

Monergism

A New Year's Gift

SERIOUS REFLECTIONS ON TIME AND ETERNITY

John Shower

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With some other Subjects, Moral and Divine.

To which is prefixed an Introduction concerning the first Day of the Year, how observed by the Jews, and may best be employed by a serious Christian.

By JOHN SHOWER.

The second Edition Corrected, and very much Enlarged.

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TO THE READER.

The visible Decay of Piety, and Evangelical Holiness, is a common subject of Complaint: and hardly ever more justly than now, with respect to the Generality of Churches, and particular Christians. All serious and considering Persons must needs reckon themselves obliged on that account both to Mourn and Fear. The causes of serious Mourning are too many, and too notorious, to be unobserved by those, who have any Knowledge of the present State of the Christian Religion in Europe, even among the most Reformed. The general unacquaintedness with the Mysteries of the Gospel; the Reproach of the solemn Assemblies by the Corruption of its Doctrines and Worship, and the dishonor cast upon its most sacred Institutions; the late terrible Desolations of the Temple and Sanctuary, and grievous sufferings of our Brethren in many parts of the World; the shameful Apostasy of so many Thousands from the Doctrine and Worship of the Gospel, and other considerations of this kind, which might be named, do carry with them a loud call to Humiliation and Mourning.

But the Practical Degeneracy of Professing Christians unto Worldliness, Profaness, and Sensuality, doth not only afford matter of Lamentation for the present, but too much ground to Fear, that the bitterness of Death is not past; that God 's Anger is not turned

away, or his Controversy ended with the Protestant Churches. And after we have known so many Thousands to renounce and abjure their Religion in an Hour of Temptation, and see so many more (yea the far greatest part,) in a preparedness to Revolt, on the like or lesser Trials, by reason of their vicious Lives, (because they receive not the Truth in the Love of it,) what can we reasonably expect, but further Tokens of Divine Displeasure?

And how little of any encouraging Prospect is there, by the serious Reformation of Persons, Families, and Churches to turn away his Wrath? Where are there any Symptoms of the Recovery of the Power of Godliness, from whence in our Age there is so undeniable a Declension? (And acknowledged by all Parties that there is so.) How little is to be seen of any such thing, among those who are most Forward and Zealous in espousing the Reformed Interest? Even such as would be thought of all others to be most concerned for its Preservation, and have suffered not a little for it?

The distressed case of our Brethren cannot but move our Bowels of Compassion, when we read or hear from time to time the Relation of the barbarous Proceedings of their Persecutors. But the sensual wicked Lives of professedly Reformed Christians, is certainly a more dreadful object to be considered, and ought so to be regarded by us, as the Consequences of it are much more to be feared, than of the fiercest Persecution by open and avowed Enemies. For the Church of Christ never lost either Truth or Holiness that way; it hath rather been a considerable outward Means, for the preservation and increase of Both. Though this cannot be said, but the direct Contrary, concerning Protestants persecuting one another for lesser Differences.

The sad Effects of it have been seen and felt to that degree, in weakening the common truly Christian Interest among us, that now, if ever, there is a louder Call than ordinary to Forbearance, and Forgiveness, and Unity of Affection; that our Divisions, with a revengeful, persecuting Spirit, may not prove our Ruin.

And whatever Expectations we may and ought to have, from the unfulfilled Prophecies, of God's rebuilding Zion, in the latter days, and destroying her Enemies; (which we have no reason to question but he will most gloriously effect, and ought daily to pray that he would hasten it, for his Names sake:) yet can we never hope to see anything considerable of that kind, in our Time, without a great Repentance and Reformation, and the more Plentiful pouring out of the H. Spirit for the healing of the Nations. I therefore wish that the confident expectations of a speedy deliverance of the Church, may not divert us from the present Duty we are called to, as the proper appointed Means, to which God hath directed us for that end.

Before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, what was it that did hinder the Jews from hearkening to the Voice of God and Man for their Preservation; but this Presumption, that at that time their Messiah would come and save 'em? And that Day of the Lord which is expected, (wherein he will plead the Controversy of Zion against Babylon,) how Glorious soever it may be in the Issue, may be, 'tis likely it will be such, as shall disappoint our vain and foolish Hopes concerning it. God will thoroughly purge his Temple, and punish the Men that are at Ease, and settled on their Lees, and tread down the Outer-court of false Professors. Therefore all ranks and degrees of Men should be awakened to serious Repentance.

And are there any hopeful Beginnings of such a Thing, within view? Is there anything on Foot to be observed, like such a retrieving of

Gospel Holiness in the Hearts and Lives of Men? Doth not the Name and Thing grow more and more into Contempt every day? And who can tell how far it may proceed, to procure Judgment upon any particular Place or Country, that is guilty of so general, and provoking a Defection?

