his works, is as bad or worse than to believe no God at all. The denial of his providence is made equal with the denial of God: Ps. 14:1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' He denied God, Elohim, which word denotes God's providence; not, there is no Jehovah, which notes his essence, he denied not God quoad essentiam, but quoad providentiam, whereupon the psalmist dubs the atheist fool. It strips God of his judicial power. How shall he judge his creatures, if he know not what they think, and regards not what they do? How easy will it be for him to be imposed upon by the fair pretences and lying excuses of men! It is diabolical. The devil denies not God's right to govern, but he denies God's actual government; for he saith, Luke 4:6, 'The power and glory of the world is delivered' unto him, 'and to whomsoever,' saith he, 'I will, I give it.' God had cast off all care of all things, and made the devil his deputy. He that denies providence denies most of God's attributes, he denies at least the exercise of them. He denies his omniscience, which is the eye of providence; mercy and justice, which are the arms of it; power, which is the life and motion of providence; wisdom, which is the rudder of providence, whereby it is steered; and holiness, which is the compass and rule of the motion of providence.

(4.) It is clearly against natural light. Socrates an heathen could say, Whosoever denied providence did Δαίμονιᾶν, was possessed with a devil.* Should God create a man anew with a sound judgment, and bring him into the world, when he should see the harmony, multitudes, virtues, and operations of all creatures, the stated times and seasons, must he not needs confess that some invisible,

inconceivable wisdom did both frame, and doth govern all the motions of it? And it is a greater crime in any of us to deny providence, either in opinion or practice, than it was or could have been in heathens; because we have not only that natural reason which they had, sufficient to convince us, but supernatural revelation in the Scripture, wherein God hath declared those methods of his providence which reason could not arrive to; as to deny his creation of the world is a greater crime in a man that knows the Scripture than in a heathen, because that hath put it out of doubt. And the asserting of this being the end of all God's judgments in the world—Job 19:29, 'Wrath brings the punishment of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment,' i.e., providence—the denial of it is a sin against all past or present judgments, which God hath or doth exercise, the Scripture frequently declaring the meaning of such and such judgments to be, that men may know that the Lord is God.

2. The second thing is, the grounds of the denial of providence. This atheism has been founded,

(1.) Upon an overweening conceit of men's own worths. When men saw themselves frustrated of the rewards they expected, and saw others that were instruments of tyranny and lust graced with the favours they thought due to their own virtue, they ran into a conceit that God did not mind the actions of men below. So that it was pride, interest, self-conceit, and opinion of merit, rather than any well-grounded reason, introduced this part of atheism into the world; for upon any cross this opinion of merit swelled up into blasphemous speeches against God. When we have any thoughts (as we are apt to have) by our religious acts to merit at God's hand, we act against the absoluteness of his providence, as though God could be obliged to us by any other than his own promise. Methinks Job hath some spice of this in speaking so often of his own integrity, as though God dealt injuriously with him in afflicting him. God seems to charge him with it: Job 40:8, 'Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?' As though in speaking so much of his own integrity, and in complaining expressions, he

would accuse God of injustice, and condemn him as an unrighteous governor; and in Job's answer you find no syllable or word of his integrity to God, but a self-abhorrency: Job 42:16, 'Wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes.' I doubt that from this secret root arise those speeches which we ordinarily have among men, What have I done that God should so afflict me? though in a serious way it is a useful question, tending to an inquiry into the sin that is the cause of it; but I doubt ordinarily there is too much of a reflection upon God, as though they had deserved other dealing at his hands. Take heed therefore of pride and conceits of our own worth, we shall else be led by it to disparaging conceits of God, which indeed are the roots of all actions contradictory to God's will.

(2.) It is founded upon pedantical and sensual notions of God. As though it might detract from his pleasures and delight to look down upon this world, or as though it were a molestation of an infinite power to busy himself about the cares of sublunary things. They thought it unsuitable to the felicity of God, that it should interrupt his pleasure, and make a breach upon his blessedness. As though it were the felicity of a prince not to take care of the government of his kingdom, nor so much as provide for the well-being of his children. I doubt that from such or as bad conceptions of God may spring ordinarily our distrust of God upon any distress. Take heed therefore of entertaining any conceptions of God but what the Scripture doth furnish you with.

(3.) Or else, this sort of atheism was ushered in by a flattering conceit of the majesty of God. They thought it unbecoming the excellency of the divine majesty to descend to a regard of the petty things of the world. This seems to be the fancy of them, Ps. 73:11, 'How doth God know? is there knowledge in the Most High?' They think him too high to know, too high to consider. How unreasonable is it to think God most high in place, and not in perfection; and if in perfection, not in knowledge and discerning? They imagined of him as of a great prince, taking his pleasure upon the battlements of his palace, not beholding the worms upon the ground; muffled with clouds, as Job

32:13, 14, 'How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark clouds? thick clouds are a covering to him, that he sees not, and he walks in the circuit of heaven. We cannot indeed have too high apprehensions of God's majesty and excellency; but most take heed of entertaining superstitious conceits of God, and such as are dishonourable to him, or make the grandeur and ambition of men the measure of the greatness and majesty of God. Upon this root sprung superstition and idolatry, and the worship of demons, who, according to the heathens' fancy, were mediators between God and men. And I doubt such a conceit might be the first step to the introducing the popish saint-worship into the Christian world; and this lies at the root of all our omissions of duty, or neglects of seeking God. Let us therefore have raised thoughts of God's majesty, and admiring thoughts of his condescension, who, notwithstanding his greatness, humbles himself to behold what is done upon the earth. The psalmist sets a pattern for both, Ps 113:5, 6.

(4.) From their wishes upon any gripes of conscience. They found guilt staring them in the face, and were willing to comfort themselves with the embraces of this doctrine, wherein they might find a security and ease to their prostituted consciences, and unbounded liberty in the ways of sin. Those in Zephaniah were first settled upon their lees, and then, to drive away all fears of punishment, deny God's government: Zeph. 1:12, 'The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' A brave liberty, for a city to be without a magistrate, a house without a governor, a ship without a pilot, exposed to the mercy of winds and waves; a man to be without reason, that passion and lust should act their pleasure; a liberty that beasts themselves would not have, to be without a shepherd, and one to take care of them! Such wishes certainly there are in men upon a sense of guilt; they wish, for their own security, there were no providential eye to inspect them. Take heed therefore of guilt, which will draw you to wish God deprived of the government of the world, and all those attributes which qualify him for it. The readiness to entertain the motions of Satan, rather than the motions of the Spirit, implies a willingness in them that Satan might be the god of the world, who

favours them in sin, rather than the Creator who forbids it. But indeed the fears of conscience evidence a secret belief in men of a just providence, whatever means they use to stifle it; else why is man, upon the commission of some notorious sinful act, afraid of some evil hap to betide him? Why is he restless in himself? There is no sinner, unless extremely hardened, but hath some secret touch of conscience upon notorious enormities; while the work of the law is written in their heart, their conscience will bear witness and accuse them, Rom. 2:15. In the most flagitious courses which the apostle reckons up, Rom. 1:29–32, they cannot put off the knowledge of 'the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death,' that is, worthy of death by the judgment of God, which judgment is discovered in the law of nature.

3. The third thing is, the various ways wherein men practically deny providence, or abuse it, or contemn it.

(1.) When we will walk on in a way contrary to checks of providence, when we will run against the will of God manifested in his providence, we do deny his government, and refuse subjection to him; when we will be peremptory in our resolves against the declaration of God's will by his checks of providence, we contend with him about the government of us and our actions. Such a dispute had Pharaoh with God, notwithstanding all the checks by the plagues poured out upon him, he would march against Israel to take them out of God's hand into his own service again, Exod. 15:9, 'The enemy said, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.' Here is the will of man vaunting against the governor of the world, resolved to dispute God's royalty with him in spite of all the blastings of his designs, and the smart blows he had had from that powerful arm, which cost him and his subjects their lives; they would not understand the taking off their wheels, but would ran headlong into the Red Sea. A remarkable example of this is in a good man not so peremptory in words, but against the revelations of God's mind both by the prophet and his providence; Jehoshaphat had made a league

with Ahab, 2 Chron. 18:1–3, and God had ordered Micaiah to acquaint him with the ill success of the affair they went about, ver. 16, 19, which Jehoshaphat found true, for his own life was in danger, he was hardly beset by the enemy upon a mistake, ver. 31, 32, he had an eminent answer of prayer, for upon his cry he had a quick return; God engaged his providence over his enemies' hearts for him: ver. 31, 'The Lord helped him, and God moved them to depart from him.' And for this conjunction and continuance in it against Micaiah's prophecy, God sends a prophet to reprove him, 2 Chron 19:2, 'Should thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from the Lord;' he reproves him sharply for this confederacy, yet Jehoshaphat after had a signal providence in delivering him from another army, chap. 20:24. Yet after this he goes on in this way, chap. 20:35, 'after this,' i.e., after a reproof by a prophet, after ill success in his league, after eminent care of God in his deliverance, after a signal freeing him from a dangerous invasion in a miraculous way, he enters into a league with Ahab's son, as wicked as his father, ver. 36; he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and after that a third prophet is sent to reprove him, and the ships were broken, ver. 37. Here is a remarkable opposition to checks of providence, and manifest declarations of God's will, as if he would be the commander of the world instead of God. Abner's action is much of the same kind, who would make the house of Saul strong against David, though he knew and was satisfied that God had promised the kingdom to David.

(2.) In omissions of prayer. One reason to prove the fools' denying God's government of the world is, that they call not upon the Lord, Ps. 14:2, 'The Lord looked down from heaven, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.' 'Tis certainly either a denying of God's sufficiency to help us, when we rather beg of every creature, than ask of God; or a charging him with a want of providence, as though he had thrown off all care of worldly matters: 2 Kings 1:3, 'Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that you go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?' Seeking of anything else with a neglect of God, is denying the care of God over his creature. Do we not in this

case make ourselves our own governors and lords, as though we could subsist without him, or manage our own affairs without his assistance? If we did really believe there was a watchful providence, and an infinite powerful goodness to help us, he would hear from us oftener than he doth. Certainly those who never call upon him disown his government of the world, and do not care whether he regards the earth or no. They think they can do what they please, without any care of God over them. The restraining prayer is a casting off the fear of God: Job 15:4, 'Thou castest off fear,' why? 'and restrainest prayer before God.' The neglect of prayer ariseth from a conceit of the unprofitableness of it. Job 21:15, 'What profit should we have if we prayed unto him?' Which conceit must be grounded upon a secret notion of God's carelessness of the world; such fruit could not arise but from that bitter root. But the prophet Malachi plainly expresses it: Malachi 3:14, 'Ye have said it is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?' Whence did this arise, but from a denial of providence upon the observation of the outward happiness of the wicked? ver. 15, 'And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.' Sometimes it ariseth from an apprehension that God in the way of his providence dealeth unjustly with us. A good prophet utters such a sinful speech in his passion, 2 Kings 6:33, 'Behold, this evil is of the Lord, what should I wait for the Lord any longer?'

(3.) When men will turn every stone to gain the favourable assistance of men in their designs, and never address to God for his direction or blessing. When they never desire God to move the hearts of those whose favour they court, as though providence were an unuseful and unnecessary thing in the world. It was the case of those Elihu speaks of: Job 35:9, 10, 'They cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, Where is God my maker, who gives songs in the night?' &c. None in the midst of their oppressions and cries under them, did consider either the power of God in the creation, as he was their maker, nor his providence in the government of the world, as he raised up men from low estates, and gave matter of cheerfulness

even in a time of darkness. This was the charge God by his prophet brought against Asa: 2 Chron. 16:7 (before the text, ver. 9), 'Thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God;' herein thou hast done foolishly,' where he sets a reliance on the creature, and a reliance on God, in direct opposition. In several cases men do thus deny and put a contempt on God as the governor of the world, when we will cast about to find out some creature-refuge, rather than have recourse to God for any supply of our necessities. Doth not he slight his father's care, that will not seek to him in his distress? This was Asa's sin: 2 Chron. 16:12, 'In his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.' The Jews think, that one reason why Joseph continued two years in prison, was his confiding too much upon the butler's remembrance of him, and interest for his deliverance, which they ground upon the request he makes to him: Gen. 40:14, 'But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness to me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.' I must confess the expressions are very urgent, being so often repeated, and seems to carry a greater confidence at present in the arm of flesh than in God. We do not read that Joseph prayed so earnestly to God, though no doubt but being a good man he did. Methinks the setting down his request with that repetition in the Scripture, seems to intimate a probability of the Jews' conceit; or also when we do seek to him, but it is out of a general belief of his providence and sufficiency, not out of an actuated consideration; or when we seek to him with colder affections than we seek to creatures, as if we did half despair of his ability or will to help us; as when a man thinks to get learning by the sagacity of his own wit, his indefatigable industry, and never desires with any ardent affection the blessing of God upon his endeavours. When we lean to our own wisdom, we distrust the providence of God: Prov. 3:5, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.' Trust in God, and leaning to our own wisdom, are opposed to one another as inconsistent; or when a man hath some great concern, suppose a suit at law, to think to carry his cause by the favour of friends, the help of his money, the eloquence of his advocate, and never interest God in his business: this is not to

acknowledge God in thy ways, which is the command: ver. 6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him;' as though our works were not 'in the hand of God,' Eccles. 9:1. This is to take them out of God's hand, and put them into the hands of men. To trust in our wealth, it is to make God a dead and a stupid God, and disown his providence in the bestowing it upon us. The apostle seems to intimate this in the opposition which he makes between 'uncertain riches,' and 'the living God,' 1 Tim. 6:17. These, and many more actions suitable to them, are virtual denials of God's superintendence, as though God had left off the government of the world to the wits, or rather follies of men. These are to magnify the things we seek to, above God, as the chief authors of all our good. It is to imagine him less careful than man, more insufficient than man. It is a departure from a full fountain to a shallow stream; not to desire God's assistance, is either from some check of conscience that our business is sinful, that we dare not interest him in it, or a disowning God's care, as if we could hide our counsels from him (Isa. 29:15, 'Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and they say, Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?'), and bring our business to pass before he shall know of it; at least it is a slighting God's government, since we will not engage God by prayer in the exercise of it on our behalf, and disdain to acquaint him with our concerns. It is a reflection upon God's wisdom to do so, which the prophet mentions with a woe: Isa. 31:1, 2, 'Woe unto them that go down to Egypt for help: but they look not to the Holy One of Israel! Yet he also is wise.' It is a disparagement to God's providential wisdom, not to look to him in our concerns, yea, and of his righteousness too; 'they look not to the Holy One of Israel.' In this they neither regard his holiness nor his wisdom. When we consult not with him upon emergent occasions, we trust more to our own wisdom, counsel, and sufficiency, than to God's; and set up ourselves as our own lords, and independent upon him, as though we could manage things according to our pleasure.

(4.) When upon the receiving any good, they make more grateful acknowledgment to the instruments, than to God the principal author of it; as if God had no hand in bestowing those blessings upon

them, as if the instruments had dispossessed God of his governing providence, and engrossed it in their own hands. This men are guilty of when they ascribe their wealth to their own wit and fortune, their health to their own care, or the physician's skill; their learning to their own industry, their prosperity to their friends or merits. When men thus return their thank-offering to second causes, and ascribe to them what is due to God, they give the glory of his providence to a miserable creature. Thus was the foolish boasting of the Assyrian: Isa. 10:13, 14, 'By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom: for I am prudent: for I have removed the bounds of the people,' &c. Belshazzar's offence also, Dan. 5:23, 'Thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven: and praised the gods of silver,' as though they were the authors of all thy greatness; so Hab. 1:16, 'They sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag, because by them their portion is fat,' alluding to those that then worshipped their warlike weapons, and the tools whereby they had got their wealth, in the place of God, as the heathen used to do.* How base a usage is this of God, to rifle him of all his glory, and bestow it upon the unworthiest instruments, inanimate creatures! It is as high idolatry as that of the heathens, inasmuch as it is a stripping God of the glory of his providential care, though the object to which we direct our acknowledgments is not so mean as theirs, which was a stock or stone. But is it not the same injury to a person to rifle him of his goods, to bestow it upon a beggar, as to give it to a prince? It is a depriving a man of his right.† Yet, is not this ordinary! Do not men ascribe more to the physician, that saves an eye in danger of being lost by a defluxion, than to God, who hath given them both, with the enjoyment of the light of the sun; yea, more to the medicine than to that God who hath a witness of his deity in every drug? It is as if the kindness a prince shews to his subjects should be attributed to a scullion in his kitchen rather than to himself. This is to 'believe God, and say it is not he,' Jer. 5:12. It is applicable to the case of mercies as well as afflictions and judgments, of which it is properly meant. And this contempt is the greater, by how much the greater mercy we have received in a way of providence: Hos. 2:8, 'She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold,

which they prepared for Baal;' she that had most reason to know, because she had enjoyed so much; she that had experience how by a strong and mighty hand I brought her out of Egypt into the land now possessed by her: she would not know that I gave her those good things she prepared for Baal. It would be a natural consequence from this Scripture, that those that employ the good things they enjoy upon their lusts, do deny the providential goodness of God in their possession and enjoyment of them, because they prepare God's goodness for their sinful pleasures, as though their own lusts had been the authors of them; and also their instruments, that receive too high and flattering thanks of this nature, are much like Herod, that tickled himself with the people's applause, that his voice was the voice of God, and not of man.

(5.) When we use indirect courses, and dishonest ways to gain wealth or honour. This is to leave God, to seek relief at hell's gates, and adore the devil's providence above God's: when God doth not answer us, like Saul, we will go to the witch of Endor, and have our ends by hell when heaven refuseth us. It is a covenanting with the devil, and striking up a bargain and agreement with hell, and acknowledging Satan to be the god of the world. No man will doubt but in express covenants with the devil, as witches and conjurors are reported to make, that the devil shall give them such knowledge, such wealth, or bring them to such honour; it is no doubt, I say, but such do acknowledge the devil the god of the world, because they agree by articles to have those things conferred upon them by Satan, which are only in the power of God absolutely to promise or bestow. So when a man will commit sin to gain the ends of his ambition or covetousness, does he not implicitly covenant with the devil, who is the head of sinners, and set up his sin in the place of God, because he hopes to attain those things by sinful means, which are only in the hand of God, and on whom he only can have a dependence? This is the devil's design out of an enmity to providence. He tempted Christ to be his own carver, thereby to put him upon a distrust of his Father's care of him: Mat. 4:3, 'Command that these stones be made bread,' as though God would not provide for him; which design of the

devil is manifest by our Saviour's answer. This is to prostitute providence to our own lusts, and to pull it down from the government of the world, to be a lacquey to our sinful pleasure; to use means which God doth prohibit, is to set up hell to govern us, since God will not govern our affairs in answer to our greedy desires. It is to endeavour that by God's curse which we should only expect by God's blessing; for when God hath forbid sinful ways, severely threatened them, perhaps cursed them in examples before our eyes, what is it but to say, that we will rather believe God's curse will further us than his blessing? It is to disparage his blessing, and prefer his curse, to slight his wisdom and adore our folly. When we go out of God's way, we go out of God's protection, we have no charter for the blessing of providence without that condition: Ps. 37:3, 'Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' To do evil, then, is not to trust in God, or have any regard to his providential care.

(6.) When we distrust God when there is no visible means. A distrust of God renders* him impotent, or false and mutable, or cruel and regardless, and what not. We detract from his power, as if it depended upon creatures, or that he were like an artificer, that could not act without his tools; as if God were tied to means, and were beholding to creatures for his operating power; as if that God who created the world without instruments could not providentially apply himself to our particular exigencies without the help of some of his creatures. If he cannot work without this or that means you did expect your mercy by, it supposeth that God hath made the creature greater than himself, and more necessary to thy well-being than himself is; or else we conceit him false or foolish, as if he had undertaken a task of government too hard for him; as if he were grown weary of his labour, and must have some time to recruit his strength; or as if he were unfaithful, not walking by rules of unerring goodness; or if we acknowledge him wise, and able, and faithful, yet it must then be a denial of his gracious tenderness, which is as great as his power and wisdom, and a perfection equal with any of the rest. If his caring for us be a principal argument to move us to cast our

care upon him,—as it is 1 Peter 5:7, 'Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you;' then if we cast not our care upon him, it is a denial of his gracious care of us,—this is to imagine him a tenderer governor of beasts than men, as though our Saviour had spoke a palpable untruth, when he told us, not an hair of our heads doth fall without his leave; as if he regarded sparrows only, and not his children; or else it implies that God cannot mind us in a crowd of business, in such multitudes in the world, which he hath to take care of. But certainly as the multitude of things doth not hinder his knowledge of them, so neither do they hinder his care. The arms of his goodness are as large to embrace all creatures, as the eyes of his omniscience are to behold them. From this root do all our fears of the power of men grow: Isa. 51:12, 13, 'Who art thou, that art afraid of a man that shall die, &c., and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens?' &c. Our forgetfulness at least, if not a secret denial of God's power in the works of creation and providence, ushers in distrust of him, and that introduceth a fear of man. If they that know his name, will put their trust in him: Ps. 9:10, 'For thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee;' then a distrust of him discovers an ignorance and inconsideration of his name and his ways of working, and implies his forsaking of his creatures. He that trusts in anything else besides God, denies all the powerful operations of God, and conceives him not a strength sufficient for him, Ps. 52:7; that man doth not 'make God his strength, who trusts in the abundance of his riches.' How gross is it not to trust God under the very sense of his powerful goodness, but question whether he can or will do this or that for us. When we will have jealousies of him, when he doth compass us round about with mercy, and encircle us with his beams, it is to question whether the summer sun will warm me, though it shine directly upon me, and I feel the vigour of its beams upon my body; much more base is this, then to distrust him when we have no means. What doth this imply, but that he cares not what becomes of his children, that no advantage can be expected from him, that his intentions towards us are not gracious even whiles we feel him!

(7.) Stoutness under God's afflicting or merciful hand, is a denial or contempt of providence. This was the aggravation of Belshazzar's sin: Dan. 5:23, 'And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.' He glorified not God in the way of his providence, but was playing the epicure, and was sacrilegiously quaffing in the vessels of the temple when the city was besieged; he seemed to dare the providence of God upon a presumption that the city was impregnable, by reason of Euphrates, and the provision they had within their walls, which Xenophon saith was enough for twenty years, yet was taken that night when the hand-writing was. And by how much God's judgments have been more visible to us, and upon some well known by us, or related to us, so much the greater is the contempt of his providential government, as ver. 22, 'And thou his son, Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this,' &c. He had known God's judgments upon his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, a domestic example of God's vindicating his government of the world, and yet went in the same steps; so Jer. 5:3, 4. 'Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock. What is the reason? The prophet renders it, ver. 4, 'They are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.' Correction calls for submission; but those, like a rock under God's hand, were correction-proof, they would not consider the ways of God's providence, and the manner of them; it is as if by our peevishness we would make God weary of afflicting us, which is the worst case can happen. This is God's complaint of the ten tribes, Hos. 7:9, 'gray hairs are upon them, and they know it not; strangers have devoured his strength,' &c. There was a consumption of their strength; the Assyrians and Egyptians, to whom they gave gifts, had drained their treasure; but they would not consider God as the author, or acknowledge whence their misery came; they would not 'seek God for all this, ver. 10. It is like a man's picking a pocket, or cutting a throat under the gallows in contempt of justice;* whereas good men are both afflicted with, and remember God's judgments. Eber called his son Peleg, division, because in his days the earth was divided, that in the daily sight of the sun[†] he might remember that

sharp providence in scattering of the Babel builders. Judgments affect us when they are before our eyes, as the thunder and plagues did Pharaoh; but when they are removed, men return to their beloved ways, as though God had shot away all his arrows, and was departed to mind them no more. Take heed of this, it is a sin highly provoking; God is so tender that his providence should be minded and improved, that a sin of this nature he follows with his displeasure, in this life at least: Isa. 22:12, 13, 'And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning; and behold joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.' When God in any judgment shews himself to be the Lord God of hosts, and calls us to weeping, and we behave ourselves jollily in spite of his government, it is a sin he will remember, and bind the guilt upon us, ver 14, 'And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die.'

(8.) Envy also is a denial of providence. To be sad at the temporal good, or the gifts of another, as counting him unworthy of them, it is a reflection upon the author of those gifts; an accusing providence of an unjust or unwise distribution.‡ Since God may do what he will with his own, if our eye be evil, because God is good, we intrench upon his liberty, and deny him the disposal of his own goods, as if God were but our steward, and we his lords. It is a temper we are all subject to: Ps. 37:1, 'Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.' It is peculiarly the product of self-love, which affects the principality in the world, and particularly affects the conduct of God in distributing his goods, that he must not give but to whom they please. It ariseth indeed from a sense of our wants; but the language of it is, God is unjust in his providence to me, because he bestows not upon me that good which he gives to another. It is such a sin that it seems to be a companion of our first parents' pride, which was the cause of their fall. They envied God a felicity by himself, for they would be like him, they would be as gods. Hence, perhaps, the Jews say Cain denied the providence of God, as envying his brother, because God accepted Abel's sacrifice

and not his. Jonah's passion arose from this pride, for fear he should be accounted a false prophet; whereupon he envies God the glory of his mercy, and the poor Ninevites the advantage of it; he would have God conform the way of his providence to his pleasure and reputation. Indeed, it is to envy God the honour of his providence in those gifts or good things another possesses, whereby he is instrumental to glorify God and advantage others. Thus, we would direct God what instruments he should employ; when no artificer in his own art would endure to be directed by any ignorant person what tools he should use in his work.

(9.) Impatience under cross providence is a denial and contempt of God's government. Men quarrel with God's revealed will, and therefore no wonder that they quarrel with his providential will; whereby we deny him his right of governing, and slight his actual exercise of his right. As if God were accountable to us for his dispensations, and must have only a respect to us or our humour in his government: Job 18:4, 'He tears himself in his anger; shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?' Must God alter the scene of his affairs according to our model and platform? And because he doth not observe our rules and methods, must we tear ourselves in anger? This is a secret cursing of God and flying in his face, when we see providence so cross, that there seems to be no help at any time either in heaven or earth: Isa. 8:21, 22, 'They shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upwards. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness.' Take heed of fretting at God's management of things in the world, or thy own particular concerns; this may lead to a cursing of God, and is indeed an initial secret swelling against him, and cursing of him. Man is ambitious to become a god. Adam's posterity have in one sort or other imitated him. This,

[1.] Is a wrong to the sovereignty of providence. It was a good admonition of Luther's to Melancthon, when he was troubled much about the affairs of the church, *Monendus est Philippus ut desinat*

esse rector mundi. By this temper we usurp God's place, and set ourselves in his throne; we invade his supremacy, by desiring everything to be at our beck, and are displeased with him, because he doth not put the reins of the world's government into our hands; as if we would command his will and become his sovereigns. It is a striving with our Maker for the superintendency, when we will sit judge upon him, or censure his acts, and presume to direct him: Isa. 45:9, 'Woe to him that strives with his Maker. Shall the clay say to him that fashions it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands.' How do men summon God to the bar of their interest, and expostulate with him about his works, why he did not order them thus and thus; and if he doth so, to tell him he hath no hand, no hand of providence in the world! The design of that place is to stop such peevishness and invasions of God's right; I will not have my sovereign will disputed, as if I were but the creature's servant. I am content you should 'ask of me things to come,' ver. 11, and pray to me, but notwithstanding yet to submit to my pleasure, without a peevish endeavouring to wrest the sovereignty out of my hand, and pull the crown from my head.

[2.] It is a wrong to the goodness and righteousness of providence. It is a charging God with ill management, and an implicit language, that if we were the commanders of providence, things should be managed more justly and righteously; as it was Absalom's pretence in wishing to be the king of Israel in David's stead, 2 Sam. 15:4. If patience be a giving God the honour of his righteousness in his judgments—Ps. 119:75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;'—impatience must be a charge against God for unrighteousness in his judicial proceedings, and a saying, 'the way of the Lord is not equal,' Ezek. 18:25. It is implied in that complaint, Isa. 58:2, 3, 'They ask of me the ordinances of justice, &c. Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge?' We demand justice of thee, since thou dost not seem to do that which is fit and righteous, in not regarding us in our suits, and not bestowing that which we have fasted for. God governs the

world according to his will, our murmuring implies that God's will is not the rule of righteousness. We affront the care of God towards his creatures, as if the products of our shallow reasons were more beautiful and just than God's contrivances for us, who hath higher and more glorious ends in everything, both for ourselves and the world, of which we are members, and for his own glory, to which we ought to subject ourselves, when perhaps our projects tend immediately to gratify some sensual or spiritual lust in us. It is the commendation the Holy Ghost gives of Job, chap. 1:22, 'In all this Job sinned not, neither charged God foolishly,' as a character peculiar to him, implying that most men in the world do, upon any emergency, charge God with their crosses, as dealing unjustly with them, in inflicting punishment when they think they have deserved rewards. Jeremiah is not innocent in this case: Jer. 20:7, 'O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived,' in the ill success of his prophecy, as though an immense goodness would, and a sovereign power needed to deal in a fraudulent way with his creatures to bring his ends about.

[3.] It is a wrong to the wisdom of providence. We would degrade his omniscience and wisdom, and sway him by our foolish and purblind dictates; it is as if we would instruct him better in the management of the world, and direct him to a reformation of his methods: Job 40:2, 'Shall he that contends with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproves God let him answer it.' It is a reproving God, and reproofs imply a greater authority, or righteousness, or wisdom, in the person reproving. We reprove God, as if God should have consulted with us, and asked our advice; it is to take upon us to be God's counsellors, and to conclude the only wise God by our imperfect reason: Rom. 11:34, 'Who hath been his counsellor?' It is a secret boasting of some excellency in ourselves, as if God did not govern well, or we could govern better. Shall a silly passenger, that understands not the use of the compass, be angry that the skilful pilot will not steer the vessel according to his pleasure? Must we give out our orders to God, as though the counsels of infinite wisdom must roll about according to the conceits of our fancy? Is not the language of our hearts in our fits

of impatience as prodigiously proud against God's providence as the speech of that monster was against the creation, who said if he had been by God at the creation of the world, he could have directed him to a better platform? All this, and much more, is virtually in this sin of impatience.

(10.) In charging our sins and miscarriages by them upon providence, in this we contemn it. Some think Cain doth so: Gen 4:9, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Thou art the keeper and governor of the world, why didst thou not hinder me from killing my brother? It is certain the first man did so: Gen. 3:12, 'The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree;' thy gift is the cause of my sin and ruin. It is as certain David laid the sin of Uriah's murder at the door of providence: 2 Sam. 11:25, when he heard that Uriah was dead, 'The sword,' saith he, 'devours one as well as another.' Man conjures up trouble to himself when by his folly he brings himself into sin, and from thence to misery, and then his heart frets against the Lord, and lays the blame both of his sin and following mischiefs upon him: Prov. 19:3, 'The foolishness of man perverts his way, and his heart frets against the Lord.' There are many other ways wherein we deny or slight providence.

[1.] When we do things with a respect to the pleasure of men more than of God, as though God were careless both of himself and his own honour, and regarded not the principles and ends of our actions.

[2.] In vain boasting and vaunting of ourselves. As Benhadad would have such a multitude of men in his army as that there should not be dust enough in Samaria to afford every man a handful, 1 Kings 20:10, wherein he swaggers with God, and vaunts as if he were the governor of the world; yet this man, with his numerous host, was routed by a troop of lacqueys, ver. 15, 20; they are called 'the young men of the princes.' Such is the folly of men against the orders of God, when they boast in their hearts that their house shall continue for ever, Ps. 49:11.

[3.] Oppression. 'They slay the fatherless, and say, The God of Jacob shall not regard it,' Ps. 94:6, 7. Their denial of providence was the cause of their oppression of the poor, and where this is found in any, it is an argument it ariseth principally from a like cause. This is also made the cause why they eat up God's people as they eat bread, Ps. 14:1, 4.

[4.] Misinterpretations of providence.

Such cursed jealousies had the Jews of God: Num. 14:3, 'And wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?' As though God in that mighty deliverance had cheated them with a design to destroy them in the wilderness, when one of those plagues poured out upon Pharaoh being turned upon their heads, had destroyed them in Egypt. So foolish are they to think that God would ruin them upon dry land who might have drowned them as well as their enemies in the Red Sea; so unreasonable is man in his disputes against God.

[5.] In limiting providence. In bounding it to time, manner, and other circumstances, as they did: Ps. 78:41, 'They limited the holy one of Israel, for they remembered not his hand.' As though God must manage everything according to the will of a simple creature. It was a forgetfulness of providence, at least, that was the cause of it.

Use 2. The second use is of comfort. As the justice and righteousness of God is the highest comfort to a good man since the evangelical dispensation, in that he hath to deal with a righteous God, who can as soon deny himself as his righteousness, so it is none of the meanest comforts that we acknowledge and worship that God, who exerciseth himself in a constant government of the world, and leaves not anything to the capriciousness of that which we call fortune and chance. What satisfaction can any man in his sober wits have, to live in a world cast off from all care of the Creator of it? Wisdom without providence would make any man mad, and the greatest advantage would be to be a stupid and senseless fool. Can there be any worse news told to men than this, that let them be as religious as they will, there is no eye above takes notice of it? What can be bitterer to a rational man than that God should be careless of the world?* What a door would be opened by it for all sin in the wicked, and despair in the godly! It is as great a matter of joy to the godly that God reigns as it is of terror to the wicked: Ps. 97:1, 'The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; Ps. 99:1, 'The Lord reigns, let the people tremble.'

It is a comfort that,

1. Man is a special object of providence. God provides for all creatures, even those that are the works of his hands, much more for man, who is more peculiarly the work of his hands, in whose creation he took counsel: Gen. 1:26, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' The work of his heart, in being made according to his image, and intended as a subordinate end of his whole creation, next to the principal, that of God's glory. He is the preserver of man and beast; of man principally, of beasts in subserviency to man's good and preservation.

2. Holy men a more special object of it. God preserves and provides for all things, and all persons. But his eye is more peculiarly fixed upon those that fear him: Ps. 33:18, 'Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy,' so fixed as if he had no regard to anything else. If God hath a care of man created after his own image, though his image be depraved, much more of those wherein his image is restored. If God loves himself, he loves his image and his works. A man loves the works which he hath made of some external matter; much more doth a father love his son, much more doth God love his own, and therefore will work their good, and dispose of them well. God exerciseth a special providence over the actions of a good man, as well as his person, Ps. 37:23, 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways;' it is a special, because a delightful providence, he delights in his way. How highly may it cheer a man to be in covenant with that God which rules the world, and hath all things at his beck, to be under not only the care of his wisdom, but of his goodness. The governor of the world, being such an only friend, will do him no hurt, being such an only father, will order all things to his good out of a fatherly affection; he is the world's sovereign, but a good man's father; he rules the heavens and the earth, but he loves his holy ones. Other things are the objects of his providence, and a good man is the end of it. For 'His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to

shew himself strong for him whose heart is perfect towards him,' 2 Chron. 16:3.

3. Hence it will follow that the spirits of good men have sufficient grounds to bear up in their innocent sufferings and storms in the world. Innocent sufferings. There is a righteous governor who orders all, and will reward them for their pains as well as their service: Heb. 6:10, 'For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love;' there is one that presides in the world, who sees all their calamities, and cannot be mistaken in their cause, who hath as much power and wisdom as will to help them. It would be an affliction indeed if there were no sovereign power to whom they might make their moan in their distress, to whom they might ease their consciences, if there were no governor to whom they might offer up their petitions in the storms they meet with in the world. How doth the presence of a skilful pilot in a weather-beaten ship cheer the hearts of the fearful passengers! What a dread would it be to them to have the vessel wherein their lives and all are concerned left to the fury of winds and waves, without an able hand to manage it? God hath a bridle to check the passions of men, to marshal them according to his pleasure; they are all but his instruments in the government, not the lords of it. God can lay a plot with more wisdom for a good man's safety than the enemy can for his destruction; he can countermine their plots with more power than they can execute them; he can out-wit their craft, overpower their strength, and turn their designed cruelty against them, as a knife into their own breasts.

4. Hence follows a certain security against a good man's want. If God take care of the hairs, the ornamental superfluities, why should we doubt his care of our necessary supply? If he be the guardian of our hairs, which fall off without our sense of their departure, shall he be careless of us when we are at a pinch for our all? Will God reach out his care to beasts, and deny it to his children? What would you judge of that father who should feed his servants and starve his sons? He supplies his enemies, and hath he no bowels for his friends? The very unjust as well as the just are enlightened by his sun, and refreshed by

his rain; and shall he not have a providence for those that have a special interest in that Mediator, whose interposition kept up those standing mercies after our forfeiture of them by sin? If he bless with those blessings those who are the objects of his curse, will he not bless those that are in his special favour with them, so far as they may prove blessings to them? Ps. 34:10, 'The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing,' ver. 9, 'for there is no want to them that fear him.' A good man shall have what he needs, not always what he thinks he needs. Providence intends the supply of our necessities, not of our desires; he will satisfy our wants, but not our wantonness. When a thing is not needful, a man cannot properly be said to want it; when it is needful, a good man shall not be without it. What is not bestowed upon us may not be so beautiful at that time wherein we desire it, for everything is beautiful in its season, Eccles. 3:11. He that did not want God's kindness to renew him, shall never want God's kindness to supply him; his hand shall not be wanting to give, where his heart has been so large in working. Others live that have an interest only in common providence, but good men have providence cabinetted in a promise, and assured to them by a deed of covenant conveyance; he was a provider before, he hath made himself now your debtor. You might pray for his providential care before with a common faith, now with a more special expostulation, for in his promise he hath given a good man the key of the chest of his providence, because it is 'the promise of this life, and that which is to come,' 1 Tim. 4; of this life, not to our desires, but necessities; of the life to come to both, wherein they shall have whatsoever they can want and whatsoever they can desire.

Again consider, God doth exercise a more special providence over men, as clothed with miserable circumstances, and therefore among his other titles this is one, to be 'a helper of the fatherless,' Ps. 10:14. It is the argument the church used to express her return to God: Hosea 14:3, 'For in thee the fatherless find mercy.' Now what greater comfort is there than this, that there is one presides in the world who is so wise he cannot be mistaken, so faithful he cannot deceive, so

pitiful he cannot neglect his people, and so powerful that he can make stones even to be turned into bread if he please!

Further, take this for a comfortable consideration;

God doth not govern the world only by his will as an absolute monarch, but by his wisdom and goodness as a tender father. It is not his greatest pleasure to shew his sovereign power, or his unconceivable wisdom, but his immense goodness, to which he makes the other attributes subservient. What was God's end in creating is his end in governing, which was the communication and diffusion of his goodness; we may be sure from hence that God will do nothing but for the best, his wisdom appointing it with the highest reason, and his goodness ordering it to the most gracious end; and because he is the highest good, he doth not only will good, but the best good in everything he acts.

What greater comfort can there be than that we are under the care of an infallible, unwearied, and righteous governor! infallible because of his infinite wisdom, unwearied because of his incomprehensible omnipotency, and righteous because of his unbounded goodness and holiness.

Use 3. Of exhortation.

The duties arising from hence will run as a thread through the web of our whole lives, and all the motions of them. This doctrine hath an influence upon our whole course; there is nothing we meet with but is an act of providence, and there is no act of providence but calls for some particular duty. Is there any good we want? We must seek it at his hands, we must depend upon him for it; we must prescribe no methods to him, but leave the conduct of it to his own wisdom. Is it a cross providence, and contrary to our desires and expectations? Murmur not at it. Is it afflictive and troublesome? Submit to it. Is it either good or bad, and present? We must study to understand it. Is it a good and present? Give God the glory of it.

1. Seek everything you need at the hands of God. It is not only the skilfulness of the pilot, but a favourable gale from heaven, which must conduct the ship to the intended port. As his providence is the foundation, so it is the encouragement of all prayer. The end of the Lord's prayer is, 'For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.' The providential kingdom belongs to God. Power he hath to manage it, and his glory is the end of all. Seek to him therefore for the exercise of his power in thy concerns, and for his directing them to his glory in his providential administrations. Every one of our days, and both the mercy and the misery of them, depend upon him: Prov. 27:1, 'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth,' but God foresees all events; have recourse therefore to his care for every day's success. What are our contrivances without the leave and blessing of providence? Like the bubbles blown up from a nut-shell, easily broken by the next puff. Our labour will be as fruitless as Peter's, with all his toil, and catch nothing till God speaks the word, and sends the fish into our net, Luke 5:5. The way of man is not in himself: Jer. 10:23, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.' Dangers are not within the reach of our eye to foresee, nor within the compass of our power to prevent. Human prudence may lay the platform, and God's power blast the execution when it seems to be grown up nearest to maturity. Hezekiah was happy in his affairs, because he was assisted by God; Ahaz unhappy, because he is deserted by God. If we would have a clock go well, we must look chiefly to the motion of the chief wheel; a failure in that makes an error in all the rest. Nothing can terminate its motion to our benefit without providence. Coloured glass can reflect no beams without the sun's light, nor fruits be ripened without its influence. Our dependence on God is greater than theirs on the sun. God lets men play with their own wit and strength, and come to the brink of execution of their designs, and then blows upon them, that they may know there is a God in the earth. Pythagoras could say it was γελοῖον, a ridiculous thing to seek that which is brave and virtuous anywhere else than of God.* Cyrus is a brave pattern, who is mentioned in Scripture, and represented by Xenophon calling upon God when he was first chosen general;† and

in his speech to his captains to encourage them to hope for a good success of the expedition, tells them they might expect it, because I have begun with God, which you know, saith he, is my custom, not only when I attempt great matters, but also τὰ μικρὰ, the things of lesser concernment. The seeking of God should be the prologue to all our affairs. We are enjoined first to pray, and then to determine: Job 22:27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee.' The interesting providence in our concerns is the highway to success. The reason we miscarry, is because we consult not God, but determine without him; and then we have no reason to complain of him for not prospering our way, when we never commended our affairs to his conduct. It hath been the practice of holy men. Nehemiah first petitioned God before he would use his interest in the king's favour: Neh. 2:4, 'Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king,' &c. So Abraham's steward put up his request to God, before he would put the business he came upon in execution, Gen. 24:12. David frequently in particular cases, 1 Sam. 23:9, 2 Sam. 2:1, 2 Sam. 16:12. God only doth what he pleases in heaven and in earth. He only can bless us, he only can blast us. Shall we be careless in any undertaking, whether we have his favour or no? It is a ridiculous madness to resolve to do anything without God, without whose assisting and preserving of us we had not been able to make that resolution.

2. Trust providence. To trust God when our warehouses and bags are full, and our tables spread, is no hard thing; but to trust him when our purses are empty, but a handful of meal and a cruse of oil left, and all ways of relief stopped, herein lies the wisdom of a Christian's grace. Yet none are exempted from this duty, all are bound to acknowledge their trust in him by the daily prayer for daily bread, even those that have it in their cupboards as well as those that want it, the greatest prince as well as the meanest beggar. Whatever your wants are, want not faith, and you cannot want supplies. It is the want of this binds up his hand from doing great works for his creatures; the more we trust him the more he concerns himself in

our affairs. The more we trust ourselves, the more he delights to cross us; for he hath denounced such an one cursed that maketh flesh his arm, Jer. 17:5, though it be the best flesh in the world, because it is a departing from the Lord. No wonder then that God departs from us, and carries away his blessing with him; while we trust ourselves, we do but trouble ourselves, and know not how to reconcile our various reasons for hopes and fears, but the committing our way to the Lord renders our minds calm and composed: Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' Thou shalt have no more of those quarrelling disturbing thoughts what the success shall be.

(1.) Trust providence in the greatest extremities. He brings us into straits, that he may see the exercise of our faith: Zeph. 3:12, 'I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.' When we are most desolate, we have most need of this exercise, and have the fittest season to practise it; he is always our refuge and our strength, but in time of trouble a present help, Ps. 46:1. Daniel's new advancement by Belshazzar but a day before the city was taken by the enemy, Dan. 5:29, the king slain, and (no doubt) many of his nobility, and those that were nearest in authority with him, it being the interest of the enemy to despatch them, was a danger, yet God by ways not expressed preserved Daniel, and gave him favour with the conqueror. God sometimes leads his people into great dangers, that they may see and acknowledge his hand in their preservation. Daniel had not had so signal an experience of God's care of him, had he been in the lower condition he was in before his new preferment. God's eye is always upon them that fear him, not to keep distress from them, but to quicken them in it, and give them as it were a new life from the dead: Ps. 33:18, 19, 'To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.' God brings us into straits, that we may have more lively experiments of his tenderness in his seasonable relief. If he be angry, he will repent himself for his servants, when he sees their power is gone, because then the glory of his providence is appropriated to himself: Deut. 32:36, 39, 'See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god

with me: I kill, and I make alive.' No creature can have any pretence to share in it; he delights thereby to blow up both our affections to him and admirations of him, and store up in us a treasure of experiments to encourage our trusting in him in the like straits. We should therefore repose ourselves in God in a desert as well as in the cities; with as much faith among savage beasts as in the best company of the most sociable men;* and answer the greatest strait with Abraham's speech to Isaac, 'GOD WILL PROVIDE.' For we have to do with a God who is bound up to no means, is at no expense in miraculous succours, who delights to perfect his strength in the creature's weakness. We have to do with a God who only knows what may further our good, and accordingly orders it; what may hinder it, and therefore prevents it. He can set all causes in such a posture as shall conspire together as one link to bring about success, and make even contrary motions meet in one gracious end; as the rivers which run from north and south, the contrary quarters of the world, agree in the surges of one sea. Though providences may seem to cross one another, they shall never cross his word and promise, which he hath magnified above all his names. And his providence is but a servant to his truth.

(2.) Trust it in the way of means. Though we are sure God hath decreed the certain event of such a thing, yet we must not encourage our idleness, but our diligence. Though Moses was assured of the victory when Amalek came armed against him, yet he commands Joshua to draw up the valiant men into a body, himself goes to the mount to pray, and is as diligent in the use of all means as if he had been ignorant of God's purpose, and had rather suspected the rout of his own than his enemies' forces. Neither doth Joshua afterwards, though secured by promise in his conquest of Canaan, omit any part of the duty of a wise and watchful general; he sends spies, disciplines his forces, besiegeth cities, and contrives stratagems. Providence directs us by means, not to use them is to tempt our guardian; where it intends any great thing for our good, it opens a door, and puts such circumstances into our hands as we may use without the breach of any command, or the neglect of our own duty. God could have

secured Christ from Herod's fury by a miraculous stroke from heaven upon his enemy, but he orders Joseph and Mary's flight into Egypt as a means of his preservation. God rebukes Moses for praying, and not using the means in continuing the people's march: Exod. 14:15, 'Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forwards.' To use means without respect to God, is proudly to contemn him; to depend upon God without the use of means, is irreligiously to tempt him; in both we abuse his providence. In the one we disobey him in not using the means he hath appointed; in the other presumptuously impose upon him for the encouragement of our laziness. Diligence on our part, and the blessing on God's, Solomon joins together, Prov. 10:4, 'The hand of the diligent makes rich,' but, ver. 22, 'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich.' So Eccles. 9:1, 'Our works are in the hand of God;' our works, but God's blessing; God's blessing, but not without our works. It was the practice of good men. Jacob wrestles with God to divert his brother's fury, yet sends a present to his brother to appease him, Gen. 32:9, 13. David trusts in the name of the Lord his God in his duel with Goliath, but not without his sling; our labour should rather be more vigorous than more faint, when we are assured of the blessing of providence by the infallibility of the promise.

(3.) Trust providence in the way of precept. Let not any reliance upon an ordinary providence induce you into any way contrary to the command. Daniel had many inducements from an appearance of providence to eat the king's meat: his necessity of compliance in his captivity, probability of preferment by learning the wisdom of the country, whereby he might both have advanced himself and assisted his countrymen, the greatness of the consideration for a captive to be fed from the king's table, the ingratitude he might be accused of for despising so kind a treatment; but none of these things moved him against a command; because the law of God forbade it, he would not eat of the king's meat, Dan. 1:8–10, &c. 'But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat.' Daniel might have argued, I may wind myself into the king's favour, do the church of God a great service by my interest in him,

which may be dashed in pieces by my refusal of this kindness; but none of these things wrought upon him. No providences wherein we have seeming circumstances of glorifying God, must lead us out of the way of duty; this is to rob God one way to pay him another. God brought Daniel's ends about: he finds favour with the governor, his request is granted, the success is answerable, and all those ends attained which he might in a sinful way, by an ill construction of providence, have proposed to himself, all which he might have missed of had he run on in a carnal manner. This, this is the way to success: Ps. 37:5, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.' Commit thy way to the guidance of his providence, with an obedience to his precept and reliance on his promise, and refer all success in it to God. If we set up our golden calves made of our own ear-rings, our wit, and strength, and carnal prudence, because God seems to neglect us, our fate may be the same with theirs, and the very dust of our demolished calf may be a bitter spice in our drink, as it was in theirs.

(4.) Trust him solely, without prescribing any methods to him; leave him to his wise choice, wait upon him because he is a God of judgment, Isa. 30:18, who goes judiciously to work, and can best time the executions of his will. The wise God observes particular periods of time for doing his great works,—John 2:4, 'My hour is not yet come; woman, what have I to do with thee?'—which man is no competent judge of: I will do this miracle, but the season is not yet come wherein it will be most beautiful. God hath as much wisdom to pitch the time of performance of his promise, as he hath mercy at first to make it. How presumptuous would it be for the shallow world, a thing worse than nothing, and vanity, to prescribe rules to the Creator! much more for a single person, a little atom of dust, infinitely worse than nothing, and vanity, to do it. Since we had no hand in creating the world or ourselves, let us not presume to direct God in the government of it: Job 38:4, 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.' Would it not be a disparagement to God to stoop to thy foolish desires? yea, would you not yourselves have a lower conceit of him, if

he should degrade his wisdom to the wrong bias of your blind reason?

3. Submit to providence. It is God's right to govern the world, and dispose of his creature; it is his glory in heaven to do what he will: Ps. 115:3, 'But our God is in the heaven: he hath done whatsoever he pleased.' Let us not, by our unsubmitive carriage, deprive him of the same glory on earth; he brings to pass his will by ways the creature cannot understand. It is the wisest speech in the medley of fooleries, the Turkish Alcoran.* We must walk by the rule of reason which God hath placed in us for our guide; yet if providence brings to pass any other event contrary to our rational expectations, because it is a clear evidence of his will, we must acquiesce. As when a traveller hath two ways to come to his journey's end, the one safe and the other dangerous, reason persuades him to choose the safest way, wherein he falls among thieves; now having used his reason, which in that case was to be his director, he must acquiesce; God's providence bringeth forth an event, which he could not without violence to his reason avoid. And therefore it is a great vanity, when a man hath resolved the most probable way in a business, and fails in it, to torment himself; because though our consultations depend upon ourselves, yet the issues of them are solely in the hand of God. It concerns us therefore to submit to God's disposal of us and our affairs, since nothing can come to pass but by the will of God effecting it, or permitting it. If the fall of a sparrow is not without his will, Mat. 10:29, much less can the greater events which befall men, the nobler creatures, be without the same concurrence of God's pleasure; therefore submit: for,

(1.) Whatsoever God doth, he doth wisely. His acts are not sudden and rash, but acts of counsel; not taken up upon the present posture of things, but the resolves of eternity. As his is the highest wisdom, so all his acts relish of it, and he guides his will by counsel: Eph. 1:11, 'Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.' If God took counsel in creating the world, much more in laying a platform of government, much more in the act of government; for men can

frame models of government that can never reduce them into practice. Now God being infinitely wise, and his will infinitely good, it must needs be that goodness and wisdom are the rules whereby he directs himself in his actions in the world. And what greater motive can there be to persuade our submission, than wisdom and goodness transacting all things? God's counsel being the firmest, as well as the wisest, it is a folly both ways to resist it.

(2.) God discovers his mind to us by providences. Every work of God being the result of his counsel, when we see it actually brought forth into the world, what else doth it discover to us but that counsel and will of his? Every single providence hath a language wherein God's mind is signified, much more a train and contexture of them: Luke 7:22, 'Tell John what things you have seen and heard: how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, to the poor the gospel is preached.' Our Saviour informs John's disciples from acts of providence, he gives them no other answer, but turns him over to interpret and construe his works in the case. Providence therefore must not be resisted, when God's mind in it is discovered. It is disingenuous to act against his pleasure and manifest mind; it is the devil's sin. Aaron, when he lost his two sons in so judicial manner by fire from heaven, yet held his peace, Lev. 10:1–3; because God had declared his mind positively, 'I will be glorified.' It is dangerous to resist the mind of God, for the word of his providence shall prosper in spite of men and devils: Isa. 55:11, 'My word that goes forth of my mouth, shall not return unto me void; it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it;' and therefore a resisting of it is termed θεομαχεῖν, a fighting against God, by Gamaliel, no great friend to the church, Acts 5:38, 39.

4. Murmur not at providence. Though we do not clearly resist it, if there be a repining submission, it is a partial opposition to the will of God. We might as well murmur at God's creation as at his providence, for that is as arbitrary as this; he is under no law but his own righteous will: we should therefore leave the government of the world to God's wisdom, as we acknowledge the frame of it to be an

act of his power. If God should manage his ways according to our prescriptions, what satisfaction would God have? what satisfaction would the world have? He might be unjust to himself, and unjust to others. Your own complaints would not be stilled, when you should feel the smart of your own counsels; yet if they were, what satisfaction could there be to the complaints of others, whose interests and therefore judgments and desires lie cross to yours? Man is a cross creature. The Israelites exclaimed to God against Pharaoh, and when the scene was changed, they did no less murmur against Moses in the wilderness. They were as troublesome when they were delivered, as when they were afflicted. In Egypt they would have their liberty, and in the wilderness their stomachs turn, and they long for the onions and garlic, though attended with their former slavery. Let God govern the world according to his own wisdom and will, till all mankind can agree in one method to offer to him, and that I think will never be, though the world should last for ever. Murmur not, therefore; whatsoever is done in the world is the work of a wise agent, who acts for the perfection of the whole universe; and why should I murmur at that which promotes the common happiness and perfection, that being better and more desirable than the perfection of any one particular person? Must a lutenist break all his strings because one is out of tune? And must God change his course because things are out of order with one man, though in regard of divine providence things are not out of order in themselves, or without any care, for God is a God of order? This temper will hinder our prayers; with what face can we pray to that God whose wisdom we thus repine at? If God doth exercise a providence in the world, why do we murmur? If he doth not take care of those things, why do we pray to him? It is a contradiction. It also hinders us from giving God the glory, and ourselves the comfortable sight of his providence. God may have taken something from us, which is the matter of our sorrow, and give another thing to us, which might be the matter of our joy. Jacob lost a joint, and got a blessing, Gen. 32:29, 31. What advantage can it be to murmur? Can all your cries stop the motions of the heavens, when a storm reaches you? Can your clamours make the clouds move the faster, or

persuade the showers from drenching us? Murmuring at any afflictive providence, is the way to make the rod smarter in itself, and sharper to us.

5. Study providence. It is a part of atheism not to think the acts of God in the world worth our serious thoughts. And if you would know the meaning of his administrations, grow up in the fear of God: Ps. 25:14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.' God is highly angry with those that mind him not: Ps. 28:5, 'Because they regard not the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.' He shall utterly root them out.

(1.) Study providence universally. The darkest: God brings order out of the world's confusion, even as he framed a beautiful heaven and earth out of a rude mass. The terriblest: these offer something worth our observation; the dreadful providence of God makes Sodom an example to after ages: Jude 7, they are 'set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,' &c. The smallest: God is a wise agent, and so the least of his actions are significant. There is nothing superfluous in those acts we account the meanest; for to act vainly and lightly argues imperfection, which cannot be attributed to God. The wisdom of God may be much seen in those providences the blind world counts small; as a little picture is oft-times of more value, and hath more of the workman's skill than a larger, which an ignorant person might prize at a higher rate; the lilies, flowers, sparrows, our Saviour raises excellent observations from.