It concerns us therefore, everyone to look to himself; to Repent, and do our first Works, and make our Peace with God, that we may be found within the small number of those, who shall be thought worthy to escape the almost Epidemical infection, and to stand before the Son of Man. On which Account, anything that is likely to awaken Men to Consideration of the great acknowledged Principles of Religion cannot be unseasonable. Yea, in such a case the meanest, and weakest Endeavors may be of some use. The Subjects of the following Reflections are most of them of that kind, necessary to be attended to by all sorts of Persons; and so cannot be too often pressed, though in different Manners.

The usefulness of the subject Matter, and the smallness of the Bulk, are two things which are wont to recommend a Book to most Readers. For which reason, I may Hope, this will be read by several, who suffer much better, (because bigger,) books to lie by them neglected. Some may possibly give it the reading, as a New-years gift. And whoever shall be so far persuaded by it as to set apart some Time in the beginning of the Year, for Self-examination, Confession of sin, Repentance, Thanksgiving, and solemn renewal of his Covenant with God, (which several of these Reflections may not only excite to, but are intended to direct and assist him in,) I am persuaded he will thank me for putting him in mind (at least,) of so seasonable an Exercise. The greatest part of these Meditations were begun on a New-years day, though some others are thought fit to be inserted, as tending to promote the same design. But knowing how

much easier it is to stir up other Men's Devotion, than to command and keep alive my own; 'tis desired that the most devout Thoughts contained in these Papers, may be looked upon as what the Author aims at, and would persuade to, rather than what he hath already attained: as what he knows he ought to be and do, and doth seriously endeavor rather than what he is, and hath been: heartily lamenting wherein he hath been Faulty, or defective in such duties, as these, and the like Reflections, do oblige to, and enforce upon All, who shall read them, and therefore much more upon himself.

That they were Penn'd at several times, and in occasional Retirements for Spiritual Exercises, will, with the difference of the Subjects, be a sufficient excuse, that some are larger and others shorter, and that the Style is in some places more neglected than in others. If I may hereby render any Service to the Souls of Men, if any secure Sinner, any Self-deceiving Hypocrite, or backsliding Christian be hereby awakened, or any serious Believer's Devotion be quickened and advanced, I hope God will accept it. To his Blessing I humbly recommend it; for those Ends.

THE INTRODUCTION

From what Time the Jews reckoned the Beginning of their Year: of the difference between their Sacred and Civil Account. The Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the Year, 'its Institution, Nature, and Design: the Traditions and Customs of the Jews respecting that Day.

Upon the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt, the first month which began with the new Moon next to the vernal Equinox, was to be accounted the beginning of Months; it answers to the latter end of our March, and the Beginning of April; and is sometimes called Nisan, and sometimes Abib. It was ordinarily after that Deliverance, reckoned the First month of the year, in their Sacred or Ecclesiastical Account. Therefore the Passover kept in this month, is said to be observed in the first month: and the Feast of Purim, which was kept in our February, is said to be in the last month, that is, of the Sacred year. A Period so remarkable and extraordinary, as that was to the Jews, deserved very well to be particularly remembered and taken notice of: and might justly be accounted the First, or chiefest of their months. And by comparing Exod. 12.41. with Gal. 3.17. it may be concluded that Abraham received the Promise, on the fifteenth day of this month: and 'tis computed that about the same time of the year Isaac was born; and the Tabernacle afterwards erected in the wilderness.

As the Redemption of Israel, from their Bondage in Egypt, was but a Type of a more glorious one by the Messiah, he was pleased to suffer Death in this Month. According to this Computation, the Month Tisri, (which began with the first new Moon next to the Autumnal Equinox) is often called the Seventh Month: but was not so accounted before the Deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. As to Civil and Political Affairs, it was for the most part reckoned the First Month of the year. on this Account, this Month Tisri (which answers to part of our September, and part of October) on the Fifteenth day of the Month was the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Fruits of the Earth were gathered in, and is said to be in the End of the year. Much hath been said by many Learned Men for the date of the Worlds Creation, and the Beginning of the year, from the Vernal Equinox or the Spring; and the Egyptians are alleged as keeping the great

Festival of Aries, or of the New Year, when the Sun enters into Aries. But however uncertain that be, and how difficult to determine it, yet in Autum is Computed by the Jews, the Creation of the World, the Birth of the first Patriarchs, the Reparation of the Tables of the Law, the Dedication of the Temple, the Three Great Solemn Feasts of the Beginning of the Year, and other Remarkable Passages. As many Religious assemblies, and Solemn Feasts were appointed to the Jews in this Month Tisri, as in all the year besides.