(2.) Regularly. By the word: compare providence and the promise together; God's manner of administrations, and the meaning of them, is understood by the word: Ps. 77:13, 'Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary.' By faith: we many times correct our sense by reason; when we look through a blue or green glass, and see all things blue or green, though our sense represents them so, yet our reason discovers the mistake. Why should we not correct reason by faith? Indeed, our purblind reason stands in as much need of a regulation by faith, as our deceitful sense doth of a regulation by reason. We may often

observe in the gospel, that the Holy Ghost taking notice of the particular circumstances in the bringing Christ into the world, and in the course of his life, often hath those expressions, 'as it is written; that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.' There is not a providence happens in the world, but there are some general rules in the word whereby we may apprehend the meaning of it. From God's former work discovered in his word, we may trace his present footsteps. Observe the timings of providence wherein the beauty of it appears, since 'God hath made every thing beautiful in its time.'

(3.) Entirely. View them in their connection. A harsh touch single would not be pleasing, but may rarely affect the concert. The providences of God bear a just proportion to one another, and are beautiful in their entire scheme; but when regarded apart, we shall come far short of a delightful understanding of them. As in a piece of arras folded up, and afterwards particularly opened, we see the hand or foot of a man, the branch of a tree; or if we look on the outside, we see nothing but knots and threads, and uncouth shapes that we know not what to make of; but when it is fully opened, and we have the whole web before us, we see what histories and pleasing characters are interwoven in it. View them in their end; there is no true judgment to be made of a thing in motion, unless we have a right prospect of the end to which it tends. Many things which may seem terrible in their motion, may be excellent in their end. Providence is crowned by the end of it. Asaph was much troubled about the prosperity of the wicked, and affliction of the godly, but he was well satisfied when he understood their end, which was the end of providence too: Ps. 73:16, 17, 'When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary, then understood I their end.' Moses his rod was a serpent in its motion upon the ground; but when taken up, it was a rod again to work miracles. God set us a pattern for this in the creation. He views the creatures as they came into being, and pronounced them GOOD; he takes a review of them afterward in their whole frame, and the subordination of them to one another, and the ends he had destined them to, and then pronounceth them very good. The merciful

providences of God, if singly looked upon, will appear good, but if reviewed in the whole web, and the end of them, will commence very good in our apprehensions.

(4.) Calmly. Take heed of passion in this study, that is a mist before the eye of the mind; several pleasures also disturb and stifle the nobler operation of the intellective part, and all improving thoughts of God's providence: Isa. 5:12, 'And the harp, and the viol, and wine, are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, nor consider the operations of his hands.' All thoughts of them are choked by the pleasures of sense. Passions and sensual pleasures are like flying clouds in the night, interposing themselves between the stars and our eyes, that we cannot observe the motions of them. Turbulent passions, or swinish pleasures prevailing, obscure the providence of God. Our own humour and interest we often make the measures of our judgment of providence. Shimei, when Absalom rebels against his father, looks no further than his own interest, and therefore interprets it as a judgment of God in revenging the house of Saul: 2 Sam. 16:7, 8, 'The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned.' Therefore the Spirit of God takes particular notice that he was of the house of Saul, ver. 5, when indeed this judgment was quite another thing, for David's sin in the matter of Uriah was written in the forehead of it.

(5.) Seriously. It is not an easy work; for the causes of things are hid, as the seminal virtues in plants, not visible till they manifest themselves. Providence is God's lantern in many affairs; if we do not follow it close, we may be left in the dark, and lose our way. With much prayer, for we cannot of ourselves find out the reason of them; being shallow creatures, we cannot find out those infinite wise methods God observes in the managing of them; but if we seriously set to work, and seek God in it, God may inform us, and make them intelligible to us. Though a man may not be able of himself to find out the frame and motions of an engine, yet when the artificer hath explained the work, discovered the intent of the fabric, it may be easily understood: if it be dark, whilst you seriously muse on it, God

may send forth a light into you, and give you an understanding of it: Mat. 1:20, Joseph thought of those things, and whilst he thought on them, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream; God made them known to him. The Israelites saw God's acts in the bulk of them, but Moses saw his way, and the manner how he wrought them; Ps. 103:7, 'He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.' Moses had more converse with God than they, and therefore was admitted into his secrets.

(6.) Holily; with a design to conform to that duty providence calls for. Our motions should be according to the providence of God, when we understand the intent of them. There is a call of providence: Isa. 22:12, 'In that day the Lord called to weeping and mourning,' sometimes to sorrow, sometimes to joy. If it be a providence to discover our sin, let us comply with it by humiliation; if it be to further our grace, suit it by lively and fresh actings. As the sap in plants descends with the sun's declination, and ascends at the return of the sun from the tropic, there are several graces to be exercised upon several acts of providence, either public to the church and nation, or particular to our own persons—sometimes faith, sometimes joy, sometimes patience, sometimes sorrow for sin. There are spiritual lessons in every providence, for it doth not only offer something to be understood, but some things to be practised. Mark 10:15, a child is brought to Christ, and Christ from thence teaches them a lesson of humility. Luke 13:1–3. When Christ discourses of that sad providence of the blood of the Galileans, and the tower of Siloam, he puts them upon the exercise of repentance. The ruler inquired the time when his son began to recover, that his faith in Christ might be confirmed, for upon that circumstance it did much hang; and in doubtful cases, after a serious study of it, and thou knowest not which way to determine, consider what makes most for God's glory and thy spiritual good, for that is the end of all. Let us therefore study providence, not as children do histories, to know what men were in the world, or to please their fancy only, but as wise men, to understand the motions of states, and the intrigues of councils, to enrich them with a knowledge whereby they might be

serviceable to their country. So let us inquire into the providence of God, to understand the mind of God, the interest of the church, the wisdom and kindness of God, and our own duty in conformity thereunto.

6. Ascribe the glory of every providence to God. Abraham's steward petitioned God at the beginning of his business, Gen. 24:12; and he blesses God at the success of it, ver. 26, 27. We must not thank the tools which are used in the making an engine, and ascribe unto them what we owe to the workman's skill. Man is but the instrument, God's wisdom is the artist. Let us therefore return the glory of all where it is most rightly placed. We may see the difference between Rachel and Leah in this respect; when Rachel had a son by her maid Bilhah, she ascribes it to God's care, and calls his name Dan, which signifies judging—Gen. 30:6, 'God hath judged me, and heard my voice'—that the very name might put her in remembrance of the kindness of God in answering her prayer; and the next, Naphthali, she esteems as the fruit of prayer, ver. 8; whereas Leah takes no notice of God, but vaunts of the multitude of her children: ver. 11, 'Behold, a troop comes.' She imposeth the name of Gad upon them, which also signifies fortune or good luck; and the next, Asher, ver. 13, which is fortunate or blessed. And we find Leah of the same mind afterward, ver. 17. It is said God hearkened unto her, so that her son Issachar was an answer of prayer; but she ascribes it to a lower cause which had moved God, because she had given her maid to her husband, ver. 18. 'Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to thy name be the glory.'

Doct. 2. All the motions of providence in the world are ultimately for the good of the church, of those whose heart is perfect towards him. Providence follows the rule of Scripture. Whatsoever was written, was written for the church's comfort, Rom. 15:4; whatsoever is acted in order to anything written, is acted for the church's good. All the providences of God in the world are conformable to his declarations in his word. All former providences were ultimately in order to the bringing a mediator into the world, and for the glory of him; then

surely all the providences of God shall be in order to the perfecting the glory of Christ in that mystical body whereof Christ is head, and wherein his affection and his glory are so much concerned. See the proof of this by a scripture or two: Ps. 25:10, 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.' Not one path, but all the works and motions; not one particular act or passage of providence, but the whole tract of his proceedings; not only those which are more smooth and pleasant, but those which are more rugged and bitter. All mercy and truth suitable to that affection he bears in his heart to them, and suitable to the declaration of that affection he hath made in his promise. There is a contexture and a friendly connection of kindness and faithfulness in every one of them. They both kiss and embrace each other in every motion of God towards them. As mercy made the covenant, so truth shall perform it. And there shall be as much mercy as truth in all God's actings towards those that keep it: Rom. 8:28, 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' We know, we do not conjecture or guess so, but we have an infallible assurance of it; all things, even the most frightful, and so those that have, in respect of sense, nothing but gall and wormwood in them; work together, they all conspire with an admirable harmony and unanimous consent for a Christian's good. One particular act may seem to work to the harm of the church, as one particular act may work to the good of wicked men; but the whole series and frame of things combine together for the good of those that are affectionate to him. Both the lance that makes us bleed, and the plaster which refresheth the wounds, both the griping purges and the warming cordials, combine together for the patient's cure. To them who are called according to his purpose. Here the apostle renders a reason of this position, because they are called not only in the general amongst the rest of the world, to whom the gospel comes, but they are such that were in God's purpose and counsel from eternity to save, and therefore resolved to incline their will to faith in Christ; therefore all his other counsels about the affairs of the world shall be for their good. Another reason of this the apostle intimates, verse 27, 'The

Spirit makes intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.' The intercessions of the Spirit, which are also according to God's will and purpose, will not be fruitless in the main end, which both the intercessions of the Spirit and purpose of God, and the will and desire of the saints, do aim at, which is their good. Indeed, where any is the object of this grand purpose of God, he is the object of God's infinite and innumerable thoughts: Ps. 40:5, 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward; they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' The psalmist seems to intimate that, in all the wonderful works which God hath done, his thoughts are towards his people. He thinks of them in all his actions; and those thoughts are infinite, and cannot be numbered and reckoned up by any creature. He seems to restrain the thoughts of God towards his people in all those works of wonder which he doth in the world, and which others are the subjects of; but his thoughts or purposes and intentions in all (for the word signifies purposes too) are chiefly, next to his own glory, directed towards his people, those that trust in him, which, verse 4, he has pronounced blessed. They run in his mind, as if his heart was set upon them, and none but them.

Here I shall premise two things as the groundwork of what follows:

1. God certainly in all his actions has some end; that is without question, because he is a wise agent; to act vainly and lightly is an evidence of imperfection, which cannot be ascribed to the only wise God. The wheels of providence are full of eyes, Ezek. 1:18; there is motion, and a knowledge of the end of that motion. And Jesus Christ, who is God's deputy in the providential government, hath seven eyes as well as seven horns, Rev. 5:6; a perfect strength, and a perfect knowledge how to use that strength, and to what end to use it, seven being the number of perfection in Scripture.
2. That certainly is God's end which his heart is most set upon, and that which is last in execution. What doth God do at the folding up of

the world but perfect his people, and welcome them into glory? Therefore God principally next to himself loves his church. The whole earth is his, but the church is his treasure: Exod. 19:5, 'If you will keep my covenant, then shall you be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine,' segullah; such a treasure, that a man, a king, will entrust in no hands but his own. 'All the earth is mine' is not a reason why the church was his treasure, but an incentive of thankfulness; that when the whole earth was his, and lay before him, and there were many people that he might have chosen and loved before them, yet he pitched upon them to make them his choicest treasure. And when the blessed God hath pitched upon a people, and made them his treasure, what he doth for them is with his whole heart and with his whole soul. Jer. 32:41, 42, speaking of making an everlasting covenant, he adds, 'Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good,' &c., 'assuredly with my whole heart, and with my whole soul.' As though God minded nothing else but those people he had made an everlasting covenant with, which is the highest security, and most pregnant expression of his affection that can be given to any; not to give them a parcel or moiety of his heart, but the whole, infinite, entire piece, and to engage it all with the greatest delight in doing good to them. That infinite heart of God, and all the contrivances and workings of it, centre in the church's welfare. The world is a wilderness, but the church is a garden. If he water the wilderness, will he not much more dress his garden? If the flights of birds be observed by him, shall not also the particular concernments of the church? He hath a repository for them and all that belong to them; he hath a book of life for their names, Luke 10:20, a book of record for their members, Ps. 139:16; a note-book for their speeches, Mal. 3:16, 'A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord;' and a book of providence for their preservation, Exod. 32:32. In the prosecution of this I shall shew,

1. That it is so de facto, and hath been so.
2. That according to the state of things, and God's economy, it must be so.

3. The improvement of it, by way of use.

1. That all providence is for the good of the church de facto, and has been so.

It will appear by an enumeration of things.

(1.) First, All good things.

(2.) Secondly, All bad things are for their good.

(1.) First, All good things.

[1.] The world.

[2.] Gifts and common graces of men in the world.

[3.] Angels.

[1.] The world. The whole world was made and ordained for the good of the church, next to the glory of God. This will appear in three things:

First, The continuance of the world is for their sakes. God would have destroyed the world because of the ignorance and wickedness of it, before this time, but he overlooked it all, and had respect to the times of Christ, and the publishing faith in him, and repentance: Acts 17:30, 'And the times of this ignorance God winked at,' God overlooked,* he looked not so upon them, as to be provoked to destroy the world, but his eyes were fixed on the times of Christianity, therefore would not take notice, in the extremity of his justice, of the wickedness of those foregoing ages. Believers are the salt of the earth, Mat. 5:13, which makes the world savoury to God, and keeps it from corrupting. It is meant not only of the apostles, but of Christ's disciples, of all Christians, for to them was that sermon made, ver. 1. 'If the salt have lost his savour,' if the salt be corrupted, and Christianity overthrown in the world, wherewith shall the world

be salted? How can it be kept from corruption? If they that persecuted the prophets before you in Judea (which is sometimes called the earth in Scripture), cannot relish you, and find nothing grateful to their palates in your doctrine and conversation, wherewith shall they be salted? How shall they be preserved from corruption? The land will be good for nothing but to be given as a prey to the Romans, to be trodden under their feet, as being cast out of God's protection. They are the foundation of the world: Prov. 10:25, 'The righteous are an everlasting foundation.' Maimonides understands it thus, that the world stands for the righteous' sakes. When God had Noah and his family lodged in the ark, he cares not what deluge and destruction he brings upon the rest of the world. When he had conducted Lot out of Sodom, he brings down that dreadful storm of fire.* He cares for no place, no, nor for the whole world, any longer than whilst his people are there, or he hath some to bring in, in time. For the meanest believer is of more worth than a world; therefore when God hath gathered all together, he will set fire upon this frame of the creation; for what was the end of Christ's coming and dying, but to gather all things together in one? Eph. 1:10, 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of time he might gather together in one all things in Christ.' When Christ hath summed up all together, he hath attained his end. And to what purpose, then, can we imagine God should continue the world any longer? for his delight is not simply in the world, but in the saints there: Ps. 16:3, 'But to the saints that are in the earth, in whom is all my delight;' not in the earth, but in the saints there, which are the only excellent things in it, which Christ speaks (of whom that psalm is meant) who knew well what was the object of his Father's pleasure. The sweet savour God smelt in Noah's sacrifice, was the occasion of God's declaration for the world's standing: Gen. 8:21, 'And the Lord said in his heart, I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake,' that he would no more smite it with a totally destroying judgment. It was his respect to Christ represented in that sacrifice, and to the faith and grace of Noah the sacrificer. What savour could an infinitely pure spirit smell in the blood and flames of beasts?

Secondly, The course of natural things is for the good of the church, or particular members of it. God makes articles of agreement with the beasts and fowls, whose nature is raging and ravenous, and binds them in sure bonds for the performance of those articles: Hosea 2:18, 'And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground, and will make them to lie down safely.' As upon our sin God can arm them against us, so upon our obedience he can make them serviceable even against their natures, as if he had made a covenant with them, and they had both the reason and virtue to observe it. I do not remember any instance in Scripture, that God went out of the usual tract of his providence, and acted in an extraordinary manner, but where his people were one way or other concerned. It was for Joshua's and the Israelites' sake that the sun was arrested to stand still in the valley of Ajalon, that they might have light enough to defeat their enemies, and pursue their victory, Josh. 10:12, 13. The sea shall, against its natural course, stand in heaps like walls of brass to assist the Israelites' escape, Exod. 14:22. The fire is restrained in the operation of its nature, even whilst it retains its burning quality, when the lives of the three valiant believing children are in danger, Dan. 3:25. The mouths of lions are muzzled when the safety of his beloved Daniel is concerned, Dan. 6:22. And the shadow goes back upon the dial for Hezekiah's sake, 2 Kings 20:11. When God would at any time deliver his people, he can muster up lightnings and thunder's for their assistance; 1 Sam. 7:10; he can draw all the regiments of heaven into battle array, and arm the stars to fight against Sisera, when Israel's condition needs it; and make even the lowest creatures to list themselves as auxiliaries in the service. God hath not a displeasure with senseless creatures, neither is transported with strains of fury against such objects, when he alters their natural course. Hab. 3:8, 'Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thy horses and chariots of salvation?' No; but he made those creatures the horses and chariots, to speed assistance and salvation to his people, which the psalmist elegantly describes, Ps. 114. All creatures are his host; and that God that created them hath still the

sovereign command over them, and can embody them in an army to serve his purpose for the deliverance of his people, as he did against Pharaoh.

Thirdly, The interest of nations is ordered as is most for the church's good. He orders both the course of natural things, and of civil affairs for their interest. He alters the state of things, and changeth governors and governments for the sake of his people. For these causes God sent Elisha to crown Jehu king: 2 Kings 9:6, 7, 'I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, &c., that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord at the hand of Jezebel.' For the sakes of the godly in that nation, and the revenging the blood of the prophets which had been shed, was he raised up by the Lord. He sent such judgments upon Egypt, that it was as much the interest of that nation to let Israel go, as it was before to keep them their vassals. God orders the interest and affairs of nations for those ends; and according to this disposition of affairs, Christ times his intercession for his church. The angels had been sent out to view the state of the world, and found it in peace: Zech. 1:11, 'Behold, all the earth sits still, and is at rest;' there had been wars in Artaxerxes and Xerxes his time, but in the time of Darius that part of the world had an universal peace, which was the fittest time for the restoration of the Jews, and building the temple, because it could not be built but by the king's cost, whose treasure in the time of war was expended another way; nor would it consist with their policy to restore the Jews to their government at such a time when they had wars with the neighbour-parts of Egypt. See how God orders the state of the world in subserviency to his gracious intentions towards his church. The time of the Jewish captivity was now out, according to the promise of God, and God gives that part of the world a general peace, that the restoration of the Jews, and the rebuilding of the temple, might be facilitated, and the truth of his promise in their deliverance accomplished. Upon the news of this general peace in that part of the world, Christ expostulates with God for the restoration of Jerusalem: ver. 12, 'How long, O Lord, wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem,

and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?' The time of the captivity determined by God was now expired. The first Reformation in Germany was backed by reasons of state as it was then altered, it being the interest of many princes of that country to countenance Luther's doctrine, for the putting a stop to the growing greatness of Charles the Fifth, who had evident designs to enslave them. I might mention many more; only by the way let me advise those that have an inclination to read histories of former transactions, to which men naturally are addicted, to make this your end, to observe the strange providences of God in the world, and how admirably he hath made them subservient to the interest of the church, which will be the most profitable way of reading them, whereby they will not only satisfy your curiosity, but establish your Christianity. Calvin understands that place: Deut. 32:8, 'He sets the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel,' that in the whole ordering of the state of the world, God proposeth this as his end, to consult for the good of his people, and his care extends to the rest only in order to them; and though they are but a small number, yet he orders his whole government of the world's affairs as may best tend to their salvation. Therefore God sets the people bounds, or enlargeth them according as they may be serviceable one way or other to this end. And the reason is rendered, ver. 9, 'For the Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.' Therefore God orders all the rest of the world in subserviency to the maintaining and improving his portion and inheritance.

[2.] As the world, so the gifts and common graces of men in the world, are for the good of the church, which is a great argument for providence in general; since there is nothing so considerable in government as the disposing of places to men according to their particular endowments and abilities for them. And the bestowing such gifts upon men is none of the meanest arguments for God's providential government of the world. As,

First, The gifts of good men. The gifts conferred upon Paul were deposited in him, not only to be possessed by him, but used and laid out for the good of the church: Col. 1:25, 'Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you;' 'The manifestation of the Spirit to any man is given to profit withal,' 1 Cor. 12:7. And this is the great end for which men should seek to excel, viz., for the edifying of the church: 1 Cor. 14:12, 'Forasmuch as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church.'

Secondly, The gifts and common graces of bad men. There is something that is amiable in men, though they have not grace. As in stones, plants, and flowers, though they have not sense, there is something grateful in them, as colour and smell, &c. And all those things that are lovely in men are for the church's good; the best life, and the worst death, things present, let who will be the possessor, all things between life and death, are for the good of believers, because they are Christ's: 1 Cor. 3:22, 'Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world,'—i.e., whether the gifts of the prime lights in the church, or the common gifts of the world,—'are all yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' God is the dispenser of them, Christ is the governor of them, and all for your sakes. As the medicinal qualities of waters are not for the good of themselves, but the accommodation of the indigencies of men. By the common works of the Spirit God doth keep men from the evil of the world. For it cannot be supposed that the Spirit, whose mission is principally for the church, should give such gifts out of love to men which hate him, and are not the objects of his eternal purpose; but he hath some other ends in doing it, which is the advantage of his church and people; and this God causes by the preaching of the gospel, which when it works gracious works in some, produceth common works in others for the good of those gracious ones. As a seed of corn hath straw, husks, and chaff come up with it, which are shelters to that little seed which lies in the midst, so in the preaching of the gospel there are some husks come up among natural men, which God makes to be shelters to the church, as those common works, and

restraining men through the knowledge of Christ. God gives gifts to them, not out of love to them, but love to his church. As nurses of great men's children are fed with better meat than the other servants, not out of any particular personal respect to them, but to their office, that the milk whereby the child is nourished may be the sweeter and wholesomer; were it not for that relation, she must be content with the diet allowed to the rest of the servants. Some stinking plants may have medicinal virtues, which the physician extracts for the cure of a disease, and flings the rest upon the dunghill. God bestows such qualities upon men otherwise unsavoury to him, which he draws forth upon several occasions for the good of those that are more peculiarly under his care, and then casts them away. These gifts are indeed the ruin of bad men, because of their pride, but the church's advantage in regard of their excellency, and are often as profitable to others as dangerous to themselves. As all that good which is in plants and animals is for the good of man, so all the gifts of natural men are for the church's good; for they are for that end as the principal, next the glory of God, because every inferior thing is ordained to something superior as its end. Plants are ordained for the nourishment of beasts, and both plants and beasts for men; the inferior men for the service of higher; and all for the community: yet still there is a higher end beyond those, viz., the glory of God, to which they are ultimately ordained, which is so connected with the church's good, that what serves one serves the other.

[3.] Angels, the top creatures in the creation, are ordered for the good of the church. If the stars are not cyphers in the world only to be gazed upon, but have their influences both upon plants and animals; as the sun in impregnating the earth, and enlivening the plants, and assisting the growth of fruits for the good of mankind; if the stars have those natural influences upon the sensible world, the angels, which are the morning stars, have no less interest as instruments in the government of it. The heathens had such a notion of demons working those things which were done in the world, but according to the will and order of the supreme God. The angels are called watchers: Dan. 4:13, 'A watcher, and an holy one;' ver. 17, 'This

is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones;' they watch for God's orders, and watch for God's honour, and the church's good. There are orders of state among them, for we read of their decree; it is called their decree ministerially, as they execute it; approbative, as they subscribe to the equity and goodness of it. As the saints are said to judge the world, not authoritatively, as in commission with Christ, but as they approve of Christ's sentence. They seem to request those things of God which may make for his glory, and they decree among themselves what is fit to be presented to God in order to his glory. They cannot endure that men should trample upon God's authority, despoil him of his right, and tread down his inheritance, and therefore they send such requests to God to act so as men may acknowledge him and his government, 'to the intent that the living may know that the most high rules in the kingdoms of men.' Their care therefore must be for the church, since God rules all things in order to that, and since that is God's portion and inheritance, so that as they have a care of God's glory, they must also have a care of God's portion, and his peculiar treasure. The inward part of the temple was to be adorned with cherubims, to note the special attendance of the holy angels in the assemblies of the saints.* As evil angels plot against the church, so good angels project for it. Though in the Scripture we find angels sometimes employed in affairs of common providence, and doing good to them that are not of the church; as one is sent to comfort Hagar, and relieve Ishmael upon his cry, though he had scoffed at Isaac the heir of the covenant when he was in Abraham's family, Gen. 21:17; yet for the most part they were employed in the concerns of some of his special servants. Angels thrust Lot out of Sodom, Gen. 19:25, 26. An angel stopped the lions' mouths when Daniel was in the den: Dan. 6:22, 'My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths.' God employs angels in the preserving and ruining of empires, which is clear in the prophecy of Daniel, and some understand Isa. 10:34, 'And Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one,' of an angel. As the soul sends forth a multitude of spirits swiftly into the nerves for the supply of the lowest member, which runs thither upon the least motion, so do the angels, which are God's ministers, run at the appointment of God,

and are employed in all the wheels of providence. The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels of providence, Ezek. 1:20.

First, The highest orders among them are not exempted from being officers for the church. Though they are called God's angels in respect of their immediate attendance on God, yet they are called man's angels in respect of the service they do for them, Mat. 18:10, 'Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.' They are not the ordinary sort of angels which attend upon those little ones, upon young converts humble souls, those little ones in the kingdom of heaven; but they are the highest courtiers there, such as see the face of God, and stand before him. A king hath many servants, but not every servant, only the chief of the nobility stand before him; so they are not angels of the meanest order and rank in heaven, that are ordered to attend the lowest Christian. The apostles make no doubt of this: Heb. 1:14, 'Are they not all ministering spirits'—there is no question but they are—'sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' He asserts confidently that not one of them is blotted out of the list for this employment. 'Are they not all?' None are exempted from the service of God, so none are exempted from the end of that service, which is the good of believers. They are God's servants, but for the church's good, for them which shall be heirs. Are they not all? It is irrational to deny it. And they are sent forth, every one of them hath his commission signed by God for this purpose, and not only for the church in general, but for every member in particular; 'for the heirs of salvation.' And not only for them which are already called and enrolled, but for them who shall be called, whose names are written in the book of God's election; 'who shall be heirs.' And they are not only faintly sent, as if they might go if they will, but they have a strict charge to look after them well, not in one or two of their works, or ways, but in all: Ps. 91:11, 'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; to bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.' They are to use all their strength to this purpose, to bear them up in their hands; as the elder children are appointed by parents to have a care of the younger in their works and motions, and to use

both their wisdom and strength for them. The angels are a guard to secure them here, and at last to convey them to their Father's house, Luke 16:22. When a man is in favour with a prince, all the courtiers will be observant of him.

Secondly, Armies of them are employed upon this occasion. There are great multitudes of them, as Bildad speaks, Job 25:3, 'Is there any number of his armies?' that is, of his angels. When Joel speaks of the heathens gathering together, 'Thither,' saith he, 'Lord, cause thy mighty ones to come down,' chap. 3:11. A whole squadron of them shall attend upon a gracious man, according to the circumstances he is involved in. Gen. 33:1, 2, 'And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host.' Regiments of angels, enough to make up an army (for so Jacob terms them) met him upon the way, to secure his brother Esau, and to encourage him in his journey. So some interpret 2 Sam. 5:24, 'The sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees,' the sign of the marching of the brigade of angels, with the Lord at the head of them, for the discomfiture of David's enemies; 'then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.' And this they do not of their own heads, but by the pleasure of God; not only by a bare will, but a delight: Ps. 103:21, 'Bless the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.' צונו his choicest pleasure, he delights to see this his militia upon action.

Thirdly, Christ hath the government of them to this end for his church. Angels are all put in subjection to him: Heb. 2:7, 8, 'In that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.' He is 'exalted above all principality and power.' 'God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,' Eph. 1:21, 22; all things, even principalities and powers, are put under his feet, to be commissioned and influenced by him for the good of his church: Ezek. 1:12, 'Whither the Spirit was to go, they went.' They are ordered by the Spirit of Christ to this purpose: Zech. 1:10, 'Those are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.' They are his faithful

messengers, despatched into the world by him, as scouts and spies, to take notice of the state of the world, and to give him intelligence, and an exact account of affairs, and, ver. 11, they gave an account to Christ. Christ is the head and general of them, Col. 2:10. They are his host, always in a warlike posture, with Christ in the head of them, Zech. 1:8, upon their horses, which notes readiness to move and speed in motion: and as an host they are said to pitch their tents round about them that fear him, and are in a continual conflict with the evil angels to prevent their designs, in the behalf of Christ, whom they acknowledge as their head by their worship of him, Heb. 1:6. Christ orders them to take care to seal his servants in the foreheads, that they may be preserved in the storms which shall happen in the world at the time of the ruin of the Romish papacy, Rev. 7:2, 3. An angel comes that had the seal of the living God (commission of God), saying, 'Hurt not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in the foreheads.'

Fourthly, The great actions which have been done in the world, or shall be done for the church, are performed by them. Angels were sent as expresses by God with his great decrees concerning the revolutions of times, Dan. 7:16; 8:16, 'And I heard a man's voice, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.' An angel was sent to Daniel with the message of a Redeemer, and the clearest prophecy of Christ, which the Jews are not able to answer to this day, which they most startle at, Dan. 9:21. Part of the discovery of the revelation to John, which is a standing almanac to the church, was made us by an angel, Rev. 10:8, 9; 22:8, 9. And when by the course of time those turnings are to happen in the world, the angels must have their share of service in them. The trumpets are sounded by angels, and the vials which are filled with the causes of such alterations, are poured out by the hands of angels. Some indeed, by the angels there mentioned, understand the visible instruments of reformation, not excluding the angels, who are the invisible ministers in the affairs of the world.*

Fifthly, They engage in this work for the church with delight; they act as God's ministers in his providence with a unanimous consent: Ezek 1:9, 'Their wings were joined one to another;' so that they perform their office with the same swiftness, and with the same affection, without emulation to go one before another, which makes many actions succeed ill among men; but they go hand in hand. They do it with affection, both in respect of the kind disposition of their natures, and as they are fellow-members of the same body, for they are parts of the church and of the heavenly Jerusalem: Heb. 12:22, 'Ye are come to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first-born;' and therefore act out of affection to that which is a part of their body, as well as out of obedience to their head. They do it in respect of their own improvement too, and increase of their knowledge (which is the desire of all intellectual creatures); for they complete their understandings by the sight of the methods of infinite wisdom in the perfecting his gracious designs. And it is God's intent that they should grow in the knowledge of his great mystery by their employment: Eph. 3:10, 'To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,' i.e., By the gracious works of God towards the church, and in the behalf of it, for the security and growth of the church, and in the executions of those decrees which as instruments they are employed in; for I do not understand how it can be meant of the knowledge of Christ, for that they know more than the church below can acquaint them with: for without question they have a clear insight into the offices of Christ, who is the head, and whom they are ordered to worship. They understand the aim of his death and resurrection, and can better explain the dark predictions of Scripture, than purblind man can. But by observing the methods which God uses in the accomplishment of them, they become more intelligent, and commence masters of knowledge in a higher degree, which it is probable is one reason of their joy, when they see God's infinite wisdom and grace in the conversion of a sinner; without affection to them, and their employment about them, they could not rejoice so much. And their rejoicing in their first bringing in to God,

argues their joy in all their employments which concerns their welfare.

(2.) As all good things, so all bad things are ordered by providence for the good of the church. That which in its own nature is an injury, by God's ordering puts on the nature of a mercy; and what is poison in itself, by the almighty art becomes a sovereign medicine. Are God's dispensations in their own nature destructive? That wise physician knows how to make poisons work the effect of purges. Are they sharp? It is to humble and purge the church. As shadows serve to set out the pictures, so the darkest passages of providence are made by God to commend the beauty of those glorious things he works for his church. We may see this in,

[1.] Bad persons. As,

First, The devil. God manageth him for his own glory, and the strengthening of believers. Mat. 8:31, 32, the devils desired to enter into the herd of swine, with an intent, probably, not only to destroy the swine, but to incense the Gadarenes against him, out of whom they had been cast, to do him some considerable mischief. But what is the issue? As they discover their malice, so they enhance the value of Christ's kindness to the distressed man, whom he had freed from this tyranny. Hereby also was the law of God justified in commanding the Jews to abstain from swine's flesh, which the Gadarenes, being apostate Jews, had broken; he magnified his own power in the routing such a number of unclean spirits, which had not been so conspicuous in the turning them out of one man, had not this regiment discovered themselves among the swine, and brought such a loss upon the Gadarenes, whereby as they shewed their own strength and malice, so they discovered occasionally the greatness of Christ's charity, and his power over them; so that in granting the malicious petition of this exasperated legion, the law of God is justified, our Saviour's love glorified, his power manifested, and a foundation laid for the gaining proselytes in that country, to which purpose he left the man he had cured, Luke 8:39, and to strengthen

the faith of those poor believers which then followed him. God makes use of the devils by the sovereignty of providence, to bring about ends unknown to themselves, for all their wisdom. The malice of the devil against Job hath rendered him a standing miracle of patience for ever. They are the 'rulers of the darkness of this world,' Eph. 6:12, not of the light of the world; they are the rulers of the wicked, and the scullions of the saints, to scour and cleanse them. They are the rulers of the world, but subordinate to serve the providence of God, wherein God declares his wisdom by serving himself of the worst of his enemies. The devil thought he had brought a total destruction upon mankind when he persuaded our first parents to eat of the forbidden fruit, but the only wise God ordered it to bring about a greater glory to himself, and a more firm stability to his people, in introducing an everlasting covenant which could not be broken, and establishing their happiness upon surer terms than it was settled in paradise; and afterwards in filling the heart of Judas to betray Christ, and the hearts of the Jews to crucify him. Even by that way whereby he thought to hinder the good of mankind, he occasionally promotes their perpetual redemption; and I do not much question but those very principles which the devil had distilled into the Gentile world, of shedding human blood in sacrifices for expiation of guilt, and the gods conversing with men in human ways, and the imagination of the intercessions of demons for them,—the first out of rage against mankind, and both that and the other to induce them to idolatry,—might facilitate the entertainment of Christ as the great expiatory sacrifice, and the receiving of him as the Son of God, though in an human shape, and the belief of his intercession. God overreaches the devil, and makes him instrumental for good where he designs hurt and mischief.

Secondly, Wicked men. All the wicked in the midst of the church are for the good of it, either for the exercise of their grace, or security of their persons, or interest: Prov. 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he will make his enemies to be at peace with him.' Sometimes he will incline their hearts intentionally to favour, or order even their actions against them to procure their peace, contrary to their

intentions. Sometimes God makes them his sword to cut his people, sometimes physic to purge them, sometimes fire to melt and refine them, sometimes hedges to preserve them, sometimes a ransom to redeem them, Prov. 21:18. A traveller makes use of the mettle of a headstrong horse to carry him to his journey's end. That wind which would overturn a little boat, the skilful pilot makes use of to drive his ship into the harbour, and the husbandman to cleanse his corn from the chaff. Though the ends of the workers, viz., God and wicked men, are different, yet the end of the work is but one, which is ordered by God's sovereign pleasure. It was promised in the promise of the gospel to the Gentiles: Gen. 9:27, 'God shall enlarge Japhet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.' God shall allure Japhet, the Gentiles of Europe, to dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan the head of the cursed posterity, shall be servants to the church beside their will, and sometimes against it, by an overruling hand. And Christ hath bought them to be his servants: 2 Peter 2:1, 'Denying the Lord that bought them,' and therefore hath the disposing of them, whether they voluntarily give up themselves to him or no. He is a Lord by purchase over them, who own him not as a Saviour. The hatred of the church's enemies sometimes conduceth more to her good than the affections of all her worldly friends. Now this appears,

First, In furthering the gospel. The Jews, who speak not of Christ among themselves, but with opprobrious terms,* have been the exact preservers of the Old Testament, even to the very number of the letters, wherein Christians have sufficient to confirm them in the belief of Christ's being the Messiah, and unanswerable arguments against their adversaries; whereupon St Austin terms them *capsarios ecclesiæ*, such that carry the books of the children of great men after them to school. When the authority of the Revelation was anciently questioned, the Church of Rome was instrumental to keep it in the number of the canonical books, not thinking they should find their own church so plainly deciphered in it to be the mother of abominations. To this we may refer the action of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, in causing the Scripture to be translated

about three hundred years before the coming of Christ, through which the nations † might better discern (as it were through a prospective glass) the new star of Jacob which was shortly to arise. No doubt but many of the Gentiles, by comparing the old Scripture prophecies, which they could read in the Greek language, might be more easily induced to an embracing the gospel, and acknowledging Christ to be the Messiah, when it came to be divulged among them. Herod is the cause of the consultation about the place of Christ's birth, not for any goodwill he had to him whom he intended to murder, but God makes use of this to clear up the truth of the prophecy concerning Bethlehem, the place of his birth: Mat. 2:6, 'Out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people Israel.' And they certainly were not very good who preached Christ out of envy, and propagated the gospel, wherein Paul rejoiced; not in their sin, but in the providential fruit of it: Philip. 1:15, 18, 'Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.'

Secondly, In furthering the temporal good of the church.

(1.) In its preservation. Wicked men are often serviceable to the church, as the filthy raven was to holy Elijah, or as the lion which would have devoured Samson is a storehouse to provide him food; for in his hunger he finds a table spread in the belly of his enemy. Pharaoh's design was to destroy Israel, and the daughter of that irreconcilable enemy is directed to preserve Moses, who was to be the ruin of her family, the destruction of the Egyptian glory, and the deliverer of the church. She saves him out of charity, and God out of a wise design; she, by his education in the Egyptian learning, fits him for the court, and God for the deliverance of his church. Egypt had corn to relieve, first Abraham, Gen. 12:10, afterward Jacob in a time of famine, the family wherein the church of God was only then bound up. Herod lies in wait for Christ's destruction, and Egypt, the most idolatrous country in the world, and an ancient enemy to God's church, affords him shelter, God makes 'Moab to hide his outcasts

and be their covert from the face of the spoiler,' Isa. 16:3, 4. Some think God's design in sending Jonah to Nineveh to work so remarkable a change by repentance, was to soften some of their hearts, and the hearts of their posterity, to deal more tenderly with those gracious Israelites, who, in the captivity of the ten tribes some years after, should be their guests, God making thereby provision for his own people in that common judgment which should come upon the nation. This God doth sometimes by reviving the law of nature and the common sentiments of religion in the hearts of natural men, whereby their own consciences, bearing witness to the innocency and excellency of the church of God, put them upon thoughts for its security. Sometimes it is above their own sphere and besides their own intentions. The whale which swallowed Jonah intended him as a morsel to quell his hunger, but proves his security, and disgorgeth him upon the shore; they understand their own aim, but not the design of God. The leech that sucks the patient's blood knows not the chirurgeon's design, who useth it for the cure of a disease. Sometimes their rage proves their own ruin, and the church's safety; as the leech bursts itself sometimes, and saves the patient. The very earth, whereby is meant the carnal world, is said to help the woman, the church, by swallowing up the flood which the dragon casts out of his mouth against her, Rev. 12:16, just as the old rags were the instruments whereby Jeremiah was drawn out of the dungeon.

(2.) In the advancement of the church or persons eminent. Abner had a plot for bringing Israel to David's sceptre, which concurred both with God's purpose and promises, but sprung from an ill cause, a disdain to be checked by Ishbosheth, though his king, for an unjustifiable act, for having too much familiarity with one of Saul's concubines, 2 Sam. 3:6–10. And from this animosity he contrives the deposing of Ishbosheth, and the exaltation of David; yet dissembles the ground, and pretends the promise of God to David, ver. 18, 'For the Lord hath spoken of David, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.' He is the first engine that moves in this business, and by him and his correspondents after his death, ver. 17, the business is brought about

by God's overruling hand, wherein God's promise is accomplished, and David a type of Christ, and the great champion for the church against its enemies round about is advanced. Very remarkable is the advancement of Mordecai, in order to the advancing of the Jews as well as preserving them, when the necks of all the visible church God had in the world were upon the block. Haman ignorantly is the cause of this preferment of Mordecai, and at that time too when he came to petition for his death: Esther 6:4, 'He was come to speak to the king to hang Mordecai upon the gallows which he had prepared for him.' The king asks him what should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour, ver. 6. He imagineth that the king's question did respect himself, lays out a scheme of what honour he was ambitious of, ver. 8, 9, which was by the king designed for Mordecai, and Haman made the herald to proclaim him. Here Haman, not only a wicked man in himself, but the greatest enemy Mordecai and the whole church of God had, is made unwittingly an instrument to exalt Mordecai, and in him the whole church of God.

(3.) In enriching the church, or some persons in it, whereby it may become more serviceable to God. How wonderful was it, that when the Israelites were abominated by the Egyptians, God should so order their hearts that the Egyptians should lend them gold and jewels, Exod. 12:35, 36, and dismiss them with wealth as well as safety, and not so much as one person molest them till they arrived at the Red Sea! The very gain and honour of the enemies is sometimes consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth: Micah 4:13, 'Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; I will make thy horn iron, and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth.' This was when many nations were gathered against Sion, ver. 11; 'the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just,' Prov. 13:22. And God sometimes makes the wicked, unwittingly to themselves, in their carking, be the factors for good men, into whose lap providence pours the fruit of their labour. God gave Cyrus the spoils of Babylon and the treasures of Crœsus, to enable him to furnish the Jews with materials for building the temple: Isa. 45:3, 4, 'And I will give thee

the treasures of darkness, and hidden treasures of secret places (speaking of Cyrus), that thou mayest know that I the Lord which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel, for Jacob my servant's sake,' &c. That he might acknowledge him the God of Israel, and lay his wealth out in the service of God, and the service of Jacob his servant.

Thirdly, As bad persons, so bad things are ordered to the good of the church, whether they be sinful evils or afflictive.

1. Sin.

(1.) A man's own sin. Onesimus runs from his master, and finds a spiritual father; his being a runagate is the occasion of his being a convert. By flying from his master he becomes a brother in the Lord, Philem. 10, 12, 16. What Joseph's brethren sinfully intended for revenge against their brother, and security from their father's checks (who acquainted Jacob with their miscarriages), God ordered for the preservation of them who were the only visible church in the world. Their sin against their brother, contrary both to their intentions and expectations, became the means of their safety. God makes the remainder of sin in a good man an occasion to exercise his grace, discover his strength, and shew his loyalty to God.

(2.) Other men's sins. That might be in Sarah but a heady passion, for hearing her son mocked by Ishmael, that made her so desirous to have the bond-woman and her first son thrust out, Gen. 21:10; but God makes use of it to make a separation between Isaac, the heir of the covenant, and Ishmael, that he might not be corrupted by an evil example from him; God orders Abraham to hearken to her voice, because in Isaac his seed should be called, ver. 12. And the revengeful threatening of Esau was the occasion of Jacob's flight, whereby he was hindered from marrying with any of the people of the land, by whom he might have been induced to idolatry, Gen. 27:43, 46. Why should we mistrust that God that can make use of the lusts of men to bring about his own gracious purposes?

2. Commotions in the world. There is the eye of God, that eye which runs to and fro throughout the whole earth in the wheels of worldly motions, even in the most dreadful providences in the world that stare upon men with a grim countenance: Ezek. 1:18, 'Their wings were dreadful, and their wings were full of eyes.' All the overturnings in the world are subservient to the church's interest, though they are not visibly so, unless diligently attended.* God orders the confusions of the world, and is in the midst of the tumults of the people: Ps. 29:10, 11, 'The Lord sits upon the flood; yea, the Lord sits King for ever. The Lord will give strength to his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.' He sits upon the flood as a charioteer in his chariot, guiding it with holy and merciful intentions to his people, to give them both strength and peace in the midst of them, and as the issue of them. By water and floods is frequently meant tumults and confusions in the world. If it were not so, why should our Saviour encourage his disciples, and all their successors in the same profession, to lift up their heads when they hear of wars, if their redemption were not designed by God in them? Luke 21:25–28; they are all testimonies of the nearer approaches of Christ in power and glory to judge the earth, and glorify his people. God's great end in the shaking of nations is the performing those gracious promises to his church which yet remained unaccomplished. These earthquakes in the world will bring heaven to the church. The great revolutions in the eastern part of the world, the ruin of the Babylonian empire, the erecting the Persian, and all the means whereby it was brought about, God ordered, God foretold, God directed, for Jacob's service. Cyrus, led by ambition, levies an army against Babylon; yet though he was a ravenous bird he was to execute the counsel of God: Isa. 46:11, 'Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel,' to be an instrument for the delivery of the captived Jews, and the restorer of the ruined temple. He had called him out by name to make a great revolution of the world. He foretold by his prophet Isaiah many years before, the means he should use in the siege of Babylon to attain the victory, the very dividing Euphrates, which was the great confidence of the Babylonian: Isa. 44:27, 'That say to the deep, Be dry; and I will dry up the rivers;' whereby it was

as it were dried up for them to pass over the very opening of the gates: Isa. 45:1, 'And the gates shall not be shut;' the Babylonians in a presumptuous security had left them open, thinking it impossible the city could be taken, because of the river Euphrates: 'I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight;' and what was the end of that great revolution and motion in that part of the world? See Isa. 45:4, 'For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel, mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name.' This prophecy was when Jerusalem and the temple were standing. God casts about long before his people needs, for their welfare in the great revolutions and changes of the world. In Isa. 44:28, 'That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.' Cyrus had no knowledge of this end of God, 'though thou hast not known me,' Isa. 45:4, 5, twice repeated. Cyrus did not know God, neither did he know God's end; he acts his own purposes, and is acted by God to higher purposes than he understood. In all the siftings of nations, and sifting the church among the nations, as corn is sifted in a sieve, God designs not the destruction of his people, but the cleansing them, the separating the flour from the bran.

3. Destroying judgments, yea, and the very curses sometimes are turned into blessings.

Destroying judgments. The desolation of the Jews was not only in order to the fulfilling God's truth in his threatenings, but useful for the great gospel design; the fall of the Jews was the calling of the Gentiles: Rom. 11:11, 12, 'Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles.' And also their fall and dispersion among the Gentiles was prophesied of as the occasion of their return to God: Ezek. 20:36, 37, 'Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness, so will I plead with you; and cause you to pass under the rod, and bring you into the bond of the covenant;' when they are in the wilderness of captivity, then God shall plead with them, and make them to pass under the rod of propriety, and bring them into covenant. The like also is prophesied of that captivity of the ten tribes to this day, not

known where they are: Hosea 2:14, the time of God's speaking kindly to her should be in the wilderness, and then 'I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope.' No question but God hath performed his promise, and brought many of the posterity of the ten tribes into the church among the mass of the Gentiles, among whom they were dispersed.

Curses sometimes, as God orders them, prove blessings. The curse of inspired Jacob upon Levi,—Gen. 49:7, 'Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel,'—was the advantage both of Levi and the Israelites; that they were dispersed among the several tribes without any universal cohabitation as the rest, was a curse; but that they should be the instructors of the people in the matters of the law, was an honour God put upon the head of that tribe, and a public blessing to the people.

4. Divisions in the church. One would think this of all other things should shake the foundation of it; yet God orders even these to the good of the church. Paul and Barnabas, two great apostles, fell out, Acts 15:36–39, &c.; the contention comes to be very sharp, a thing naturally of very ill consequence in two of the prime guides of Christianity, and at the laying the first foundation of it; but the gospel gains ground, one sails to Cyprus, and the other travels into Syria. Perhaps had not this quarrel been between them, and they thus disjointed from one another, some of those poor souls had never, or at least not so soon, have heard of the gospel mercy.

5. Persecutions. These naturally tend to the dissolution and utter extirpation of it, but God orders them otherwise. God doth often lay the scene of his amazing providences in very dismal afflictions; as the limner first puts on the dusky colours on which he intends to draw the portraiture of some illustrious beauty. The oppression of Israel immediately before their deliverance was the dusky colour whereupon God drew those gracious lines of their salvation from Egypt, the pattern of all the after deliverances of the church in all

ages, and a type of our spiritual redemption by Christ. The humiliation, persecution, and death of the Son of God, was the dusky colour upon which God drew that amazing piece of divine love and wisdom in man's salvation, which the eyes of saints and angels will be fixed on with ravishing admirations to all eternity. All afflictions in the world, which God doth exercise the church with, are parts of his providence, and like mournful notes in music, which make the melody of the tune more pleasant, and set off those sweeter airs which follow upon them. Afflictions here cause the joys of heaven to appear more glorious in the eyes of glorified saints. The persecutions of the martyrs did but heighten their graces, send them to the place of rest, and enlarge their robes of glory. God many times saves his people by sufferings, and brings them to the shore upon the planks of a broken ship, and makes that which was the occasion of their loss to be a means of their safety; they sometimes evidence that which they would destroy. Herod's murdering the children, to destroy him that was born king of the Jews, made his birth more conspicuous in the world; snuffing the candle makes it burn the clearer.

They sometimes make,

1. To the improvement of the church. One of the sorest judgments God brought upon the Jewish church is expressly asserted by God to be for their good: Jer. 24:5, speaking of the captived Jews, 'Whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.' The Chaldeans had overrun their land, carried them captives, made them slaves, destroyed the temple; yet God tells them this was for their good, when there was no present appearance of any good in it. It should be good in respect of God's favour towards them, which retired to return with the greater force: ver. 6, 'I will set mine eyes upon them for good; I will build them, and not pull them down.' God will give them a more durable settlement. In respect also of that frame of heart they should have toward God, their knowledge of him and cleaving to him, ver. 7, 'I will give them a heart to know me; and they shall return to me with their whole heart.' God had but a moiety of their hearts before, but then he should have the whole. And indeed

it was remarkably for their good; for they who before were addicted to idolatry were never guilty of the same sin after; and God kept them from being drawn away to it by the example and solicitation of those among whom they were. The church grows by tears and withers by smiles. God's vine thrives the better for pruning. God makes our persecutions fit us for that for which we are persecuted; as Saul by his persecution of David for the title God had given him to the kingdom, made him fitter to succeed him in the throne, and manage the government. God uses persecutors as lances, which, while they wound us, let out the purulent and oppressive matter; and makes them instruments of his providence to work out his people's happiness, and thus makes the very wrath of man to be an occasion of his people's praise: Ps. 76:10, 'The wrath of man shall praise thee.' God doth in this as a father deals with his son, sends him to a sharp school, that he may be trained up in learning.

2. In the increase of the church. The Jews crucified our Saviour to diminish the multitude of his followers, and by this means the number is increased. The whole world runs after him by that means they used to stop their course, which Christ foretold, that when he was lifted up he should draw all men after him; and that a grain of corn brings not forth more seed unless it be cast into the ground and die.

1. In the increase of it within its own bounds. When the Israelites were most oppressed in Egypt, the more they multiplied, Exod. 1:20. When the dragon's fury did most swell against the woman, she brought forth a man child, Rev. 12:1, 3, 4. When the Roman empire was at the highest, and was most inflamed with anger against the Christians; when the learning of the philosophers, the witchcrafts of heretics, the power of the emperors, and the strength of the whole world was set against them, the Christians grew more flourishing and numerous by those very means which were used to destroy them. Not only a new succession of saints sprung up from the martyrs' ashes, but their flames were the occasion of warming some so much with a heavenly fire, that some persecutors have become preachers.

Their very bonds for the truth have sometimes a seminal virtue in them to beget men to faith in Christ: Philip. 1:12, 'The things which have happened unto me, have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel.'

2. In the increase of it in other parts. Paul's prison made his preaching famous in Rome, and was an occasion of bringing Christianity into Nero's court, that monster of mankind, Philip. 1:13, 4:22; one might have looked for saints in hell as soon; his bonds were as great a confirmation of the truth of his doctrine as his eloquence. When Saul made havoc of the church, and by that storm dispersed the Christians, they, like so many grains of corn scattered in several parts of a greater field, produced the greater harvest: Acts 8:3, 4, 'Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.' As clouds scattered by the winds, they rained down the gospel in several quarters. The Jews when scattered in their several flights did scatter among the heathen the notions of the true religion. When they shall go down to Egypt to secure themselves from Sennacherib's invasion, they shall be a means to make many converts among that idolatrous nation: Isa. 19:18, 'In that day' (the day of the Jews' trouble) 'shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts;' so one expounds it, but I rather think it meant of the times of the gospel. The flight of the Israelites shall be the occasion of some Egyptians' conversion. A poor slave in Naaman's family was an occasion both of the cure of his body and of that of his soul, 2 Kings 5:2, 3, 17. So much for the first reason, drawn from an enumeration of things.

Reason 2. To prove that all providence is for the good of the church, is, because God hath sometimes preferred mercy to the church, and care of it, above his own concernments of justice. He values his mercy to them above his justice upon his enemies. He consults their safety before he brings ruin upon the wicked whose sins are full. He first prepared the ark for Noah, and sees him lodged in it before he begins to shower down destruction upon the world. He hath sometimes punished a nation more for their offences against his

people, than their sins against himself. Amalek was guilty of many idolatries and other sins against God, but God chargeth none of them upon them but their malicious hindering the Israelites in their march to Canaan: 1 Sam. 15:2, 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.' He shews his love to them, and how much he values them, that when he is acting justice and pouring out his wrath, when he is (as it were) cutting and slashing on all sides, and is in fury with wicked men, he hath nothing but sweetness and tenderness towards his own. Amos 9:9, 10, in the sifting of Israel and the nations 'Not the least grain shall fall upon the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword.' While he thunders out his fury upon wicked men, he hath his eyes upon the least grain of the true Israel. What would it be for God, when he is raising the glory of his justice upon the people that have provoked him, not to regard the concernments of this or that, or many sincere souls, but put no stop to his fury? Yet he doth, not a grain shall perish. He is more desirous to hear of the preservation and welfare of a few righteous, than of the just punishment of the wicked wherein his justice is gloriously interested. The man clothed with linen, that was to mark the mourners, returned to God and gave an account that he had done according to his command, Ezek. 9:11; the other five, which were to kill, returned not to give any account of their severe and sharp proceedings. The angels that held the four winds of the earth, Rev. 7:1, which some understand of wars and commotions in the world for the overthrow of the Romish power, were ordered not to let the winds go till the servants of God were sealed in their foreheads.

Reason 3. God takes particular notice of the meanest of his people, and mightily condescends to them, much more of the church. It is strange to consider that the Scripture mentions none of those great potentates among the heathen, but either as they were instruments of his people's good, or executioners of his justice upon them, or subjects of his people's triumph. Cyrus and Darius are mentioned as their friends; Nebuchadnezzar, and Sennacherib, and others, as God's instruments in scourging them; Chedorlaomer and the other

kings with him, as they were the subjects of Abraham's valour and triumph, Gen. 14:9, 10. He takes no notice of the names of any in his word but upon such accounts; Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar had done no doubt many actions before, but none taken notice of but those; but he takes notice of the meanest wherein was grace, and the meanest of their concerns and actions.* He mentions in his word Jacob's flocks, &c., things of no great moment, the actions, speeches, gestures of his people, to shew how his providence wrought for them, and how much he is concerned in the least of their affairs; but the great empires of the world, their original and progress, and the magnified founders of them, he speaks not of but as they have some relation or other to his people. As we love to use the names of our friends, so doth God love the relish of the names of his servants. The name of Noah is repeated several times, as the Jews observe, Gen. 7, 8. The Spirit of God loves the very mention of their names, he delights to dwell upon the catalogue of their names. The Scripture uses to reckon the genealogies of wicked men in short characters. Cain's generation is numbered in haste, as if God had no care at all of them, Gen. 4:17, 18; he puts them off with a kind of &c. But he insists much upon the generation of the godly. Seth's posterity are written in a large scroll and more legible hand, Gen. 5, with the number of the years which they lived, which in Cain's posterity there is no notice taken of. His whole respect, his heart, his eye, his all is fixed upon them. And Christ himself stands more astonished and wondering at the faith of the centurion, the importunity of the Canaanitish woman, condescends to them to grant them what they would have. You never find him taking notice of the learning of the rabbis, the magnificence of Herod, or the glorious building of the temple. See how condescending God is, to work a miracle for the support and strengthening of a weak faith, and the peevish distrust of his people. Gideon's faith was weak, yet how compassionate is God towards him (Judges 6:36, &c., he would have one time the fleece dry, another time wet; God condescends to them in all), in ordering his providence as Gideon would have it, without upbraiding him, just as a tender mother cherishes a weak child! And this miracle was in order to the church's deliverance from a present oppressive enemy.