That the Birth and Baptism of our Blessed Savior Jesus Christ should be at this time of the Feast of Tabernacles, is as Considerable, as that his Passion should be about the time of the Jewish Passover. He was Sacrificed for us at that time, when by God's appointment the Pascal Lamb was to be offered as his Type: And at the Feast of Tabernacles he came to pitch his Tent in our nature, to tabernacle in our Flesh, and dwell among us. The Scepter was so far gone from Judah that the Jews were compelled by a foreign Power, instead of observing the feast of the Tabernacles at Jerusalem, everyone to repair to his own City to be taxed, as the Emperor Augustus had commanded, (and 'tis not very likely he would appoint that in the depth of Winter, the time of our Christmas) and now was the Season for Shilo to appear.

The Eighty first Psalm, composed by Asaph for the first day of this Month, or the feast of Trumpets, is supposed to have been in Remembrance of that Deliverance out of Egypt: the Sounding of Trumpets being a token of Liberty. This Feast of Trumpets on the First Day of the New Year, according to their Civil Account, is thus commanded, Levite. 23.24. Numb. 29.1. & 10. cap 10. that it should be, a Sabbath, and a Memorial of blowing of Trumpets, a holy Convocation, &c. Some think it is called a Memorial of Trumpets to preserve the memory of Isaac 's Deliverance, by the substitution of a Ram to be sacrificed in his stead; to this purpose it may be alleged

that it is sometimes called by the Jews, the Binding of Isaac: which they suppose to have been in the same day of the year. By others termed Festum Cornu, the Feast of the Horn. But it is more probable, that this name was not given, with any respect to Isaac, but on the account of that kind of Trumpets, which were then sounded, viz. such as were made of sheep's or rams horns. Others think it to have been Appointed as a grateful remembrance of former victories which God had afforded them. Particularly that at Jericho, where was the first opposition they met with in their passage to Canaan, and the walls of the City fell down at the Sound of such Horn-Trumpets; Josh. 6.13, 20. But the most likely account of it is this: That it was intended to solemnize the Beginning of the New Year, to mind them of the Beginning of the World, and to excite their thankfulness for the Fruits and Blessings, and Benefits of the year preceding. The extraordinary Blowing of Trumpets by the Priests at this time, (in all their Cities, as well as at Jerusalem, where two Silver Trumpets were also used at the Temple, as well as these of Horn, and the Levites sung the 81 Psalm) might serve both to stir up the People to bless God for the Favors of the Year past, acknowledging his Goodness in preserving them to the beginning of another; and withal excite them to pray for his Protection and Blessing, for the New Year, on which they now entered.

Maimonides, the famous Jewish Rabbin, thinks the sounding of Trumpets at this time was designed to signify some such Exhortation as this, Arise, O ye sleepers, out of your sleep, and you that slumber awake out of your slumbering. Search your works, and turn by Repentance. Remember your Creator, you that have forgotten the Truth, and have exchanged it for the Vanities of the World; and have all your Lives wandered after Vanity, which will not profit or deliver you. Consider your Souls, consider your Ways, and Works, and let

everyone of you forsake his evil way, and his thoughts that are not good.

Some have imagined a typical Representation of the two Covenants in this Feast. The Old Covenant figured by the Year passed; and the Covenant of Grace, or the Gospel state by the New Year then begun; and that by the sound of Trumpets was prefigured the future Preaching of the Gospel, according to that of the Apostle, Their sound went forth unto all the Earth, and their words unto the end of the World; and so the Feast of Trumpets is abrogated by the Preaching of the Gospel, if that were typically signified by it. The publication of the Gospel is the joyful sound, Psalm 89.15. And Ministers are to lift up their Voice like a Trumpet, Isaiah 58.1. the discharge of their Office as Watchmen, is expressed by setting the Trumpet to their mouth, Hos. 8.1. Ezek. 33. When the Jews shall be converted to the Faith of Christ, it is said, in that day the great Trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come, who were ready to perish, Isaiah 27. ult. 'Twas the Office of the Priests to sound these Trumpets, Numb. 10.8. The public Dispensation of the Gospel is committed to Ministers, set apart for that Work, as the Sons of Aaron for theirs. We read but of two Trumpets at first, for Eleazar and Ithamar, the two Sons of Aaron, Numb. 3.4. But David added many musical Instruments: And in Solomon 's time, at the dedication of the Temple, we read of one hundred and twenty Priests who sounded with Trumpets, 2 Tim. 5.12. Without supposing any Type here, in a strict and proper sense; we may yet farther consider the Parallel, and observe, how the Joy and Gratitude of these Trumpets did excite, is exceeded by that greater rejoicing, promised and foretold by the Prophets, when the glad tidings of the Gospel of Salvation by the Messiah should be published to the World, Isa. 54.1. Luk. 2.11. Gal. 4.27. which hath been in part accomplished: And will be more complete, in that Kingdom of Peace and Purity, which Christ will