Certainly when we find God taking care and ordering even the very pins, snuffers, and basins of the temple, the place of his worship, as well as the more stately ornaments of it, we may say, Doth his care extend to the meanest utensils in his temple, and not much more to the worshippers in it? Doth he give order for the candlesticks, and will he not have much more care of the lights in them? His care to the least implies his care of the greatest too. In a building, the little stones must be well laid as well as the greatest. Every believer is a stone in the spiritual building.

Reason 4. God reveals often to his people what he will do in the world, as if he seemed to ask their advice; and therefore surely all his providences shall work for their good. God would not surely acquaint them, and advise with them what he should do, did he intend to do anything to their hurt. There is not anything in the heart of Christ wherein the church is concerned but he doth reveal it to them: John 15:15, 'I have called you friends; for all things I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.' He discovered all to them, the ends of his coming, his Father's love, his death, and resurrection, what he would do after his ascension, the progress of his affairs, and the glory of heaven, and the end of all. John must be the penman of the Revelation which concerned the future state of the church in all ages. Joseph must know the interpretation of dreams in order to the church's preservation. Moses must be acquainted with God's methods in the Israelites' deliverance, with the Egyptians' ruin. Daniel must know the future state of the eastern parts of the world; he must know the turnings of the times, and the end of the world, Dan. 10:11, 19, 20. It is to Noah, and none else, that he immediately discovers his intended destruction of the world. And all those revelations ended in his people's advantage; nay, he doth not only reveal, but as it were consult with him in his affairs. God doth as it were unbosom himself to Abraham, as one friend to another; as it were adviseth with him concerning his intention on Sodom: Gen. 18:17, 'And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?' i.e. I will by no means do it, it will not consist with my love and friendship to him to hide anything from him. And see the reason of

it: ver. 18, 'Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.' It was, first, his great affection to him, because he had advanced him, and promised that a mighty nation should spring out of his loins. And he had not withheld from him the secret of giving the Messiah, which was a universal blessing, and so many ages were to run out before it was to be accomplished; he had discovered to him his acts of mercy, and therefore would not hide from him his acts of justice, he would know his mind in it and what he thought of it. And you know the story, how God regulated himself by Abraham's prayer, and denied him nothing, till Abraham left off suing any more. It would make one conjecture, that if Abraham had proceeded farther, he had quite diverted the judgment from Sodom. And when the Israelites had provoked God by a golden calf, he would not do anything against them till he had consulted Moses, and therefore lays the whole case before him, and seeks to take him off from pleading with the Lord, and promising to make of him a great nation (Exod. 32:9, 10, 'And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them'), and in such terms that one would wonder at: 'Now therefore let me alone;' as if God did fear Moses's interposition would prevent him and dissuade him from it. Do not you stand in the way; my wrath will cool if you interpose yourself; as much as to say, God could not do it unless Moses gave his consent; Moses would not be quiet, but pleads the providences of God, which had been all for him, the promise of God made to Abraham concerning them. And he would not leave till God repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people, ver. 14. If angels, as Calvin saith, are God's counsellor in heaven, believers are (as it were) his counsellors on earth.

5. God has given the choicest things he hath to his people; he hath given his law. The church is the sphere wherein the light of the gospel is fixed, and wherein it shines, from whence its beams do dart out to others: Isa. 2:3, 'Out of Sion shall go forth the law.' The oracles of God, the great things of the law, as it is phrased, Hosea 8:12, his

covenant, and the counsel of his will, are entrusted with the church. Now, this being a mercy which exceeds all other things in the world, is therefore comprehensive of all other, as the greater comprehends the lesser. And the psalmist considers it as the top-stone of all blessings; for after summing up the providences of God, he shews how God had distinguished Jacob by more eminent marks of his favour: Ps. 147:19, 20, 'He shews his word to Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation;' he hath not left so rich a legacy to any, or given any so much of his heart. Others are ordered by the word of his power (for that is meant by word in the foregoing verse), but Jacob hath the word of his grace too. And this being the choicest piece of affection which God hath shewed to the church, implies the making all lesser providences subservient to it. The church, wherein God hath laid up his gospel, and those souls which are as the ark wherein God hath deposited his law, shall be shadowed with the wings of his merciful providence, in a perpetual succession of all true blessings. All the providences of God are to preserve his law in the world; his severest judgments are to quicken up the law of nature in men that know no other, and the law of his gospel in men that sit under it. And he hath given Christ to his church, and thereby hath given an earnest that still their good shall be promoted. It is not to be thought that God will spare anything else, when he hath given them his Son.

The second thing. It must needs be that all providences is for the good of the church.

1. All the providence of God is for the glorifying his grace in Christ. The whole economy or dispensation of the fulness of time, to the latter ages of the world, is for the gathering of all things together in him: Eph. 1:10, 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of time he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth, even in him;' in him as their head. This was the design in all his dispensations, both before his coming and since, ever since the promise made to Adam, though it be more manifest in the latter age. This the apostle represents as the main

purpose of God, ver. 9. This was the mystery of his will, which accordingly to his good pleasure he had purposed in himself, that is, purposed in himself as a thing he was mightily pleased with; and, ver. 11, saith he, he works all things after, or κατὰ, 'according to the counsel of his own will,' or of that purpose which he had purposed in himself, to gather all things in one in Christ. All the things that God acts are referred to this as their end, and ordered by this counsel as their rule. As it was the design of God's providence to make way for Christ's entrance into the world, and all the prophecies in the Old Testament tended to the discovery of it, so since the coming of Christ the end of all is to advance him in respect of his headship: Eph. 1:22, 23, 'And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all.' God would advance Christ to the highest pitch, ver. 21, far above all principality and power, both in this world and in the world to come; and there is still a fulness wanting to Christ to complete him,—not any personal fulness, but a fulness belonging to him as head, which is the advancement God designs him. He is already advanced above all principality and power; he is already given as a head to the church, but the completeness of it is not till all his members be perfected, to which all his providences in the world doth ultimately tend. Therefore if the design of God be to honour Christ, and if the spiritual happiness of the church be part of that glory and fulness of Christ, it must needs be carried on by God, else he will want part of his completeness as a head. But this shall not be wanting, since, as all things are squared according to that counsel of glorifying Christ as head, so all things are acted for believers by that power whereby he raised Christ from the grave to be their head, which power is the copy according to which all acts which respect the church are framed: ver. 19, 'And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him up from the dead.' God intended the good of the church in this very act of glorifying Christ, for he is made the 'head over all things to the church;' as if God then had prescribed him that order, that the glory he gave him should be also managed for the church's interest. Christ

is Lord of the rest of the world, but head of the church. All things are under his feet, but are not his members; he is head over all things to the church, and therefore to every member of the church, the least as well as the greatest; and to the whole church, even that part of it which is on earth, as well as that part which is in heaven, who are completed. This church is the fulness of Christ, he would be bodiless without it; therefore since Christ will be a head without a body if the church be not preserved, in order to the preservation of it, all things must necessarily concur by the wise disposal of affairs. Therefore since they are travelling to be where their head is, he having the government of the world, will make all things contribute assistance to them in their journey. That Christ may have that completeness of glory which God intends him, he expressly tells his Father that he is glorified in his people: John 17:10, 'And I am glorified in them.' And at the sound of the seventh trumpet, 'the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever,' Rev. 11:15. Now, since all the motions in the world are that the kingdoms of the world may become the kingdoms of his Christ, peculiarly his, as being anointed King by him, it must needs be that all things must be subservient one time or other to this end, wherein the good of his people doth consist; otherwise they would not bless God so highly for it as they do: ver. 17, 'We give thee thanks, O Lord God. Almighty; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.' And where there is a resistance of this glory of Christ, it is a natural effect of that decree whereby Christ is constituted King, that the resisters should be broken in pieces, and dashed like a potter's vessel, Ps. 2:6, 9; and the issue of all is the blessedness of those that put their trust in him, ver. 12. The care that God hath of Christ and the church in the types of them, seems to be equal. The ark, which was a type of Christ, and the table of shew-bread, a figure of the church, had three coverings, whereas all the rest of the vessels, &c., belonging to the ceremonial part, had but two, Num. 4:5–8. On the ark there was the veil, and covering of badgers' skins, and a covering of blue; on the table of shew-bread there was a cloth of blue, a cloth of scarlet, and a covering of badgers' skins. God orders as much for the security of the church as

for the security of Christ, therefore the same things that tend to the glorifying of Christ shall tend to the advantage of the church.

2. God hath given the power of the providential administration of things to Christ, to this very end, for the good of the church. If God had constituted him head over all things to the church, can there be any doubt but that he will manage the government for that which is the principal end of his government, which he hath shed his blood for, and which is chiefly intended by God who appointed him?

(1.) All power of government is given to Christ: Mat. 11:27, 'All things are, delivered to me of my Father.' And, John 5:22, 'The Father judges no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son,' that is, the whole government and administration of affairs. It is not to be understood of the last judgment, for then it would be a limitation of that word all; not that the Father lays aside all care of things, but as the Father discovers himself only in him, so he governs things only by him. All this power was committed to him upon his interposition after the fall of man. He was made Lord and Christ, that is, anointed by God to the government of the world; for, upon the fall, God as a rector, had overturned all. Man could not with any comfort have treated with the Father, had not Christ stepped in and pleaded for the creation, whereupon God commits all judgment to the Son, that he might temper it. It was by Christ as a covenanting mediator, that the earth was established, Isa. 49:8. He had this government anciently, and it was confirmed to him upon his death: Heb. 1:3, 'Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power.' Calvin understands the first word not only of the deity of Christ, but of the discovery the Father made of himself in and through him as a mediator. The latter words some understand both of his providential and mediatory kingdom: 'by the word of his power:' this, say some, is referred to the Father, whose image Christ is, as acting by a delegated authority and commission from his Father; others, to Christ, as, that Christ upholds or bears up all things by his own powerful word.

Calvin thinks both may be taken, but embraceth the second as being more generally received.

I may offer, whether it may not be meant also of the powerful interposition of Christ as mediator, whose interest in God was so great, that he kept up the world by his powerful intercession, when all was forfeited; and God put it, upon that interposition, into his hands, as 'heir of all things' (who having a hand with him in creation, understood both the rights of God and the duty of the creature), upon the condition of 'purging sin' by his death, which he did, and thereupon went to heaven to take possession of the government, at the right hand of God; 'sat down,' took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as due to him by covenant and articles agreed on between them. I know nothing at present against such an interpretation of the words; but I will not contend about it. All this honour was confirmed unto him upon his death. For having performed the condition requisite on his part, God deposes him, and entrusts him with the government of things, that he might order all things so as to see the full travail of his soul.

(2.) All this power was intended by God for this end, the good of the church. As God appointed Christ a priest for his church to sacrifice for them, a prophet to teach them, so the other office of king is conferred upon him for the same end, the advantage of the church. God acquaints us of this end, aimed at him, in the promise of the government to him: Jer. 33:15, 16, 'In those days, and at that time, will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up to David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.' What is the end? 'In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely.' He should execute judgment, that is, administer the government for the salvation of Judah, and security of Jerusalem. It was his office both to build the temple, and to bear the glory, and to rule upon his throne; to be a priest upon his throne, to rule as king and priest: Zech. 6:12, 13, 'He shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build the temple of the Lord.' The erecting a church is the sole work of Christ by God's appointment; and he was to bear up the

glory of it. He should rule to this end, 'for the counsel of peace shall be between them both.' If by both be meant, the Lord, and the man whose name is the Branch, it then chiefly aims at our reconciliation, as wrought by covenant between them. If by both be meant the two offices of king and priest, and that the counsel of peace be between them, it will extend to all the blessings of the church, to the good and glory of the church, which is the fruit of his kingly, as well as the first reconciliation was the fruit of his priestly, office. By peace, in Scripture, is meant the confluence of all blessings; so that the intent of God in bestowing those offices upon Christ, and so great a rule, was for the good and advantage of that church or temple, which he appointed him only to build. And in Isa. 11:9, where the prophecy of the government of Christ is, the end is expressed to be, that 'none should hurt or destroy in all his holy mountain.' And certainly, since God set him at his right hand, and confirmed this power unto him, after he had purged our sins, it was certainly out of the high value God had for him, and therefore must be the intent of God, that he should govern all things in reference to the design of that death, and for the good of those whose sins he had by himself purged. For the possessing this government was the very end why Christ died and rose again: Rom. 14:9, 'For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of dead and living.' If this were Christ's end in dying and rising, it was his Father's end too, who appointed him to death, and raised him by his mighty power. And since he was 'delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification,' Rom. 4:25, the government he is invested with, being Lord of the dead and of the living, must be for the sakes of those for whom he was delivered, and for whom he rose. His regal power, which was one end of his death, cannot cross the other main end, the constituting a church, and carrying on the good of them that believe. The government, being in the hands not of God as creator, but in and through the hands of a mediator, and that mediator which both died and rose again peculiarly for them, therefore it cannot in the least be for their hurt, but advantage. The whole management of Christ's kingly office in relation to the church, is prescribed unto Christ by God. God reveals to him what shall be done in the world, what acts

he shall perform for the church, and gives him a history of all that was to be done upon the stage, together with an order to communicate it unto his servants: Rev. 1:1, 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants' (to be communicated to the whole church), 'things that must shortly come to pass.' Whether this revelation was made to the human nature of Christ at his incarnation, as Tirinus thinks, or rather upon his ascension, is not material. The whole scheme of what was to be done in the world is revealed here by God to Christ; and you find all the motions in the world relating to the church, and the end of all is the good of the heavenly Jerusalem.

(3.) All power thus given, and intended for this end, is actually administered by Christ for this end. Christ, as the head of the church, doth like a natural head. It never sees, nor hears, nor exerciseth any act of sense only for itself, but for the good of the whole body. The eye watches for the body, the tongue speaks for it, the understanding contrives for it; every part of the head is active for the whole body. Now Christ as head is more bound to act for the church militant than for the church triumphant, because the greatest part of his work for the church triumphant, viz., the bringing them to heaven, is already performed. And they are above the reach of all things in the world, and all the actions and motions in the world cannot touch or disorder them. But the command of God concerning the other part behind is not yet performed, and even they are the members of Christ as well as those in heaven. The apostle, Col. 1:16–18, seems to refer both Christ's creation, and the preservation of things, to this title of headship: 'All things were created by him, and for him, and by him all things consist, and he is the head of the body the church;' and therefore the conservation and government of all things shall be subservient to the church, which is the body of this governing head. The chief seat of Christ's sovereignty is the church: Ps. 2:6, 'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Sion;' and he stands upon mount Sion, Rev. 14:1. The church is the proper seat and metropolis of his empire, the royal chamber of this great king. All the conquests of princes redound to the advantage of that place where they fix their

residence. He is king of the world, but for the sake of Sion. Christ did manage this charge anciently for his people; when Joshua had passed over Jordan, and first entered upon the conquest of Canaan, he sees a man over against him with a sword drawn in his hand: Josh. 5:13, 14, 'And Joshua said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the hosts of the Lord am I now come.' This was Christ, that came armed for his people, according to his charge, as their captain and general. It was not an angel, because Joshua worshipped him, ver. 14. An angel did not use to receive any worship from men; and he accepts the worship, and commands him to loose his shoe from his foot, for the place whereon he stood was holy, ver. 15. And the same person, Josh. 6:2, is called Jehovah; and there he gives him orders how he should manage his war. Christ came here to direct his people in their concerns; he employs his wisdom for his church, as well as his other excellencies. He is called a Counsellor, Isa. 9:5: it is one of the great letters in his name; and this, as the rest there mentioned, hath a relation to the church. 'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.' And the first use he makes of his power, after the confirmation of it to us, upon his resurrection, is for the church: Mat. 28:18, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; all authoritative power over angels, and the affairs of the world; 'Go you therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them,' &c.; 'and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' He commands the apostles to gather a church among all nations; and doth, by virtue of this authority committed to him, promise his presence with them, in all such services they should do to this end, even to the end of the world. He promises his Spirit, and his providential presence; as his power should endure to the end of the world, so the exercise of it for this end should run parallel with the continuance of it. There should be no alteration or change in this great end of his, as long as the world lasts. How can Christ be with them, and that to the end of the world, if all the parts of his providential government were not ordered to serve this end, the good of the church? For the church is 'the fulness of him that fills all in all,' Eph. 1:23, that fills all in all places, all in all actions and motions, for the good of his church, which is his body.

3. Thirdly, God in the church discovers the glory of all his attributes. It is in a man's house where his riches and state is seen: it is in the church God makes himself known in his excellency, more than in all the world besides: Ps. 76:1, 'In Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Sion.' It is in his church he doth manifest his power. It is called, therefore, 'a glorious high throne: Jer. 17:12, 'A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.' Kings use to display all their glory and majesty upon their thrones; in this sense heaven is called God's throne, Isa. 60:1, because the prospect of the heavens affords us discoveries of the wisdom and power of God, more than in any other visible thing, both in their essence, magnitude, and motion: so is there a greater discovery of God's attributes in the church (which is also styled heaven in Scripture) than in the whole world besides; there it is that the angels look to learn more of the wisdom of God than they understood before, Eph. 3:10. It is there the day of his power dawns, Ps. 110:3. It is there his saints see his power and his glory, Ps. 63:2; the sanctuary is called the firmament of his power, Ps. 150:1. The glory of God's attributes is centred in Christ in a higher manner than in the creation; and in that work did excel themselves in what they had done in the framing of the world; and the church being the glory of Christ, all those attributes which are glorified in Christ, do in and through him shine forth more clearly upon the church, than upon any other part of the world. He styles himself their Creator, as much as the Creator of the whole frame of heaven and earth: Isa. 43:15, 'I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.' As though all the attributes of God, his power in creation, his holiness in redemption, were designed for none else but them: and indeed by virtue of the covenant they were to be so; for if God be their God, then all of God is theirs. What wisdom, power, sufficiency, grace, and kindness he hath, is principally for them. If God be their God, it is in their concerns he will glorify himself as a God in the manifestation of his perfections. This cannot be without the ordering all providences for their advantage.

4. Fourthly, There is a peculiar relation of God and Christ to the church; upon which account this doctrine must needs be true. God is set out in all relations to manifest his great care of his people. He is a Father to provide for them, Isa. 64:8; a mother to suckle them, Isa. 49:15. Christ is a husband to love and protect them, Eph. 5:29; a brother to counsel them, John 20:17. And when all these relations meet in one and the same person, the result of it must be very strong. Any one relation where there is affection is a great security; but here all the relations are twisted together with the highest affections of them in God to the church. A father will order all for the good of his child, a mother for her infant, a husband for his wife, and one kind brother for another; so doth God for his people; and whatsoever those relations bind men to on earth, in respect of care, love, and faithfulness, that is God to his church. The church hath the relation to God which none in the world have besides. They are his jewels, therefore he will keep them; they are his children, therefore he will spare them, Mal. 3:17. They shall have protection from him as they are his jewels, and compassion from him as they are his sons. The church is Christ's flesh, as dear to him as our flesh is to us; as much his, as our flesh is ours: Eph. 5:29, 'No man hates his own flesh, but nourisheth it, as Christ doth his church.' No man can have a higher value for his own flesh than Christ hath for his church. The church, as Tertullian speaks, is nothing else but *Christus explicatus*;^{*} and as considered in union with Christ, is called Christ, 1 Cor. 12:12. It is 'the apple of his eye,' Zech. 2:8, a tender and beloved part. The church is Christ's spouse; the contract is made, the espousals shall be at the last day. The members are picked out one by one to be presented to the Lamb at last as a glorious bride for him, Rev. 21:2.

And all God's dealings with them in the world are but preparations of them for that state. Upon the making of the match God promises a communion of goods: Hosea 2:20, 'I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness,' which is a fruit of marriage, the wife being invested in her husband's estate. When God hath given the blood of his Son for the church, he will not deny her the service of the creatures, but jointure her in that as one part of her dowry. 'In that day will I hear

the heavens,' &c., ver. 21. In what day? In the day of betrothing, in the day of the evangelical administration, when the contract shall be made between me and my church. Heavens, earth, corn, wine, and oil, the voice and motions of all creatures, are for Jezreel, which signifies the seed of God. This great prince he hath a care of all his subjects, so more peculiarly of his spouse and princess, which is his seed too, and all creatures shall be her servants. This fatherly relation and affection is strong and pure, not as the love which acts an ambitious man to ambition, or a covetous man to wealth; which respects nothing but the grasping and possessing the objects they doat upon, and have nothing of love for the objects themselves, therefore deserves not the name of love. But it is the love of a father, whose love is pure towards his children; he seeks their good as his own.

Consider these two things.

1. God hath a peculiar love to this very relation, and often mentions it with delight, as if he loved to hear the sound of it in his own lips: Cant. 8:12, 'My vineyard which is mine, is before me.' Me, my, mine. The church is always under his eye, seated in his affection, and God is pleased with his propriety in them. God never calls the world my world, though he created it; sometimes he saith, the earth is mine, but it is either to check the presumptions of men, who ascribe that to themselves which is due to the first cause; or to encourage his people in the expectation of deliverance, because all things in the earth are at his beck; or to shew his own sufficiency, without the services of his people; as when he saith, the earth is mine, and the fulness thereof; but it is never mentioned in such a way, as to discover any pleasure he hath in the relation between him and it, simply considered; but my vineyard, my people, my children, my jewels, my sanctuary, very often. So much doth God esteem his propriety in them.

2. This relation is prevalent with God in the highest emergencies and distresses of his people. The very consideration that they are his people, kindles his affection, and enlivens his strength for them: Isa.

63:8, 'And he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.' God is brought in, as one that had heard the cries of his church, and had not been moved; but when he recollects himself, and considers that they were his people, and that he was in a special manner related to them, he became their Saviour; he could no longer bear it, but stirs up himself to relieve them. Nay, it hath so strong an influence upon him, that if this note be often sounded in his ears, it doth as it were change his voice, and when he seems to have a mind to cast them off he cannot. When Israel had offended by erecting and worshipping a golden calf, he calls them no more his people, but Moses's people: Exod. 32:7, 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.' As though God had not been concerned in this miraculous conduct out of Egypt; and ver. 9, 'this people,' as if he had had no interest in them, but particularises them with disdain. God had here discarded them, and turned them over upon Moses's hands, as if he would have no longer anything to do with them; but Moses in prayer turns them upon God again, and would not own them as his, but pleads that they were God's proper goods: ver. 11, 'Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt?' And ver. 12, again, 'thy people;' and God at last resumes his former notes, ver. 14, 'And the Lord repented him of the evil he thought to do unto his people.' Now they are God's people again; the repetition of this relation is a powerful rhetoric to persuade him to own them again, which he had cashiered and turned off.

5. Fifthly, The whole interest of God in the world lies in his church and people. He sees little of himself in any part of the corrupted world, but only in them. It is in the church he hath put his name; it is there he sees his image, and therefore places his love there; and shall all this signify nothing? Shall the Governor of the world let things go contrary to his own interest? They are like to him in that which is one of his greatest perfections, viz., his holiness, which gives him a greater interest in them. It is his interest that is opposed by an opposition to the church. All the hatred any bear it grows from the

inward root of enmity against God himself: Ps. 44:22, 'Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long.' God surely will concern himself in the church's interest, since it is his own. His interest lies,

(1.) In the persons of his people. It is his inheritance, Isa. 19:25. It is his portion: Deut. 32:9, 'The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.' Every part of an inheritance and a portion doth as particularly belong to the owner as the whole. Every part of the ground which belongs to the inheritance is the heir's, as well as the whole field. He will not suffer the world, which is but the work of his hands, to lay waste his church, which is his proper inheritance. It is his treasure, and where a man's treasure is, there is his heart; and where God's treasure is, there is God's heart.

(2.) In the services and actions of the church. If the church should be destroyed, whom hath God to love and imitate him, and to shew forth his glory? If the candlestick is broken, what is fit to hold out the light to the world? He hath none in the world besides, that do intentionally mind his honour, that take pleasure in glorifying his name, and writing after his copy, and observing his works. And will it stand with his interest to govern things contrary to theirs, which is really his own?

When God had made the world, and pronounced it good, what would it have signified if he had not brought in man as his rent-gatherer, and the collector of his tribute, to return it to him! And what would man signify, since the corrupted world embezzles that which is God's right, and turns it to its own use, if God had not some honest stewards, who faithfully act for him, and give him the glory of his works! And God will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him. God hath no voluntary service in the world but from them, therefore he is more interested in their good than in the good of the world besides. The services of the church are all the delight God hath in the world: Hosea 9:10, 'I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig-tree at her first time.' They are as the refreshing wine and grapes, as the

delicious fruit of the first ripe figs, wherewith a weary traveller recruits his spirits after a long and trying journey. And God hath a greater delight in the fruit he receives from the church, than in it simply as it is his inheritance; for no inheritance is valued but for the fruit and revenue it yields; and therefore God orders all his blackest providences in the world, like dark clouds, to be the watering-pots of this his garden, that the fruit and flowers of it may be brought to maturity, which yield him so much pleasure and honour. God only is acknowledged by them and in them, as the Jews were bound to acknowledge God the author of their mercies, by presenting the first fruits of their increase to God. And believers are called so: Rev. 14:4, 'These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits to God and the Lamb.' It is by and in them that God hath the acknowledgment of all his mercies and blessings to the world.

6. It cannot be but all the providences of God shall work to the good of his church, if we consider the affections of God.

(1.) His love. What hath God in the world as an object to bestow his affections upon, and communicate the rays of his love unto, since he created it, but his church? The men of the world hate him; he can see nothing amiable in them; for what was first lovely they have defaced and blotted out, but the church hath God's comeliness put upon her: Ezek. 16:14, 'It was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God;' and he did not lay those glorious colours upon her, to manage his government, or any part of it against her, to deface her. Besides their loveliness, which is conferred upon them by God, they have a love to God, and no man will act against those whom he thinks to be his friend. God being purus actus, there being nothing but purity and activity in God, his love must be the purest and highest love, the most vigorous and glowing; as fire, which sets all other bodies, so this all other powers in the world in motion for them. God cannot love them, but he must wish all good to them, and do all good for them; for his love is not a lazy love, but hath its raptures and tenderness, and his affection is twisted with his almighty power to work that good for them, which in their present

condition in the world they are capable of. Now it is certain God loves his church; for,

[1.] He carries them in his hand, Deut. 33:3; and that not in a loose manner to be cast out, but they are engraven upon the palms of his hands, Isa. 49:16, that he cannot open his hand to bestow a blessing upon any person but the picture of his church doth dart in his eye. God alludes to the rings wherein men engrave the image of those that are dear to them. And the Jews did in their captivity engrave the effigies of their city Jerusalem upon their rings, that they might not forget it.* If his eye be alway upon the church, his thoughts can never be off it in all his works.

[2.] He loves the very gates and outworks: Ps. 87:2, 'The Lord loveth the gates of Sion;' he loves a cottage where a church is more than the stately palaces of princes. The gates were the places where they consulted together, and gave judgment upon affairs. God loved the assemblies of his saints because of the truths revealed, the ordinances administered, the worship presented to him.

[3.] Nay, one saint is more valued by him than the whole world of the wicked. God is the God of all creatures, but peculiarly the God of Abraham and of his seed. One Abraham is more deeply rooted in his heart than all the world, and he doth more entitle himself the God of Abraham than the God of the whole world; for in that style he speaks to Isaac: Gen. 26:24, 'I am the God of Abraham thy father,' much more the God of Israel, the God of the whole church, of which Abraham was but a member, though the father of the faithful, and a feoffee of the covenant. God hath a greater value for one sincere soul than for a whole city. He saves a Lot, and burns a Sodom; yea, than for a whole world, he drowns a world and reserves a Noah; he secures his jewels, whilst he flings away the pebbles.

[4.] He loves them so, that he overlooks their crabbed and perverse misconstructions of his providence. When the Israelites had jealous thoughts of him, and of Moses his instrument, when they saw that

mighty Egyptian army just at their heels, and themselves cooped up between mountains, forts, and waters, God doth not upon this provoking murmuring draw up his cloudy pillar to heaven, but puts it in the rear of them, when before it had marched in the van, Exod. 14:19, and wedgeth himself in between them and Pharaoh's enraged host, to shew that they should as soon sheath their swords in his heart as in their bowels; and if they could strike them, it should be through his own deity, which was the highest expression of his affection. And though they often murmured against his providence after they were landed on the shore, yet he left them not to shift for themselves, but bore them all the way in his arms, as a father doth his child, Deut. 1:31, and bare them like an eagle upon his wings, Deut. 32:11. And God loves them magnificently and royally: Hosea 14:4, 'I will love them freely,'[†] without any doubting, without any reluctancy. I will love thee without any repugnancy in my heart to draw me back from thee; 'for mine anger is turned away,' as the streams of a river, quite another way. Now, all this considered, can the Governor of the world, the King of saints, act anything against his own affections? Yea, will he not make all things subservient to them whom he loves?

(2.) His delight. See what an inundation of sweetening joy there was in him, for which he had not terms of expression to suit the narrow apprehensions of men: Zeph. 3:17, 'The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing.' He seems in his expression to know no measure of his delight in the church, and no end of it: 'I will rejoice over thee with joy.' Joy sparkles up fresh after joy; it is his rest, where the soul and all that is within him centres itself with infinite contentment 'Joy over thee with singing:' a joy that blossoms into triumph. Never had any such charming transports in the company of any he most affected as God hath in his church; he doth so delight in the graces of his people, that he delights to mention them. He twice mentions Enoch's walking with him, Gen. 5:22, 24. And certainly God cannot but delight in it more than in the world, because it is a fruit of greater pains than the creation of the

world. The world was created in the space of six days by a word, the erecting a church hath cost God more pains and time. Before the church of the Jews could be settled, he hath both a contest with the peevishness of his people and the malice of their enemies. And his own Son must bleed and die before the church of the Gentiles could be fixed. Men delight in that which hath cost them much pains and a great price. God hath been at too much pains, and Christ at too great price, to have small delight in the church; will he then let wild boasts break the hedges, and tread down the fruit of it? Shall not all things be ordered to the good of that which is the object of his greatest delight in the world?

7. Seventhly, The presence of God in his church will make all providences tend to the good of it.

It would be an idle, useless presence if it were not operative for their good. 'The Lord is there' is the very name of the gospel church, Ezek. 48:35; what would it signify if it were a useless presence? Christ stands upon mount Sion, his throne is in the church, when the great things in the world shall be acted for the ruin of antichrist, Rev. 14:1. God's presence in his church is the glory and defence of it, as the presence of the king is the glory of the court: Zech. 2:5, 'For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.' His presence is a covenant presence: Isa. 41:10, 'Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God;' whence follows strength, help, and support: 'I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness;' that is, with my righteous power, with my power engaged to thee in a righteous covenant. His presence and providence in the world is in a way of absolute dominion, but in his church in a way of federal relation. He is the God of Israel, and God to Israel, or for Israel, 1 Chron. 17:24, yea, and a God in the midst of Israel,—every one of them sufficient engagements to protect Israel, and provide for Israel, and govern everything for Israel's good. God is under an oath to do good to Israel; will he violate his oath, tear his

seal, break his covenant, who never broke his league with any of his people yet?

8. Eighthly, The prayers of the church have a mighty force with God to this end. God is entitled a God hearing prayer; and what prayers should God hear, if not the prayers of his church, which aim at God's glory in their own good? Though the prayers of the church may in some particulars fail, yet in general they do not; because they submit their desires to the will of God, which always works what is best for them.

When God would do any mighty work in the world, he stirs up his people to pray for it; and their prayers by his own appointment have a mighty influence upon the government of the world, for when they come before him in behalf of the church in general, he doth indulge them a greater liberty and boldness, and as it were a kind of authority over him, than upon other occasions of their own: Isa. 45:11, 'Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask of me things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of mine hands command you me.' God would be more positively, confidently, and familiarly dealt with about the concerns of his sons, though they were things to come to pass in after ages. And indeed the prayers of the church have a powerful and invisible efficacy on the great actions and overturnings which are in the world. The being of the world is maintained by them from sinking; according to the Jews' saying, *sine stationibus non subsisteret mundus* (standing in prayer was their usual prayer gesture). And that they have actually such a force is evident: Rev. 8:3, 4, an angel hath a golden censer with incense, to offer it with the prayers of the saints upon the altar which was before the throne. And, verse 5, the censer wherein their prayers were offered was filled with the fire of the altar, and cast into the earth; and there were voices, thundering s, lightnings, and earthquakes. When the prayer of the saints were offered to God, and ascended up before him, that is, were very pleasing to him, the issue is, the angel fills the censer with fire of the altar, and thereby causes great commotions and alterations in the

world, signifying that the great changes of the world are an answer unto those prayers which are offered unto God; for fire is taken from that altar upon which they were offered, and flung into the world. And it must needs be that the prayers of the church should have an influence on the government of the world.

(1.) Because God hath a mighty delight in the prayers of his people. 'The prayer of the upright is his delight;' and he loves to hear the church's voice: Cant. 2:14, 'O my dove, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice' (Chaldee, 'Thy voice is sweet in prayer'). In the times of the gospel, God promises that the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem should be pleasant to him, Mal. 3:4. When Christ shall sit as a refiner, ver. 3, what is the issue of those prayers? ver. 5, 'I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers,' &c. Prayer awakes providence to judge the enemies of the church. A parent delights not in the bare crying, or the voice of his child simply considered in itself, but in the significations and effects of it. He delights in the matter of their prayers, it being so agreeable to his own heart and will, and in the sense they have of the sufferings of the whole body.

(2.) Because prayer is nothing else but a pleading of God's promises. Unto this they are directed by that Spirit which knows the mind of God, and marshals their petitions according to his will. Now as God turns his own decrees and purposes concerning his church into promises to them, so the church turns those promises into prayers for them; so that promises being for the good of the church, and there being an exact harmony between those promises and the church's prayers, all those providences which are the issue of those promises, and the answer of the church's prayers, must needs be for the church's good.

(3.) Because there are united supplications and pleadings both in heaven and earth. All the hands of the whole family in heaven and earth are concerned in their petitions.

[1.] Christ intercedes for the church, who always desires mercy and deliverance for them in the appointed time: Zech. 1:12; 'How long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?' and the issue is always gracious; for, ver. 13, God answers him with 'good and comfortable words;' and thereupon carpenters are raised to 'cut off the horns which had scattered Judah,' ver. 20.

[2.] Angels in all probability plead for the church, as we have already heard; it is likely they offer and present that to God which makes for his glory, and that is the good of the church. Angels surely desire that which their head doth, which is described as one of their own order, and called an angel, Zech. 1:12. Do they rejoice at the repentance of a sinner, and do they not likewise triumph at the happiness of the church, which is part of that family they are of? And we know that the greatness of our joy is suited to the mercies of our desires; where our joy is most triumphant, it implies that our desires before were most vehement.

[3.] Glorified saints are not surely behind. The rich man in the parable desired his friends on earth might not come into that place of torment, Luke 16:28. If there be so much charity in hell, can there be less in heaven? If he desired it, that by the presence of his companions in sin, his own torments might not be increased, do not the saints in heaven desire the presence of the whole church, that their happiness in that of the whole body may be completed? If the head Christ be not complete without the body, the members of the body cannot be complete without one another. The souls of them that were slain for the word of God cry under the altar for vengeance on them that dwell on the earth; as Rev. 6:9, 10, 'How long, O Lord holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' Will not their kindness to their fellow-members be as strong as their justice, and their love for the good of their friends draw out their prayers as well as their desire of vengeance on their enemies? Why may they not as well pray for us as we praise God for them? Had they not some likeness to their great Master whilst they were on earth, and shall they not be more like to

him now they are in heaven, and behold his face, and feel all the stirrings of his heart? And if they have no sense at all of the church's sufferings, how shall they be like to him who hath? As their bodies shall be like the glorious body of Christ at the resurrection, are not their souls now like his glorious soul, merciful, and compassionate, and sympathising in all the afflictions of the church? And can this be without some breathings for a full completing of the church's freedom? Are such desires and pleas any hindrance to their present happiness? It is so far from that, that it doth rather further their glory, which cannot be complete, as the glory of Christ, as head, is not mounted to the highest pitch of glory, till his mystical body be all gathered in and lodged with him. If it be thus, will God do anything prejudicial to the church, and contrary to the combined desires of all those that are so near him? If God doth sometimes stir up himself upon the supplication of one man, and grant an order upon his petition according to his mind; and if the prayers of one faithful Moses, or Elias, or Samuel have such a kind of almighty power in them, much more is the joint force of so many prayers twisted together.

Use 1. For information. Is it so that all providence is for the good of the church? Then,

1. God will always have a church in the world, he will have some to serve him. The whole course of his providence being designed for it, as long as the world, which is the object of his providence, doth endure, he will have a church. God would otherwise lose the end of the motion of his eyes,* the operation of his providence, since it is to shew himself strong for the church and every member of it. As long as the candle and light of the gospel burns and shines, God will have a candlestick to set the candle in.* His great design in making a world was not to have sun, moon, and stars, but a church, a company of men that might bear his mark, and honour him, to whom he might speak, and extend his grace abroad, which he was so fall of within. As a limner who would draw an excellent draught, draws his design in the midst of the cloth, and fills the void places with clouds, and

landscapes, and other fancies at his pleasure, which communicate some beauty and lustre to the work, but that was not the principal design of the workman. That Redeemer which bears the church upon his heart, will create a stability for it; it is a part of his priestly office to have a care of the lamps; it is one of his titles to be he that walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, Rev. 2:1. Priests under the law were to look to the great candlestick in the temple, supply the lamps with oil, and make them clean, Lev. 24:3, 4. The church indeed may be eclipsed, but not extinguished; if it be not conspicuous on the mountain, yet it shall be hid in the wilderness. There shall be sprinklings of professors among all people. God will leaven the places where they are into Christianity, and cause them to fructify and grow up in purity and glory: Micah 5:7, 'And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' It tarries not for man. It attends not the power of man, the precepts of man, or inventions of man; but whose descent is from heaven, and is carried on not by human power, but by the divine Spirit and providence; it shall be firmer than all worldly power, and the strongest kings: Isa. 2:2, 'And the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established upon the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills.' Above mountains and hills, to which sometimes the powers of the world are compared, Zech. 4:7. That providence which gave the church at first a footing in the world upon a weak foundation to outward appearance, in spite of men and devils will preserve it, and not suffer it to be blown up; he will shadow the church with his wings in a perpetual succession of the choicest mercies.

2. God will in the greatest exigencies find out means for the protection of his church. This will be till his providence be at an end. When God hath removed one instrument of his church's protection, he hath his choice of others, whom he can raise and spirit for his work. When those upon whom the church's hopes hang are taken off, he can raise things that are unlikely to supply the place. As the Internet accidentally had a grasshopper leapt upon his instrument,

to supply by its noise the place of a string which had newly cracked, whereby his music was continued without interruption. God can spirit men against their own natural fears. It is very improbable, that Nicodemus, one of a fearful disposition, who came to our Saviour by night for fear of the Jews, should have the courage to assert his cause in the face of a whole council of pharisees, contriving his death, and at present blunt the edge of their malice, though we read of none at that time in the council to second him, John 7:50, 51. The Holy Ghost takes particular notice that it was he that came to Jesus by night.

Joseph of Arimathea, whose name we meet not with in the catalogue of any of our disciples, † till the time of his death, and then he appears boldly to beg the body of Jesus of Pilate. God will never want instruments for the preserving that church, which he owns as his. It is observed by some, that God so ordered it, that the same day that Pelagius, the great poisoner of the Christian doctrine, was born in Britain, Austin, the most famous defender of the truth, was born in Africa; that the horn which pushed the truth should no sooner appear, but the carpenter to cut it off should be provided too. As it is observed where poisons grow, antidotes grow near them by the indulgent provision of the God of nature.

As there is the wisdom of the serpent against the church, so there is the wisdom of God for it. God's goodness upon his church in former ages is not all laid out, he hath his stores still, neither is his wisdom nonplussed, nor his power weakened; neither is he, nor can he be weary of his care.

3. The church shall in the end prove victorious against all its adversaries, or providence must miss of its aim. The church is compared to an olive tree, Hosea 14:6, in respect of beauty, 'his beauty shall be as the olive tree.' It is so also in respect of victory. Olive branches were used in triumph. God is on the church's side, and he is stronger than the strongest, and wiser than the wisest, and higher than the highest. Jesus Christ is the church's head and general; Christ the head watcheth for the good of the church, the

body. He must be destroyed before the church can. There is a mighty arm, which, though it may for a time seem withered, will in the end be stretched out, and get itself the victory. Whilst Christ is in the ship, it may be tossed, but it shall not be sunk. It may be beaten down, but like a ball to rebound the higher. The young tree that is shaken by the wind may lose some leaves, and some fruit too, but the root gets greater strength and strikes itself deeper into the earth, and makes the branches more capable of a rich return of fruit the following year. The church's stature is compared to a palm tree, Cant. 7:7, which cannot be depressed by the weights which hang upon it, but riseth the higher. God uses the same method in the church's, as in Christ's advancement. Our Saviour's death was necessary to his glory, Luke 24:26, and the church's affliction sometimes to its exaltation. A nation may lose some battles, and yet be victorious; the church may have many a cross, but in the end will surmount all difficulties. Though judgments and apostasies may be great in a nation, yet God will have a care of his own plants, Isa. 6:12, 13; 'There shall be a tenth; it shall return, the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.' As a tree in winter, which seems dead, but its juice shall revive into rich and generous blossoms. The ark shall float above the waters. Babylon shall fall, the Lamb shall stand upon mount Zion. Men may as well stop the rising of the sun in its mounting to the meridian, bridle in the tide of the ocean, as hinder the current of an almighty providence.

4. The interest of nations is to bear a respect to the church, and countenance the worship of God in it. This is to concur with God's main end, and imitate him in his providential administrations. God's people, whatever their enemies suggest to the contrary, are a blessing in the midst of a land, Isa. 19:24; their interest is greater than the interest of all the world besides; though they be but a handful, their fruit shall shake like Lebanon, Ps. 72:16. The neglect of religion is the ruin of nations. It is observed that Cyrus was slain in the war in Scythia, a little after he neglected the building of the temple of Jerusalem which he had begun.* Those Persian kings reigned the longest that favoured the Jews in that and their other just requests.

God honoured or disgraced them as they were kind or cruel to his people. And when they act for the good of his people, they shall not be without their reward. When Cyrus should let the Jewish captives go free without ransom, he should be no loser by it. God would give him the labour of Egypt, the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the strength of the Sabeans into his hand for the price of his people's delivery, Isa. 45:13, 14. Those nations which should favour them in the times of their persecutions and flights, and give them shelter in their countries, should thrive and prosper by the blessing of God upon them. If Moab give entertainment to the flying Israelites in the time of the invasion of Shalmanezzer, God will preserve their land that the spoiler shall not enter into the confines of it, and they shall have kings and judges under the protection of the house of David, i.e. under the kings of Israel, as some understand it, Isa. 16:4, 5. Saints are the guardians of the places where they live, their prayers have a greater influence than the wisest counsels, or the mightiest force, 2 Kings 2:12: 'And Elisha cried, My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.' The Chaldee paraphraseth thus: 'Thou art better to Israel by thy prayers than chariots and horsemen.' This is the elogy of one single prophet; what influence then hath the whole church of God in a place? The whole world is the better for the church of God. The Chaldee paraphrase hath a notion upon that, Ps. 22:3: 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel;' thou that establishest the world for the praises of Israel. God hath nothing to do in the world but the saving of his people. When that is once done, he will put an end to this frame of things. When he hath gathered his wheat into his garner, he will burn up the chaff. His people are the spirit and quintessence of the world. When this is extracted, the rest are flung upon the dunghill, as a caput mortuum.

5. We may see hence the ground of most of the judgments in the world. Men by their rage against the church, will not acknowledge God's government of the world for the church's good; therefore the psalmist, Ps. 59:13, 'Consume them in wrath, consume them that they may not be, and let them know that God rules in Jacob unto the ends of the earth.' The church is the seat of his government, and from

thence he extends it to the uttermost parts of the earth. In Jacob he rules, and for the sake of Jacob he orders his government to the ends of the earth; the not acknowledging this brings wrathful consumptions upon men; and it is also the end of his judgments to make men know it. It is likely enough the four kings, Gen. 14:9, might have gone clear away with all their booty, had not they laid their fingers upon Lot; but when they would pack him up among the rest, they did but solicit their own ruin, and arm the almighty God against them. God did not think any of the people worth the mention, verse 11; only Lot a righteous person, verse 12, he is named, as having God's eye only upon him. And when Abraham returns from the victory, ver. 16, the rest of the delivered captives are mentioned in the bulk, Lot only in particular, as though all that had been done had been done by God only for Lot's sake. They might have preserved the whole prey to themselves, had it not been for this jewel, too precious in God's account for their custody. And the fearful curse that God pronounced against the Ammonite and Moabite, that they should not come into the congregation for ten generations, though any of them turned proselytes, was because they came not out with so much as bread and water to meet the Israelites, and because they hired Balaam to curse them, Deut. 23:3, 4. The utter wasting of nations and kingdoms, is because they will not serve the interest of God in his people: Isa. 60:12, 'For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.' God will bring an utter consumption upon those people that refuse to love them, much more upon those that hate them.

6. What esteem, then, should there be of the godly in the world? The providence of God, being chiefly for the good of his people, cannot well fall upon them, but some drops will fall upon those involved with them in a common interest. When the corn, and wine, and oil hear Jezreel (the seed of God), and the earth hears the corn, and the heavens hear the earth, and God hears the heavens, Hosea 2:21, 22; when their supplications come up to the great superintendent of the world, many of the wicked will fare the better for that providence which is given only in answer to Jezreel's prayer; God causes his sun

to shine upon the unjust, upon them, not for their sakes. When Nebuchadnezzar issued out that unjust order for the slaying the Chaldeans for not performing an impossible command in telling him the dream he had forgotten, Dan. 2:12, Daniel was sought out to undergo the same fate; yet by his wisdom God bends the heart of Arioch, the executioner of this decree, to stay his hand. Daniel goes to the king, God stays Nebuchadnezzar's fury, and moves his heart to give them time. The providence is chiefly intended for the preservation of Daniel and his godly companions, but the rest of the wise men have the benefit of it. As the water with which a man waters his choicest plants and flowers in his garden is intended only for them, yet some falling off from those flowers refresheth the weeds that grow under them. If God had not had such flowers as Daniel and his companions, the weeds in Chaldea had been plucked up. Yet the ungrateful world takes no notice of the benefits they receive from this salt of the earth, which preserves them, and to whom they are all so much beholding. Lot had been the occasion of restoring Zoar from captivity, as I mentioned before, for the inhabitants of that city were engaged with those of Sodom in the fight against the four kings ('And the king of Bela, the same is Zoar,' Gen. 14:8); and perhaps were carried captives with the rest of their neighbours; and it had been saved from the flames which fell upon Sodom merely by Lot's prayer: Gen. 19:21, 'See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing, that I will not overthrow this city for the which thou hast spoken;' yet he found them a surly people, and was requited with a rude reception, notwithstanding his kindness: ver. 13, 'He went up out of Zoar, for he feared to dwell in Zoar.' It was not likely he was so distrustful of God, that he should overthrow it, when he had absolutely promised him the contrary; therefore most likely for some churlish threatenings from them. Nay, Sodom itself was beholden to him for a small respite of the judgment intended against them. For God tells him he could do nothing till he were come thither, Gen. 19:22. And it was so, for Lot was entered into Zoar before a drop of brimstone and fire was rained down upon Sodom: ver. 23, 24, 'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom;' when? When Lot was entered into Zoar. This good the wicked world get by God's people is so evident, that sometimes

wicked men cannot but take notice of it. Laban, a selfish idolater, was sensible of it: Gen. 30:27, 'I have found by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.' It was a lesson so legible that he might have learned it sooner than in fourteen years. The church is the chief object of preservation, wicked men are preserved for their sakes; as dung is preserved, not for its own sake, but for the manuring a fruitful field, and thorns in the hedge are preserved for the garden's sake.

7. It is then a very foolish thing for any to contend against the welfare of God's people. It is to strive against an almighty and unwearied providence. Men may indeed sometimes be suffered by God for holy ends to have their wills, in some measure, upon the church, but not altogether; they must first depose him from his throne, blind his eyes, or hold his arm. It is as foolish as if a worm should design to dig down a mountain, or chaff to martial itself in battle array against the wind, or for a poor fly to stop the motion of a millstone.

(1.) It is foolish, because it is exceeding sinful. What is done against the church is rather done against God than against it; since all her constitution, worship, observances, are directed to God as their ultimate end; so that to endeavour to destroy the church is to deny God a worship, deprive him of his sanctuary, break open his house, ravish his spouse, cut off Christ's body, rob him of his jewels, and will be so interpreted by God at the last, upon the scanning of things. If the church be God's house, the enemies shall answer for every invasion, every forcible entry, for the breaking down the gates and bars of it, God will sue them at last for dilapidations.

(2.) Very unsuccessful. Shall God be afraid of the multitudes and power of men? No more than 'a lion, or a young lion roaring after his prey, when a multitude of shepherds are called forth against them, shall he be afraid of their voice, or abase himself for their noise,' Isa. 31:4. Noise and clamour is all they can do, and that not long; the fierceness of the lion quickly scatters them. The associations, and men's girding themselves against the church, is but a preparation to

their own ruin: Isa. 8:9, 'Associate yourselves together, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces,' three times repeated. Your counsels, saith he, shall not stand against that presence of God that is with us, 'for God is with us.'

(3.) It is very destructive too. God will not alway be still and refrain himself; he seems to do so for a while, but when he doth arise he will destroy and devour at once, Isa. 42:14, he will make but one morsel of them. When God is angry with his people, and gives them into the hands of men to execute his justice upon them, and punish them, he will even punish those enemies for their cruelty, and going beyond their commission, in satisfying their own immoderate passions upon them. Upon this account God threatens Babylon: Isa. 47:6, 'I was wroth with my people; I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thy hand: thou didst shew them no mercy;' whereupon God threatens them afterwards, &c.; so Zech. 1:15, God was sore displeased with the heathen, for when he was 'but a little displeased' with his people, 'they helped forward the affliction.'

Use 2. Is for comfort.

If all the providence of God be for the good of the church, if his eyes run to and fro to shew himself strong for them, it affords matter of great comfort. His providence is continual for them, Zech. 4:2. He hath seven pipes to convey kindness to them, as well as seven lamps whereby to discern their straits. His providence is as vast as his omniscience. The number of pipes belonging to the candlestick of the church is exact according to the number of lamps. The church's misery cannot be hid from God's eye, let it be in what part of the earth soever, for his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, and his sight excites his strength. Upon the sight of their distressed condition he watches only for the fittest opportunity to shew himself strong for them. And when that opportunity comes he is speedy in the deliverance of them: Ps. 18:10, 'He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.' He doth not only ride upon a cherub, but fly. His wings are nothing but wind, which hath

the quickest and strongest motion, which moves the greatest bodies, and turns down all before it. What is for the good of the whole hath an influence upon every member of the body.

1. It is comfort in duties and special services. Nothing shall be wanting for encouragement to duty, and success in it when God calls any to it, since all his providence is for the good of the church. Let there be but sincerity on our parts, in our attempts of service upon God's call, and we need not fear a want of providence on God's part. God never calls any to serve his church in any station, but he doth both spirit and encourage them. God hath in his common providence suited the nature of every creature to that place in which he hath set it in the world; and will he not much more in his special providence suit every one to that place he calls them to, for the service of his church? He did not forsake Christ in redeeming his church, neither will he forsake any in assisting his church. When Joseph of Arimathea would boldly demand the body of our Saviour, providence made the way plain before him; he meets with no check, neither from Pilate nor the priests, Mat. 27:58, Mark 15:43.

2. In meanness and lowness. It is one and the same God that rules the affairs of the whole world, of the church and of every particular member of it. As it is the same soul that informs the whole body, the meanest member as well as that which is most excellent. Not the meanest sincere Christian but is under God's eye for good. The Spirit acts and animates every member in the church, the weakest as well as the most towering Christian. Baruch was but the prophet Jeremiah's amanuensis or scribe, and servant to Jeremiah (who was no great man in the world himself), yet God takes notice so of his service, that he would particularly provide for him, and commands Jeremiah in a way of prophecy to tell him as much: Jer. 45:5, 'I will bring evil upon all flesh, but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey, whithersoever thou goest.'

3. In the greatest judgments upon others. In an epidemical judgment upon the whole nation of the Jews, God would have a special care of

Baruch. If he should cast his people far off among the heathen, and scatter them among the countries, yet even there he would be a little sanctuary unto them. His own presence should supply the want of a temple, so he is pleased to express himself, Ezek. 11:16. But how is it possible the great God can be but a little sanctuary? His eye is upon them to see their danger, and his hand upon them to secure them from it. His promise shall shield them, and his wings shall cover them, Ps. 91:4. While he hath indignation, he hath a secret chamber for their security, Isa. 26:20, an almighty shadow under which they abide, Ps. 91:1. In times of the most devouring danger he hath a seal to set upon their foreheads as a mark of his special protection. We never have so much experience of God's care and strength as in times of trouble: Ps. 37:39, 'He is their strength in time of trouble.' He is a friend who is as able as willing, and as willing as able to help them, whose watchfulness over them is as much above their apprehension as it is above their merits.

4. In the greatest extremities wherein his people may be, there are promises of comfort, Isa. 43:2. Both in overflowing waters and scorching fires he will be with them; his providence shall attend his promise, and his truth shall be their shield and buckler, Ps. 91:4. That surely is a sufficient support; Christ thought it so, when he only said to his disciples, 'It is I, be not afraid,' John 6:17, 18. What though there be a storm, a darkness, and trouble, 'It is I am he.' The darkness of the night troubles not the pilot whilst he hath his compass to steer by. If all his providences be for the good of them that fear him, he can never want means to bring them out of trouble, because he is always actually exercised in governing that which is for their good, and till he sees it fit to deliver them, he will be with them. Great mercies succeed the sharpest afflictions, Jer. 30:5, 6, 7, &c. When there should be a voice of trembling, and men with their hands upon their loins, as women in travail, and paleness in their faces from the excess of their fears, in that day God would break the yoke from them, and they should serve the Lord their God, and David their king. Though the night be never so dark, yet it is certain the sun will rise and disperse its light next morning, and one time or other

shew itself in its brightness. We have no reason to despond in great extremities, since he can think us into safety,—Ps. 40:17, 'Lord, think on me,'—much more look us into it; his thoughts and his eyes move together.

5. In fear of wants. The power of the government of the world cannot be doubted. His love, as little as it seems, since it hath moved him to prepare heaven to entertain his people at the end of their journey, it will not be wanting to provide accommodation for them upon the way, since all things, both good and bad, are at his beck, and under the government of his gracious wisdom. His eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, not only to defend them in dangers, but supply them in wants, for his strength is shewed both ways. Doth he providentially regard them that have no respect for him, and will he not employ his power for, and extend his care to them that adore and love him, and keep up his honour in the world? He will not surely be regardless of the afflictions of his creatures. His people are not only his creatures, but his new creatures; their bodies are not only created by him, but redeemed by his Son. The purchase of the Redeemer is joined to the providence of the Creator. If he take care of you when he might have damned you for your sins, will he not much more since you are believers in Christ? And he cannot damn you believing, unless he renounce his Son's mediation and his own promise. A natural man provides for his own, much more a righteous man: Pro. 13:22, 'A good man leaves an inheritance to his children,' much more the God of righteousness, a God who hath his eye always upon them. His eye will affect his heart, and his heart spirit the hand of his power to relieve them. He hath 'prepared of his goodness for the poor,' Ps. 68:10.

6. It is comfort in the low estate of the church at any time. God's eye is upon his church even whilst he seems to have forsaken them. If he seem to be departed, it is but in some other part of the earth, to shew himself strong for them; wherever his eye is fixed in any part of the world, his church hath his heart, and his church's relief is his end. Though the church may sometimes lie among the pots in a dirty

condition, yet there is a time of resurrection, when God will restore it to its true glory, and make it as white as a dove with its silver wings, Ps. 68:13. The sun is not always obscured by a thick cloud, but will be freed from the darkness of it. 'God will judge his people, and repent himself concerning his servants,' Ps. 135:14.* It is a comfort to God to deliver his people, and he will do it in such a season when it shall be most comfortable to his glory and their hearts. The very name Jerusalem some derive from Jireh Salem, 'God will provide in Salem.' The new Jerusalem is the title given to God's church, Rev. 21, and is still the object of his providence, and he will provide for it at a pinch: Gen. 22:14, 'Jehovah Jireh,' God will raise up the honour and beauty of his church; great men shall be servants to it, and employ their strength for it when God shall have mercy on it, Isa. 60:10, 12; yea, the learning and knowledge of the world shall contribute to the building of it; ver. 13, 'The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary. It shall be called the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel, that she may know that the Lord is her Saviour, and her Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob.' As Christ rose in his natural, so he will in his spiritual body. If Christ when dead could not be kept from rising, Christ now living shall not be hindered from rising and helping his church. His own glory is linked with his people's security, and though he may not be moved for anything in them because of their sinfulness, he will for his own name, because of its excellency: Ezek. 36:22, 'I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake.' As sorrows increased upon the Israelites, the nearer their deliverance approached.

Because this method of God is the greatest startling even to good men, let us consider this a little, that God doth, and why God doth, leave his church to extremities before he doth deliver it.

Take the resolution of this in some propositions.

1. It is indeed God's usual method to leave the church to extremity before he doth command help. You never heard of any eminent

deliverance of the church but was ushered in by some amazing distress. The Israelites were not saved till they were put in between sea, hills, and forts, that their destruction was inevitable, unless heaven relieved them. Pharaoh resolves to have his will, and God resolves to have his; but he lets him come with his whole force and open mouth at the Israelites' backs, and then makes the waters his sepulchre. Constantine, the man-child in the Revelation, was preceded by Diocletian, the sharpest persecutor. When his people are at a loss, it is his usual time to do his greatest works for them; God had promised Christ many ages, and yet no appearance of him; still promise after promise, and no performance, Ps. 40:8. It was then, 'Lo, I come,' yet many hundred years rolled away, and no sight of him yet. Captivity and affliction, and no Redeemer; but when the world was overrun with idolatry, the Jews oppressed by the Romans, the sceptre departed from Judah, Herod an Edomite and stranger-king, and scarce any faith left, then, then he comes. The world will be in much the like case at his next coming: Luke 18:8, 'When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith in the earth?' There shall be faintings, despondency, unbelief of his promise, as though he had cast off all care of his church's concerns. It is not meant of a justifying faith, but a faith in that particular promise of his coming. The faith of the Israelites must needs begin to flag when they saw their males murdered by the Egyptians; could they believe the propagation of the seed of Abraham, when murder took off the infants, and labour and age would in time the old ones? Whilst their children were preserved, the promise might easily be believed. But consider, this was but just before their deliverance; like a violent crisis before recovery. He doth then 'judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he sees their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left,' Deut. 32:36. He doth so for the wicked many times. When the affliction of idolatrous Israel was bitter, when there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel, then he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, 2 Kings 14:26, 27. He doth so with private persons; Peter might have been delivered by God's power out of prison when he was first sent thither, but God thought it fittest for him to lie in chains, and free him but the night before his intended

execution, Acts 12:6, 7. Lot had his goods rifled and carried away captive before God stirred up Abraham to rescue him. When the hand of the wicked lies heaviest upon the heads of the righteous, and wrings the most mournful sighs from them; when they are needy, and the wicked securely puffing at them, as though they had brought them to so low a condition as to blow them away with a blast; 'Now,' saith God, 'will I arise:' Ps. 12:5, 'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him at safety from him that puffeth at him.' Now, this is the time I watched for as fittest for my own glory and their safety. Then God disappoints them, when they seem to have got to the goal, with the ball at their foot.

Secondly, God hereby doth glorify himself. He then discovers that there is nothing too high for his power to check, nothing too subtle for his wisdom to disappoint, nothing too low for his love to embrace. That is the season wherein his mercy will be most prized, his power most admired, his wisdom most adored, and his justice most cleared. God lets the concerns of his church go backward, that he may bring them on with more glory to himself and satisfaction to his creature. God will divide the benefit and the honour between himself and the creature; he will have the whole glory, and his creature shall have the sensible advantage. They shall enjoy salvation, there is their benefit, but 'not by sword or bow, but by the Lord their God,' Hosea 1:7. Saved they should be, but in such a way wherein the honour of God might most appear, without any mixture of the creature.

1. God glorifies his power. His eyes run to and fro to shew himself strong. He will then pitch upon such a season when his strength may appear most illustrious, and none else have any pretence to claim an equal strength with him. A time of extremity is the fittest opportunity for this, when his power cannot be clouded by any interpositions of the creature for challenging a share in it. The greater the malice against the church, the weaker the church's ability to help itself, the more glorious is the power of God magnified in deliverance; little

dangers are not so suitable for the triumph of an infinite strength. As God let Christ lie three days in the grave, that his resurrection might be known to be the fruit of a divine power, for the same end he lets his mystical body lie in the same condition. Had God brought Israel out of Egypt in the time of the kings that were friends to them from a kindly remembrance of Joseph, there had been no character of a divine power, though there had been of a divine truth apparent in the case; but he set apart that time for their deliverance, when he was to contest with the mightiest opposition from the whole body of the Egyptian nation, who had forgot Joseph their great benefactor. Had not the disciples been in a great storm, ready to be cast away, and Christ asleep till they were in extremity, they had not seen such visible marks of the extensiveness of their Master's power, Isa. 33:7, 8, &c. When the hearts of the strong men fainted, when the Assyrians would not hear the ambassadors of peace, when they had broke their former covenant, resolved to invade the land, when their calamity and despair had arrested all their hopes, 'Now,' when all things are in such a deplorable state, 'will I rise, saith the Lord, now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself.' God was not asleep or unconcerned, but he sat still watching for such a season; now is three times repeated. The Psalmist gives us a record of this in his particular case. When the waters of his affliction were many, the enemy strong, and too strong for him, their strength edged with an intense hatred, then God appears to be his stay, and prevents them in the day of his calamity, Ps. 18:16–18. God lets his enemies be too strong for him, that he might appear his only stay, without any mixture of David's strength in the case. When the Jews thrust Christ out of Nazareth, led him to the brow of the hill, and were ready to cast him down, then, and not till then, he frees himself out of their hands, and disappoints the effects of their rage, Luke 4:29. As Christ dealt thus for himself, so he deals for his church in all ages.

2. God glorifies his wisdom. 'His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong.' It is not a bare strength that God would shew, or such a power which we call in man a brutish valour, without wit or skill, but to shew his strength with his wisdom,

when all his other attributes may be glorified with that of his power. When all worldly helps are departed, we can as little ascribe our security to our own wisdom and industry as to our own strength and power. The physician's skill is best evidenced in mastering a desperate disease. He will bring the counsels of the heathen to nought, Ps. 33:10. He will let them counsel, he will let them devise and carry on their counsels near to execution, that he may shew that, as the strength of hell is no match for his power, so the craft of Satan is no mate for his wisdom. But he raises the trophies of his wisdom upon the subtle devices of his enemies.

3. God glorifies his care and compassion. When his people are nearest crushing, God is nearest preserving. God's mercy is greatest when his saints' misery is deepest; when Zion is as an outcast, it shall be taken into God's protection: Jer. 30:16, 17, 'I will heal thee of thy wounds, because they called thee an outcast, saying, This is Zion whom no man seeks after.' When none stood up to plead for her, when her lovers she depended on, had forgotten and forsaken her, when they thought her cast out of the care of any creature, the Creator would take her up. When the ruin was inevitable as to man, their preservation was most regarded by God. Had God stopped Pharaoh at his first march, by raising some mutiny in his army, his mercy to his people, as well as his power against his enemies, had not been so conspicuous. The more desperate things are, the fitter subject for the advancement of God's kindness. Had God conducted the Israelites through a rich and fruitful country, it would have obscured the glory of his care of them, which was more signal in directing them through a barren desert, crowded with fiery serpents, without bread to nourish them, or water to cool them, wherein he manifested himself to be both their caterer and physician. Moses was never more peculiarly under God's protection, no, not when he had the whole guard of Israel about him in the wilderness, than when his mother had exposed him to the river forlorn, in a pitched ark, and forsaken by his sister, who stood aloof off to see how providence would conduct him. When Laban was possessed with fury against Jacob, God countermands it, and issues out his own order to him,

how he should behave himself towards his son, Gen. 31:24, 29. God times his kindness, so that it may appear to be nothing else but grace, grace with a witness, that his people may be able to understand the very particularities of it: Isa. 30:18, 'Therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you.' He leaves them therefore for a while to the will of their enemies: verse 17, 'At the rebuke of five shall you flee, till you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign upon a hill.' Never is salvation sweeter, and mercy better relished, than when it snatcheth us out of the teeth of danger. God would have his mercy valued, and it is fit it should. And when is a calm more grateful than after the bitterest storm, attended with the highest despair? God's mercy in sparing Isaac after the knife was at his throat, was more welcome and more delicious both to father and son, than if God had revealed his intent to Abraham in the three days' journey to the mount Moriah. But God suspending his soul in bitterness all that time, prepared his heart for the valuation of that mercy. When human help forsaketh us, God most embraceth us: Ps. 27:10, 'When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.'

4. God glorifies his righteousness and justice. There is a measure of wickedness God stays for, which will be an object of his justice without exception. When the measure of a people's covetousness is come, 'then their end is come, and God will fill them with men as with caterpillars, and they shall lift up a shout against them,' Jer. 51:13, 14. Hereby God clears the justice of his proceedings, that he exercised patience so long, that things were come to that pass, that either his people or his enemies must be destroyed. As the case was with the Israelites, had not God marvellously appeared, every man of them had been cut off or reduced to slavery. The die was cast, either the Egyptians or Israelites must be defeated; either God must appear for his church, or none would be left in the world to profess him. In such a case the justice of God is more unexceptionable. No man has any semblance for complaining of him; for he struck not till the safety of his adversaries was inconsistent with his own honour and interest of the world. When men come to such a height, as to slight

and resolve to break the laws of God, then is the time for the honour of his righteousness in his own institutions, to vex them in his sore displeasure: Ps. 2:3, 5, 'Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them,' &c. When? When they resolve to 'cast away his bands and cords from them,' ver. 2. He is forced to rise then, when men make void his law, and tread down the honour of it; when they would not have God to have a standing law in the world, or a people to profess him: Ps. 119:126, 'It is time for the Lord to work, for they have made void thy law.' When the grapes of wickedness are thus fully ripe, then is God's time for the honour of his justice to cast them into the wine-press of his wrath, Rev. 14:19, 20. This is God's set time, when he may glorify, without any exception, his justice in punishing his enemies' sins, his wisdom in defeating his enemies' plots, his power in destroying his enemies' strength, and his mercy in relieving his people's wants.

Thirdly, Such extremities and deliverance in them, are most advantageous for his people.

1. It being a season to improve and know their interest. Men do not usually seek to God, or at least so earnestly, as when they are in distress; the time of the tempest was the time of the disciples' praying to Christ. The Israelites, you scarce find them calling upon God but in times of danger and distress; hereby God doth encourage and give an argument for prayer. The Psalmist useth the extremity of the church often as an argument to move God to pity: Ps. 123:3, 'Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.' We are glutted with contempt, as low as low can be: so Ps. 44:23, 24, 'Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever; our soul is bowed to the dust.' That is the most successful time for prayer, which is the time of the stirring of God's bowels. He hath been a 'strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,' Isa. 25:4. They in such a time find how considerable their interest is with God, when upon their prayer they

shall find relief suitable to every kind of danger they are in. The spirit of prayer upon the church is but the presage of their adversaries' ruin. When God seeks to destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem, he will pour upon the inhabitants of it a spirit of grace and of supplication: Zech. 12:9, 'And in that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem, and I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication.' This time of extremity, when all their hands fail, should edge the church's prayers. Our great intercessor seems in this case to set us a pattern: Zech. 1:12, 'O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy upon Jerusalem!' (התא single by itself, not in an affix.) When all the earth sits still and is at rest, unconcerned in the affairs of thy church, if thou wilt not have mercy on them in this strait, who shall relieve them? none else have any mind to it; then issue out comfortable words to the angel from the mouth of God. This is an advantage of extremity; it sets Christ a pleading, and the church on praying.

2. As a season for acting faith at present, and an encouragement of reliance upon him in future straits. As a season for acting faith at present. Our Saviour lets Lazarus die and stink in the grave, before he raised him, that he might both confirm faith in his disciples' hearts, and settle it in the hearts of some of the Jews. John 11:15, 45, 'I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe.' What, let Lazarus die, one that he loved, one so strongly pleaded for by two sisters that he loved too, and solicited upon his friendship to relieve him! ver. 3, 'Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick,' and our Saviour glad he was not there to prevent it! yes, not glad of Lazarus his extremity, nor of the church's, but of the opportunity to give them greater ground of faith and encouragement to trust him. The church's faith is God's glory. He that hath many things to trust to, is in suspense which he should take hold of; but when there is but one left, with what greediness will he clasp about that! God cuts down worldly props, that we might make him our stay. How will the church in extremity recollect all the deliverances of it in former ages, and put them up in pleas to God, for a renewal of

his wonted kindness and new successions of deliverance, whereby God gets the glory of his former work, and his church the present comfort in renewing fiducial acts upon him! How doth Jehoshaphat put God in mind of his gracious assistance acted some ages before, when he was in a strait, by the invasion of a powerful army: 2 Chron. 20:7, 'Art not thou our God that didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel?' ver. 12, 'We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.' Never are the church's eyes so fixed upon God, never God's eyes so fixed upon the church, as in times of their distress. Then there is a sweet communion with, and recounting of all their former friendships. The church then throws itself wholly upon God; its prosperity is but like a troubled sea, its distress is the time of its rest. So Asa, when assaulted by a million of men under Zerah the Ethiopian, how doth he throw himself and the whole weight of his concerns upon the hands of God, and makes his cause God's! 2 Chron. 14:11, 'Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee; O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee.'

And there is an encouragement also in the deliverance for future faith. It gives a ground for future faith from the riches of the present experience; in such distresses there is the highest experience of God, and hope is the fruit of experience. How apt are we to believe God in other straits, when we have had assistance (like they that dreamed) come unexpectedly upon us. God overthrew Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, when they were upon the heels of the affrighted Israelites and ready to crush them, but God gave them 'to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness,' Ps. 74:14, as a standing excellent dish to feed their hopes for all future deliverances upon their trust in God. And indeed that deliverance was an earnest of their perpetual security, by special providence in any succeeding trouble. And God often gives them a particular charge to remember that deliverance, with a practical remembrance to still their fear and support their faith: Deut. 7:18, 'Thou shalt not be afraid of them, but shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and to all the Egyptians.' He would have them remember it as a covenant-mercy, 'what the Lord thy God did,' thy God in covenant, not what the Lord

did barely by an arm of power, but what he did by a vastness of affection, and as a God of truth and firmness in his covenant.

3. In fitting them by the extremity for a holy reception of the mercy intended.

God keeps up the distress of his church to expel self-confidence. Trust in earthly things are the great checks of God's kindness. We hardly forsake this temper till we are forsaken by all those things we confide in. Times of extremity make us more humble; and humility, like the plough, fits us for the seed of mercy. The gardener's digging up the clods is but to prepare the earth for the receiving and nourishing some excellent plants he intends to put into its womb. There is a certain set time for God's great actions. He lets the powers of darkness have their hour, and God will take his hour: Ps. 102:13, 'Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Sion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.' He hath a set time for the discovery of his mercy, and he will not stay a jot beyond it. What is this time? ver. 9, &c. When they 'eat ashes like bread, and mingle their drink with weeping;' when they are most humble, and when the servants of God have more affection to the church; when their humble and ardent affections are strong, even to the ruin and rubbish of it; when they have a mighty desire and longing for the reparation of it, as the Jews in captivity had for the very dust of the temple: ver. 14, 'For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.' For there notes it to be a reason why the set time was judged by them to be come. That is God's set time when the church is most believing, most humble, most affectionate to God's interest in it, and most sincere. Without faith we are not fit to desire mercy, without humility we are not fit to receive it, without affection we are not fit to value it, without sincerity we are not fit to improve it. Times of extremity contribute to the growth and exercise of those qualifications.

4. In securing them against future straits. For God's disappointing enemies when they think themselves sure of all, is the highest

discouragement to them, and those of the like temper, to renew the like attempt; but if they do, it is an evidence they shall meet with the like success; it is the highest vexation to see their projects diverted, when they have lighted their match, and are ready to give fire. Men may better take notice how God loves his people, when he apprehends their adversaries in the very pinnacle of their pride, and flings them down from the mount of their hopes. It doth not only dash the present designs, but dishearten future attempts. The Egyptians, after their overthrow at the Red Sea, never attempted to disturb them in their journey in the wilderness. It was a bridle to all their enemies except Amalek, upon whose country they travelled in the wilderness, when it was the interest of state in all those nations to rout that swarm of people that must have some seat to dwell in; and every nation might justly fear to be dispossessed by them; yet we read of no league among those nations bordering upon the wilderness, such a terror did God strike into them by that relief he gave his people in their extremity at the Red Sea, whereby he provided for their future security in their whole journey. It was this melted the hearts of the Gibeonites, one of the nations of Canaan, and brought them to a submission to Joshua, as the sentiment of all their neighbours: Josh. 9:9, 'We are come, because of the name of the Lord thy God; for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt.' And for this and other reasons it may be, that the times before the church's last deliverance shall be sharper than any before, which our Saviour intimates, Mat. 24:21, 'For then there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be.' In discoursing his disciples of the troubles at the destruction of Jerusalem, which was a type of the trouble preceding the end of the world, he adds a discourse of what shall be at the end of the world, in the last attempt of the enemies of the church; for, ver. 29, he saith, 'immediately after the tribulation of those days,' he speaks of his coming in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory. And also in the Revelation: Rev. 16:18, 'And there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.' This, perhaps, at the pouring out of the seventh vial, may concern the Christian church

as well as the antichristian party. But the reason why it may be sharper just before that last deliverance, than it was in former ages, may be because it is the last effort the enemy shall make; the last demonstration of God's power and wisdom for, and care of his church, and justice upon his enemies in such cases; the last season for their multiplying their cries, and acting their faith for such a concern.

Use 3. Of exhortation.

If it be so, that the providence of God is chiefly designed for the good of the church,—

First, Fear not the enemies of the church. It is a wrong to God. Fear of man is always attended with a forgetfulness of God: Isa. 51:12, 13, 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that art afraid of a man that shalt die, and of the son of man that shalt be made as grass: and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who hath stretched forth the heavens,' &c. It is to value the power of grass above the power of the Creator, as though that had more ability to hurt than God to help. As if men were as strong as mountains, and God as weak as a bulrush. It is a wrong to his truth; hath he not comforted you in his promise? What creature should then deject you? It is a wrong to his mercy. Is he not the Lord thy Maker? Calvin refers this to regeneration, and not creation. Hath he not renewed you by his Spirit? and will he not protect you by his strength? and that you may not question his power, look up to the heavens which he hath stretched out, and the foundations of the earth which he hath laid. And is that arm which hath done such mighty works, too weak to defend that work, which is choicer in his eye than either the extended heaven or the established earth? We vilify God, and defile his glory, when our fear of man's power stifles our faith in God: Isa. 8:12, 13, 'Neither fear you their fear, nor be afraid: sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear.' Let the wicked fear the Assyrians, and engage in confederacies against them; but let your eyes be lifted up to me and my providence. God will either turn away the mouth of

the cannon from the church, or arm it against the shot; either preserve it from a danger, protect it in it, or sanctify it to the church; and who need fear a sword in a father's hand?

1. Will you fear man, who have a God to secure you? The church belongs to God, not to man as a just propriety: Isa. 43:1, 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by my name: thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,' &c. 'Thou art mine,' not man's. Thou art mine, I am thine. I will be with thee as thine, I will secure thee as mine. Is my creating, is my forming, is my redeeming thee to no purpose? I will not secure you from trouble; but surely my redemption of you, the propriety I have in you, should secure you from fears in those troubles. None shall hurt you whilst I have power to defend you. GOD WITH US, if well considered and believed, is sufficient to still those fears which have the greatest outward objects for their encouragement: Ps. 27:1, 'The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?' If God be our strength to support us, why should the weakness of dust and ashes scare us? Alliance to great men, and protection of princes, prop up men's hearts against the fear of others; and shall alliance to God be of a weaker efficacy? A heathen* could so argue, that knew nothing of redemption. Let the counsels of enemies be crafty, Ps. 83:3; yet they consult against God's hidden ones, hidden by God, whilst plotted against by men: who would fear the stratagems of men, whilst protected in an impregnable tower? God hides, when men are ready to seize the prey. How did the angel protect a sincere trembling Lot against the invasion of a whole city, and secured his person whilst he blinded his enemies' eyes that they could not find the door. Instruments cannot design more maliciously, than Christ watches over them affectionately. Christ hath his eye to see your works and danger where Satan hath his throne, Rev. 2:13.

2. Will you fear men, who have a God to watch over their motions? What counsels can prevail where God intends to overrule their resolves? There is no place so close as to keep private resolutions from his knowledge. This was the thought of those statesmen against

whom the prophet Isaiah thunders, Isa. 29:15, 16: 'Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark; surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay.' Their counsels were as well known to him as the potter's clay is to the potter, which he can either frame into a vessel, or fling away into the mass from whence he took it. God hath not despoiled himself of his government; nor will devolve his right upon any men to dispose of his concerns. When men think to act so secretly, as though they framed themselves, as though God's eye were not upon them, he will watch and trace all their motions, and make them insignificant to their purposes. Satan himself, the slyest and subtilest agent, is too open to God to hide his counsels from him. Never fear man till the whole combined policies of hell can control the resolves of heaven, till God wants omniscience to dive into their secrets, skill to defeat their counsels, and an arm to abate their power.

3. Will you fear men or devils, who have a God to restrain them?

The great dragon and general of the serpent's seed is under a binding power, who can bind him not only a thousand years, Rev. 20:2, but a thousand ages. Have his seed more force to resist almightiness than their captain? The prophet, speaking of the Assyrians threatening Jerusalem, and the confusion in some cities for fear of them, yet, saith he, 'he shall remain at Nob,' a city of the Levites, not far from Jerusalem, where he might have a full prospect of the city. He shall but 'shake his hand,' he shall not gripe it in his talons: he shall shew his teeth, but not bite, snarl but not worry, Isa. 10:32. God will let out so much of the enemies' wrath as may answer his gracious ends to the church in purging of them, but 'the remainder of wrath,' which remains in their hearts for the church's destruction, 'he will restrain,' Ps. 76:9, 10; as the physician weighs out as much as may curb the disease, not kill the patient. The chain of providence controls the power of Satan, when it doth not change his desires. The Egyptian's will against the Israelites was strong, but his power was weak. Might and power is only in the hand of God, who reigns over all, 1 Chron.

29:12. And God will exert so much of power to bridle the inclinations of nature in the wicked for the good of his people. He will give them so much line as may serve his holy purposes, but not so much as shall prejudice the church's standing. A staff is not capable of giving a smart blow without the force of the hand that holds it. Wicked men are no more than a staff in God's hand: Isa. 10:5, 'The rod of my anger, the staff in their hand is my indignation;' he can either strike with it, or break it in pieces. The staff is still in the hand of God, and can do no more than what his merciful arm moves it to; as he can restrain it, so he can divert it. What should we fear those whose hearts are in God's hands, whose enmity is under God's restraint, who can change their fury into favour, or at least bridle it as he doth the waves of the sea? No enemy's shot can exceed God's commission. God often laughs when men plot, and disappoints when they begin to act. Sometimes he makes them act contrary to their intentions. Balaam comes to curse the people, and God turns his tongue to bless them, which, if guided by his own heart, would have poured out execrations upon them, Num. 23:7, 8. God puts the words into his mouth, but not in his heart, ver. 5, and makes him bless that which his heart hates.

4. Will you fear them who have a God to ruin them? Though the beast in the Revelations hath seven heads, a reaching wisdom, and ten horns, a mighty power, Rev. 17:3 (both the numbers of seven and ten being numbers of perfection in Scripture), yet, with all his wisdom and strength, he shall tumble down to destruction; they can no more resist God's power than blustering winds or raging waves can cross his will. When the enemies of the church are in combination, like thorns full of prickles 'folded together,' then shall they 'be consumed like stubble that is dry,' Nahum 1:10. God loves to defeat pride: Exod. 18:11, 'In the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them.' God waits but the time of their swelling to make them burst. Absalom kills his brother, withdraws the people from their obedience to the king, stirs them up to revolt, enters Jerusalem in his father's absence, pollutes his concubines, engages his designs against his life, raiseth an army against him; who would not say

David was in extremity, and Absalom alone prospering in his designs? But when Absalom comes to open force, God arises, an oak catches him, his mule forsakes him, and Joab despatches him. Sennacherib had prospered in his conquest of Judea, taken many strong towns, laid siege to Jerusalem, solicits the people to revolt, blasphemes the God of heaven, and then an angel comes and makes a dreadful slaughter in a night, and he, returning to his own country, is killed by his own sons, 2 Kings 19:7, 35, 36, 37. God's arrows shall never miss their mark, and he hath more than one to strike into the hearts of his enemies: Ps. 18:14, 'He sent out his arrows and scattered them.' What reason then to fear even multitudes, who can never be too strong for that God who gave them that little strength they have!

Secondly, The second duty to which we are exhorted. If all God's providences tend to the good of his church and people,

2. Then censure not God in his dark providences. As we are often too hasty in our desires for mercy, and are not content to stay God's time, so we are too hasty in making constructions of providence, and will not stay God's leisure of informing us. When God seems at the beginning of every providence to speak the same language as Christ did to Peter in washing his feet, John 13:7, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter,' the instruments are visible, the action sensible, but the inward meaning still lies obscured from our view. We are too short-sighted to apprehend and judge of God's works; man cannot understand his own way, Prov. 20:24, much less the ways of an infinite God. God's judgments are a great deep, Ps. 36:6; we may sooner fathom the deepest part in the sea, understand all the turnings of those subterranean passages, lave out the ocean with a spoon, or suck in, into our bellies, that great mass of waters, than understand the ways of God with our shallow brains. He makes darkness his pavilion; he is sometimes very obscure in his ways. Neither the greatness of his means, nor the wisdom of his workings, can be fully apprehended by men. We have sense to feel the effects, but not heads to understand the reasons and methods of the divine

government. Eccles. 3:11, 'No man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end.' Though a man may see the beginning of God's works, yet is he able to walk understandingly along with divine wisdom in every step it takes? will he not lose the track often before it comes to an end? It is not the face, but the back parts of providence which we behold; why then should we usurp an authority beyond our ability, and make ourselves God's judges, as if infinite wisdom and power were bounded within the narrow compass of our purblind reasons? His ways are beyond our tracing, and his counsels too high for our short measures. Since therefore God satisfies the righteousness of his own will, let us submit our curiosity to his wisdom, and forbear our censures of that exact righteousness and superlative wisdom which we cannot comprehend.

1. Therefore, first fix this in your minds, that God is righteous, wise, and good in everything. Good, therefore nothing can be hurtful to his people; righteous, therefore nothing unjust; wise, therefore nothing in vain; our injurious thoughts of him make us so uncharitable towards him, and greater censurers of his righteous ways than we are of men's wicked actions. Clouds and darkness are about him; our eye cannot pierce through his darkness, or see the frame of his counsels; yet let these principles be kept as the centre, that 'righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne,' Ps. 89:14. He is righteous in his darkness, wise in his cloudiness; though his judgments are unsearchable to us, and his ways past finding out by our most industrious inquisitions, and a depth of knowledge and wisdom there is in them too deep for us to measure, Rom. 11:33. God was always righteous, wise, and good; he is the same still. Though the motions of the planets be contrary, yet the sphere where they are fixed, the natures wherewith they are created, are the same still. Though the providences of God have various motions, yet the spring of his counsel, the rule of his goodness, the eye of his wisdom, the arm of his power, are not altered. He acts by the same rule, disposeth by the same wisdom, orders according to the same righteousness; he is unchangeable in the midst of the changeable effects of providence. The sun is the same body, which admits of no inward alteration,

keeps exactly its own motion, though its appearances are sometimes ruddy, sometimes clear; its heat sometimes more faint, at another time more scorching; its distance sometimes nearer, sometimes farther off. He must be very ignorant that thinks the objects upon which we look through a prism or trigonal glass change their colours as often as they are represented so in the various turnings of the glass. You see the undulations and wavings of a chain which hangs perpendicularly, one part moves this way and another that way, but the hand that holds it, or the beam to which it is fastened, is firm and steady.

2. Distinguish between preparations to the main work and the perfection of the work, between the motions of God's eyes and the discovery of his strength; his eyes move before his power. The neglect of this was the cause of the Israelites' uncharitable censures of the kindness of God; they interpret God's reducing them into the straits near the Red Sea a design for their destruction, which was but the preparation for their complete deliverance, in a way most glorious to God, and most comfortable and advantageous to themselves.

He that knows not the use of the grape, would foolishly censure a man who should fling them into a wine-press, and squeeze them into mash, which is but a preparation of them to afford that generous liquor which was the end of their growth.* God treads his grapes in a wine-press to draw from thence a delicate wine, and preserve the juice for his own use, which would else wither upon the stalk, and dry up to nothing. We judge not the husbandman angry with his ground for tearing it with his plough, nor censure an artificer for hewing his stones or beating his iron, but expect patiently the issue of the design. Why should we not pay the same respect to God which we do to men in their arts, since we are less capable of being judges of his incomprehensible wisdom than of the skill of our fellow-creatures? God in his cross providence prepares the church for fruitfulness whilst he ploughs it. He may seem to be digging up the bowels of the church, while he is only preparing to lay the foundation

in Sion for the raising a noble structure; and in what shape soever he appears in his preparations, he will in his perfection of it appear in glory: Ps. 102:16, 'When the Lord shall build up Sion, he shall appear in glory;' and evidence that he was restoring whilst we thought him destroying, and healing whilst we thought him wounding. As God hath settled a gradual progress in his works of creation, so by degrees he brings his everlasting counsels to perfection. The seasons of the year are not jumbled together, but orderly succeed one another; and the coldness of the winter is but a preparation for a seasonable spring and a summer harvest. We do not unrighteously accuse God of disorder in his common works, why should we do it in his special works of providence? Do we disparage the musician's skill for the jarring and intelligible touches in the tuning the instrument, but rather wait for the lesson he intends to play? If we stay for God's fuller touches of this great instrument of the world in the way of his providence, it will, like David's harp, chase away that evil spirit from us which is now too apt to censure him.

3. Fix not your eye only upon the sensible operations of providence, but the ultimate end. As in a watch the various wheels have different motions, yet all subservient to one end, to tell the true hour of the day and the motion of the sun, so are all the providences of God. Should any have been preserved in the deluge upon some high mountain who had not known the design of the ark, and had seen it floating upon such a mass of waters, he would have judged the people in it in a deplorable condition, and have concluded that it would have broke against the mountain, or been overturned by the waves; yet that was Noah's preservative. Had any of us been with Christ, and acknowledged him the Saviour of the world, and yet seen him crucified in such a manner by men, and judged only by that, what wise and what just constructions should we have made of that providence? Much the same as some of his disciples did: Luke 24:21, 'We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel;' but the whole design is spoiled, we are fools, and he an impostor. Yet this, which seemed to be the ruin of redemption, was the necessary highway to it by God's constitution. No other way was it to be

procured: ver. 26, 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to have entered into his glory?' His entrance into glory to perfect our salvation was the end of the sensible suffering wherein he laid the foundation. As they charge Christ with imposture, not considering the end, so do we God with unrighteousness when we consider not his aim. The end both beautifies and crowns the work; the remarks of God's glory in the creation are better drawn from the ends of the creatures, and their joint subserviency to them, than from any one single piece of the creation. We must not only consider the present end, but the remote end, because God in his providence towards his church hath his end for after times. God acts for ends at a great distance from us, which may not be completed till we are dead and rotten. How can we judge of that which respects a thing so remote from us, unless we view it in that relation? God's aims in former providences were things to come, his aims in present providences are things to come. As the matter of the church's prayers, so the objects of God's providences are things to come: Isa. 45:11, 'Ask me of things to come, concerning my sons.' The matter of their prayers then were, that God would order all things for the coming of the Messiah. The matter of the church's prayer now is, that God would order all things for the perfecting the Messiah in his mystical body. The whole frame of providence is for one entire design; it is one entire book with seven seals, Rev. 5:1. The beginning of a book, as well as the middle, hath relation to the end. The design of God's book of providence is but one in all the seven seals and periods of time.

4. Consider not only one single act of providence, but the whole scheme, to make a conclusion. The motions of his eyes are various, but all ends in discoveries of his strength. Men do not argue from one single proposition, but draw the conclusion from several propositions knit together. It is by such a spiritual logic we are to make our conclusions from the way of providence; as in the reading Scripture, if we take not the whole period, we may make not only nonsense, but blasphemy;* as in that of the psalmist, 'Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in unrighteousness.' If a man should read

only, Thou art not a God, and make a full stop there, it would be blasphemy; but reading the whole verse, it is an excellent sense, and an honourable declaration of God's holiness. Such errors will be committed in reading the books of providence, if we fix our eyes only in one place, and make a full stop where God hath not made any. We judge not of a picture by the first draught, but the last lines; not by one shadow or colour, but by the whole composure. The wisdom of God is best judged of by the view of the harmony of providence. The single threads of providence may seem very weak or knotty and uneven, and seem to administer just occasion of censure; but will it not as much raise the admiration to see them all woven into a curious piece of branched work? Consider therefore God's ways of working, but fully judge nothing till the conclusion, for that is to judge before the time. Judge not then of providence at the first appearance; God may so lose the glory of his work, and you the comfort.

Thirdly. The third duty. Inquire into providence, and interpret all public providences by this rule. We must search into it, though we are not able to find out all the reasons of it. What can be a braver study than that which is the object of God's eternal counsel? We are conformed to God in our wills, when we have the same ends in our motions; and we are conformed to God in our understandings, when we have the same object of our thoughts. Some providences have their interpretation written in their foreheads, we may run and read: such as his signal judgments in the world, which express the very sin for which they are inflicted; others are wrapped up in a harder shell and more covers, and therefore more labour to reach the kernel; some are too high for our knowledge, none for our inquiry. It is our duty to seek after God, though we can never arrive to a perfect knowledge of him: Job 11:7, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?' He prohibits not the searching, though he asserts the impossibility of finding him out to perfection. What hath God given us faculties for, but to search after him? And we must not do it to satisfy our curiosity, but to increase our knowledge, and consequently our admiration of his wise

and powerful care. Diligence must be used too. Our first thoughts about things of concernment are usually confused; so are our first sights of providence. Providence is a great deep; deep things are not seen without stooping down. We must παρακυσαι, as the angels do when they search into the things of the gospel, 1 Pet. 1:12. But let this aim of God at the good of his church be the rule of your interpretation. Without this compass to steer our judgments by, we may both lose and rack ourselves in the wilderness of providence, and fortify our natural atheism and ignorance instead of our faith. I must confess the study of providence is in some respect more difficult than in the former ages of the world, because God seems to manage things in the church more by his wisdom than power, which is not so intelligible by man as the sensible effects of his strength. That attribute he manifested most in miraculous ways and the visible ministry of angels, as we read in Scripture stories; now he employs his wisdom more in ordering second causes, in ordinary ways, to his own high, merciful, and just ends. Yet since the discovering of Christ, God hath given us a rule whereby we may discern much of his wisdom in the knowledge of his end, as the knowledge of Christ removes the veil from the Scripture in our reading of it: 2 Cor. 3:14–16, 'The same veil remains in the reading of the Old Testament, which veil is done away in Christ' (which veil is still upon the Jews), and makes us understand those parts of the Old Testament which otherwise would be utterly obscure; so in the reading the books of providence, the knowledge of this end of God in them, will help us to understand the meaning of that which otherwise would non-plus the reason of man. He that knows the end of one that is making a watch, will not wonder at his framing small wheels and filing little pins; but he that understands nothing of the design, would count it ridiculous for a man so to trifle away his time. Without the knowledge of this end, we shall expose ourselves to miserable mistakes; as Plutarch mistook the cause of the ceasing of oracles, ascribing it to the change of the nature of the soil, not affording those exhalations as formerly, or the death of the demons which gave those oracles. He had judged otherwise, had he known or believed the rising of a higher power, the Sun of righteousness in the world, who imposed silence upon those

angels of darkness, the most famous oracles in the world ceasing about the time of Christ. To imagine to interpret the motions of providence, without a knowledge of Christ and the design of God for his church, is as vain as to imagine we can paint a sound, or understand a colour by our smell. Correct sense by reason in this work, and reason by faith. To what end hath God prescribed faith to succour us in the weakness of reason, if it had been capable to understand his ways without it, and if we make no use of it upon such occasions?

Fourthly. A fourth duty. Consider the former providences God hath wrought for the church in the past ages. Let him not lose the present glory of his past works: Ps. 102:18, 'This shall be written for the generation to come, and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord,' even for that work of his which is written to be done in former ages. God loves to have his former works read and pleaded. It is a keeping a standing praise of him in the world. We have had the benefit of them; it is fit God should have the glory of them from us, as well as from those who immediately enjoyed them. Our good was bound up in every former preservation of the church. If the candlestick had been broken, where had the candle been? Had the church been destroyed, how could the gospel have been transmitted to us? Let the duty we owe to God's glory engage us to a consideration of them, and the benefit we have had by them also incite us. We usually forget not things that are strange, nor things that are profitable; his works of old have been works of wonder in themselves, and profitable to us. To what end are the praises of God discovered to the generations to come, but that they should reflect those praises to heaven again, and convey them down to the generations following? Ps. 78:4, 'Shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord.'

1. This will help us in our inquiries in present providences.

There is a beautiful connection between former and latter providences; they are but several links of one chain. The principle

and end is the same; that God from whence they come, that Christ to which they tend, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. What God doth now, is but a copy of what he portrayed in his word as done in former ages; there are the same goodness, the same design in both. The births of providence are all of a like temper and disposition. We cannot miss of the understanding of them, if we compare them with the ancient copies; for God is in the generation of the righteous, the same God still. God is the same, his ends are the same, the events will be the same.

2. It will support our faith. The reason of our diffidence of God in the cause of the church, is the forgetfulness of his former appearances for her. Oh if we did remember his former goodness, we should not be so ready to doubt of his future care. This was the psalmist's care in his despondencies, and in his overwhelming troubles of spirit: Ps. 77:9, 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?' but, ver. 10, he concludes it his infirmity, and resolves upon a review of the records of God's ancient works for his people, 'and the years of the right hand of the Most High,' these times wherein he declared his power and his glory, and so proceeds to the top of all their deliverances, viz., that out of Egypt. Doth God's wisdom decay, or his power grow feeble? Is not his interest the same? Is he not a God still like himself? Is not his glory as dear to him as before? Hath he cast off his affection to his own name? Why should not he then do the same works, since he hath the same concern? God himself, to encourage us, calls them to our remembrance: Isa. 50:2, 'Is my hand shortened, that I cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I do dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness,' &c. Am not I the same God that dried up the sea, that wrought those ancient wonders which amazed the world? What doth your distrust signify but the impair of my power? Rouse up yourselves to a consideration of them, and thence gather fresh supplies to strengthen you in your present dependence upon me! He puts us in mind of them, because we are apt to forget them. Gen. 15:6, when it is said Abraham 'believed in the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,' God

answered him, ver. 7, 'I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees.' Keep up thy faith; and to that end, remember what I did for thee before in calling thee. Cast thy eye upon that place whence I delivered thee, either from the idolatries of the place, or the persecution he was in for the true worship of God. And as God puts him in mind of his mercy he had shewn to him before, for the encouragement of his faith, so the people of God have made use of them to this end. Goliah's sword was counted by David the fittest for his defence in his flight, because it had been a monument of God's former deliverance of him, 1 Sam. 21:9. When he asks for a sword or spear, Abimelech said, 'The sword of Goliah, whom thou slowest, is here;' and David said, 'There is none like that: give it me.' How hasty he catches at it! There is none like that sword, that hath so signal a mercy writ upon it. That very sword will not only defend me against my enemies, but guard my faith against those temptations that would invade it. This encouragement of faith and hope is the end of God in his transmission of the records of his former providences to us: Ps. 78:6, 7, 'That the generation to come might know them, and declare them to their children' from one posterity to another, 'that they might set their hope in God.'

3. It will enliven our prayer.

It is a mighty plea in prayer. How often doth David urge it! Thou hast been my help, thou hast delivered my soul from death, wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling? But in the church's concerns too: 1 Chron. 16:11, 12, 'Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember the marvellous works that he hath done.' A reflection upon what God hath done should be enjoined* with our desires of what we would have God to do for us. When Moses was praying upon the top, while Israel was fighting with Amalek at the foot of the hill, he had the rod of God in his hand, Exod. 17:9; that miraculous rod which had amazed Pharaoh, whose motion summoned all the plagues upon them; that rod which had split the sea for their passage, broached the rock for their thirst, and had been instrumental in many miracles: certainly Moses shewed this rod to

God, and pleaded all those wonderful deliverances God had wrought instrumentally by it. No doubt but he carried it with him to shew to God for a plea, as well as to the Israelites, to spirit their resolutions against their enemies.

4. It will prevent much sin.

A forgetfulness of his former works is one cause of our present provocations. It was so in the case of the Israelites' sin: Ps. 106:7, 'They remembered not the multitude of his mercies; but provoked thee at the sea, even at the Red Sea;' they had lost the memory of so many miracles in Egypt, and which aggravated their sin, 'they provoked him at the sea, at the Red Sea;' they provoked him under a present indigency, as well as against former mercy; they provoked him in that place of straits where all the powers on earth could not have relieved them had heaven neglected them. The provocation you may see, Exod. 14:11, 12, which sprang from a forgetfulness of his kindness so lately shewed to them. How apt are we to forget old mercies, when we are so naturally apt to blot out of our memories mercies newly received! If this were well considered by men, it would prevent their enterprises against the church, and consequently their shame and ruin. Are there records of any who have hardened themselves against God and prospered? Job 9:4. How might in that reflection be seen the frustrations of counsels, disgracing of attempts, showers of fury and vengeance from heaven upon the heads of such! The reason why the wonderful works of God were to be made known to posterity, was 'that they might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation of men,' Ps. 78:6, 8. If they did consider those transactions of God in and for his church, they could no more think to stop the breath of perpetual powerful providence, than to bridle in a storm, or stop the motion of the sun. To conclude this: God's providential judgments are to be remembered; though they are for the punishment of the age that feel them, they are also for the instruction of the age which succeeds them; tell, מֵרֶוֶן, number, be as exact as in your accounts, wherein you take notice of every number, minute, and cypher. The works of

providence as well as the doctrine of God are parts of a child's catechism, they are to keep up the consideration of them in themselves, and hand them in instruction to their children.

Fifthly, The fifth duty. Act faith on God's providence.

Times of trouble should be times of confidence; fixedness of heart on God would prevent fears of heart: Ps. 112:7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed.' How? 'Trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, they shall not be moved.' Otherwise without it we shall be as light as a cock* moved with every blast of evil tidings, our hopes will swim or sink according to the news we hear. Providence would seem to sleep, unless faith and prayer awakened it. The disciples had but little faith in their Master's account, yet that little faith awakened him in a storm, and he relieved them. Unbelief doth only discourage God from shewing his power in taking our parts. 'Every one will walk in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever,' Micah 4:5. Heathens will trust in their idols, and shall not we in that God that lives for ever? Have we any reason to have a less esteem of our confidence in God than heathens had of and in their idols? We should do our duty, which is faith and hope, and leave God to do his work, which is mercy and kindness. By unbelief we deny his providence, disparage his wisdom, and strip him of his power; we have none else to trust; no creature can order anything for the church's good without God's commission and direction. What should we trust him for? For that wherein his glory is concerned, which is more worth to him than all the world besides. Trust him most when instruments fail. God takes them off some time, to shew that he needs not any, and to have our confidence rightly placed on him, which staggered before between him and the creature.

1. All the godly formerly did act faith on a less foundation. The godly patriarchs who lived eight or nine hundred years, depended upon providence that long time, and shall not we for seventy years, the usual term of man's life! They had promises to support them, we

have not only the same promises, but the performances of them too. They had providences, we have the same and more, all upon record in Scripture, all since the canon of Scripture was closed, whatsoever God hath remarkably done for his people in all ages. Adam had but one promise, and but little experience of God's providence, yet no doubt trusted in him. We have a multitude of promises, not only pronounced, but sealed, confirmed by many repetitions, which are fresh obligations laid by God upon himself, the experience of all the providences of God towards his church for above five thousand years, and shall our faith stagger when upon us are come the ends of the world? Doth it become us to have our obligations to faith so strong, and our exercise of it so weak? The promise of Christ, Isa. 7:14, that a virgin should bring forth a Son, was thought by God a sufficient security to support their confidence in him against the fury of their enemies; it being a greater wonder that a virgin without loss of her virginity should bring forth a son, than the routing of an host of enemies. Is not then the performance of this, God's actual sending his Son to us through the womb of a virgin, a higher ground of confidence for the church's success in every thing else, than barely the promise could be? All creatures in danger have a natural confidence in God: 'He is the confidence of all the ends of the earth;' but the church's confidence may be more firmly placed in him, because he is particularly the God of their salvation: Ps. 65:5, 'By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth.'

2. It is your only way to have mercy for the church, and for ourselves.

If he 'take pleasure in them that hope in his mercy,' as it is in Ps. 147:11, he will take pleasure to relieve them, he will 'strengthen the bars of their gates,' ver. 13. If he take pleasure in them that hope in his mercy, then the stronger and more lively their hope is, the more intense is God's pleasure in them. If they do not hope in his mercy, he hath no pleasure in them, and no delight to them. He hath a goodness laid up for them that fear him, and he will lay it out too for them that trust in him: Ps. 31:19, 'Oh how great is thy goodness

which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!' It is laid up for all that fear him, but it is wrought for them that trust in him. It is manifested upon special acts of trust and reliance, and wrought before the sons of men. Those that own God publicly in a way of reliance, God will own them publicly in a way of kindness. Faith is the key that unlocks the cabinet of special providence. Those eyes which move about all the world are fixed upon those that trust in him: Ps. 33:18, 'The eye of the Lord is upon them that hope in his mercy.'

The sixth duty. Wait upon God in the way of his providence. Wait upon him as he is 'a faithful Creator,' 1 Pet. 4:19; much more since the title of being our Redeemer is added to that of our Creator, which strengthens his relation to us. Not to wait disparageth his care, bounds his power, or reflects upon his wisdom, as if he had stripped himself of his immense goodness, and forgot both his promise and his people; as if he had cancelled the covenant, and given up his whole interest to the lusts of men. Wait in the saddest appearances. The hour of Christ's death was dismal in the world, and darkness upon the earth; a miraculous eclipse of the sun taken notice of by the very heathens; yet were we never nearer to happiness, than in that dreadful time when our Saviour was most dyed in his own blood. The sanguine complexion of the evening sky is a presage of a fair succeeding morning; so many times is the red vesture of the church.

1. Wait upon him obedientially.

Commit your souls to God, but in 'well-doing,' 1 Pet. 4:19. Use no indirect means; a contempt of the precept cannot consist with faith in either promise or providence. The obeying part is ours, the governing part is God's: Prov. 23:17, 18, 'Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long; for surely there is an end, and thine expectation shall not be cut off.' God will govern all the day, but we must fear him all the day. When fear on our part attends government on God's part, there will be an end of

our carnal fears, and a good issue of our hopes. The greatest deliverances of his church have been when his people has stood still, Exod. 14:13. As that deliverance was a type of all future and a ground of faith, so the carriage God enjoined was a rule to his people in all future straits. It is against the laws of God's government for those listed in his service to stir without order. The law is our standing rule of duty. Providence cannot be a standing visible rule, because of the variety and seeming crossness of it sometimes to our apprehensions. Do not presume to lead God, but be led by him. It is our safety to follow him; it is our sin and danger to presume to be his directors. We may lose ourselves when we are our own blind guides, and fall into a ditch; but when we follow God, he hath wisdom to foresee the precipices we may stumble into, and goodness to divert us from them. By interposing carnal devices, men may perhaps have their ends, but with little comfort, perhaps much bitterness to themselves. Jacob by his hasty using his own and his mother's sinful project for the blessing, got it indeed, but a cross too, for he was a man of sorrows all his days. By waiting in God's way, we shall have our ends with more sweetness, because purely a fruit of God's care and goodness.

2. Wait patiently. How often are our spirits troubled about future events, and are afraid of the evil which threatens us, as if we were in pain for God, and in doubt of his wise conduct! Think not God's time too long. He waits as much for a fit opportunity to shew his mercy, as you can wait for the enjoyment of it: Isa. 30:18, 'Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; blessed are all they that wait for him.' It is a part of our blessedness to wait for God, since it is a part of God's kindness to wait for a fit season to be gracious to us. It is not for us to prescribe rules to God, but follow the rules he prescribes to us. He hath freely made his promise; let him be master of his own time to make it good. He will shew as much wisdom in accomplishing, as he did mercy in declaring it. God can do things in a moment, but it is his wisdom to take time, that his people may have time to exercise their trust, their hope, and their patience. He will take time in the ways of his providence, as well as he did in the works

of creation. He allotted six days to that which he could have framed in a minute. He is judge of what is needful for us, and when it is needful for us. If God should give us that which is a mercy in its own nature, many times when we desire it, it might not be a mercy. If we will trust the skill of his wisdom for the best season, it cannot but be a mercy, for he will give it us with his own glory and grace wrapped up in it, which will make it sweeter to himself when his wisdom is honoured, and sweeter to us when our good is promoted. God's methods appear in the end both wiser and better than our frames. Infinite goodness aims more at our welfare than our shallow self-love; and infinite wisdom can conduct things to our welfare, better than our short-sighted skill. He that knows all the moments of time, knows best how to time his actions. As God stayed for a fulness of time to bring the great redemption by Christ into the world, so he stays for a fulness of time to bring all the great consequences and appendices of it unto his church. 'Everything is beautiful in his time,' Eccles. 3:11; in its own time; in God's time, not in ours, &c.

3. Wait constantly. Though the wheels of providence seem sometimes to stand still, Ezek. 1:21, and God seems to put a period to the care of his church, yet let not us neglect our duty. Wait a while, and the wheels will be put upon their former rolling. Some particular passages of providence may trouble us for a while; but in the issue, God may answer our desires above our expectations, and thereby confute our fears. His providences are sometimes like rivers that run under ground, out of sight, but will rise again with a delightful stream, with some new medicinal quality, contracted from the earth by the way. Joseph a prisoner waits upon God for his liberty, and God gives him freedom with preferment. God can bring about his people's safety by unexpected ways. Who would have imagined before, that his own dream should make him a captive, and Pharaoh's dream make him a favourite? The chief butler remembers him not till he was in an exigency, and the divining skill of the wise men of Egypt confounded. Joseph lost nothing by waiting upon God, who made so many circumstances concur to promote his honour. Wait therefore upon him in the sorest afflictions. The church is only

afflicted in mercy, but the enemies of it are pulled up by the roots: Jer. 30:11, 'I am with thee to save thee; though I make a full end of the nations whither I have scattered thee, yet I will not make a full end of thee, but I will correct thee in measure.' God deals with his people as a father, who corrects to reform, not to destroy; but with his enemies he deals as a judge. God's providence, like Moses his rod, may seem sometimes a devouring serpent, but it is to convince the Egyptians, and deliver the Israelites.

4. Wait in the use of lawful means for preservation. Not to use means, is to slight his providence, not to trust it. It seems not to consist with the wisdom of God to order things always so, as to be necessitated to put forth an extraordinary power in things which his creatures, by a common providence, can naturally accomplish. God saves by natural means; when they will not serve the turn, he will save by supernatural. God chose an ark to preserve Noah in. He did not want supernatural means for his preservation. He might have caught him up in a cloud, and continued him there till the drying of the waters. Noah doth not dispute the business with God, but prepares an ark according to his order; and he was righteous in his obedience, as well as in his trust. God would not preserve our Saviour by a miracle, when ordinary means would serve the turn. He commands Joseph, by his angel, to flee into Egypt with the child, Mat. 2:13. Joseph desires not God to preserve him by an extraordinary power, to save his pains of travelling; he submits to God's order, and God quickly clears the way for his return. Indeed, sometimes the wheels of providence are lifted up from the earth, and do not go in the ordinary tracts, Ezek. 1:19; but miracles must be left to God's pleasure. For us to desire them, is to tempt our great governor.

The seventh duty. Pray for the church.

It is an encouragement that our suit in this case will not be denied. The desire of welfare is conformable to his counsel, which shall stand, Prov. 19:21, notwithstanding the devices of men. His counsel

in particular concerns of men shall stand; much more is the stability of his counsel for the church. He is a God hearing prayer in a way of common providence, and a God hearing prayer in a way of special attention: Ps. 61:1, 'Hear my cry, O God, attend unto my prayer.' David desires that God would hear him, as more particularly concerned in his case. He is so in the concerns of his church. Will he hear an Ishmael crying for himself, and young lions roaring for their prey, and stop his ears to the voice of his own Spirit in his people, pleading for the church, dearer to him than the whole mass of nature? We have greater arguments to use than in any other case. The relation the church hath to God; the affection God hath to the church. 'Lazarus whom thou lovest is sick,' was Martha's argument to Christ. What greater encouragement to our petitions than God's affection, than God's relation? God loves to have our affection comply with his; God loves others the better for soliciting its welfare. Moses had the greatest manifestation of God's love after he had prayed for the Israelites, Exod. 32:32, though in a case of sin; and presently after, in Exod. 33:11, God 'speaks with him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend;' and in the same chapter, and the beginning of Exod. 34, God shews him his glory as much as he was capable to bear. Daniel was a great petitioner for the church, Dan. 9:3, 21. He was God's great favourite upon that account, 10:2, 5, and had the clearest and highest revelations made to him of the course of providence in the world.

The eighth duty. When you receive any mercy for the church in answer of prayer, give God the glory of it.

The variety of his providences gives us matter for new songs and compositions, Ps. 149:1. What volleys of joyful shouts, what hallelujahs to God do we find upon the ruin of antichrist; Rev. 19:1–3, God calls for praise out of the throne, ver. 5, and the church returns it, ver. 6, 7. It is God rides upon the cherub, it is God that sits upon the wings of the wind, it is God who is in all instruments to quicken their motions and direct them to their scope, Ps. 18:10.

The ninth duty. Imitate God in his affection to the church.

Christ did what he did for the good of his church, God doth what he doth for the advantage of the church. Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ, let the same end be ours which is the end of God. Thus we shall be like our Creator, thus we shall be like our Governor, thus we shall be like our Redeemer. Men take it kindly from others that love those they have a respect for. God loves all that love his people, and blesses them that bless them: Gen. 12:3, 'I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee.'

The tenth duty. Look after sincerity before God.

It is for the security of such that God shews himself strong. No man that fully believes and understands this doctrine but should be glad to be of that happy society, that assembly of the first-born, who are under the care of a watchful eye, and the mighty power of the God of the whole earth. When God chose Israel, the very strangers should for their own interest join with them, Isa. 14:1. And to such as 'take hold of his covenant' he promises to 'give a name in his house that shall not be cut off,' Isa. 56:4, 5; yea, even 'to the sons of the strangers that shall join themselves to the Lord,' ver. 6. Let this encourage us to Christianity. God never encouraged men to be Christians by promises of worldly greatness, but by promises of a constant care of them for their happiness, by promises of making all things work together for their good. If God will shew himself strong for those that are perfect in heart towards him, then he hath no strength for those that are unsound and false in heart towards him. No man hath an interest in his special providence without faith. The power, knowledge, wisdom of God, are all set against him. Though the whole world be in commotions, the earth be removed, and the mountains cast into the depths of the sea, there is no ground of fear to faith; but what buckler against them hath unbelief and hypocrisy? What security against wrath can riches give you? What defence against his power can your potsherd strength afford you? It was not for Job's wealth that God made his boasts of him, but for his

sincerity: Job 1:8, 'Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man?' And for the want of this he loathes a world. Labour therefore for sincerity towards God, beg it of God; get the evidence of it and preserve it.

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