establish upon Earth, toward the end of the World: And shall be finally perfected at the end of Time; when Days and Years, and Time (thus measured) shall be no more. When the Messiah our B. Savior, having finished his mediatory undertaking, as to what concerns Earth, shall come again from Heaven, with the Trump of God, to raise the Dead, and summon all the World to their final Judgment. Then shall he deliver up the Kingdom to his Father: And the Faithful enter into the Joy of their Lord, and be forever with him.

There is a Tradition among the Jews mentioned by Maimonides, that on the first day of the New Year, God enters into Judgment for the Sins of the Year and Life past. That every ones Faults are weighed against his good Works. He that is found Righteous is sealed unto Life: And he that is found Wicked is sealed unto Death.

And 'tis a general Custom that hath obtained among the Jews, for the ten first days of the New Year, to rise out of their Beds in the Night, and to continue in their Synagogues praying and worshipping until break of day. The superstitious and ridiculous Ceremonies of the modern Jews on this Day, I shall not repeat. However vain and groundless, superstitious, and absurd many of their Customs, and Practices are on this Day: Yet this blind Devotion of the Jews may justly shame and condemn the Christians of our Age; Who commonly spend the Beginnings of every Year worse than any other parts of them; and instead of any solemn Retirement for Prayer and Meditation, which might assist them to number their Days, and prepare for Eternity; (instead, I say, of such seasonable Exercises) how do vain and hurtful Sports and Pastimes, or trifling and unedifying mirth, and fruitless conversations consume the greatest part of the Days, (and Nights too) of the beginning of the Year! And thus when the first fruits of the Year are offered up to Sin and Vanity, 'tis no wonder if the following parts of it are employed to no better

purpose; without any due concern for the Soul, and an Everlasting State.

To endeavor some Remedy to those disorders, and give some Assistance to them who desire seriously to make Religion their Principal Business, is the end of publishing these Reflections. I most heartily beseech the God of all Grace to influence by his Holy Spirit, the Conscience of every Reader, that some such effect may be attained. Having found the Practice recommended, to be of some use to myself, and my own Heart warmed in composing the substance of these Papers, (though' without any Intention at that Time of exposing them to the World) 'tis not unreasonable to hope, That what hath been beneficial to one, may be helpful to another. It cannot certainly be unadvisable, or improper to Begin the Year with God, with whom we should begin every Day. 'It is decorous and becoming, to Dedicate ourselves to Him, in a more solemn manner than ordinary, at such a Time: Thankfully to acknowledge the Favors and Blessings we have particularly received the Year Past: And to recollect the Sins we have been guilty of: to aggravate them with Humility, Contrition, and deep Remorse: to renew our Covenant with God: to repeat and fortify our Resolutions of living better; imploring his Grace to assist us in it: to reflect seriously on the Mutability, Frailty and Brevity of our present Life: to consider the Swiftmess, Uncertainty, Irrecoverableness, and consequently Value of our Time: to look forward to a Blessed, or Miserable Eternity, one of which we must share in; and to confirm our Faith in the Certainty thereof, and consider our near Approach to such an unchangeable State: to think what Improvement we should make at the Death of others, especially of Relations, and Friends, who have lately been called home: To make the Supposition in good earnest, that we may follow them this Year, and die before another New Years-Day; to imprint such a Thought on our Hearts, and the Inferences that may

naturally be deduced from it: to beg of God, to enable us to Redeem our Time, and discharge the Duty of our particular places; and prepare us for all the Events of the following Year; and so effectually Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our Hearts unto true Wisdom; lest we be surprised by an Unexpected Death before the period of another Year. And lastly, to pray for our Relations and Friends, Families and Neighbors, and our Enemies too; and plead with God on the behalf of Zion, and the afflicted and deformed state of the Protestant Churches. To some of these, and the like Purposes, I hope what is here offered, may be subservient; if considered with Seriousness and Application, after humble Invocation of the Blessing of God, and the aids of his Spirit; composing our Minds and Thoughts, as in his most awful and holy Presence.

I have only this to request: That if any shall find any real Benefit in this kind; he would so far requite my charitable Assistance of him, that when his Heart is most serious, his Spirit most composed and devout, and his Affections most vigorous and lively, he would not forget, to put up one Prayer to Heaven for me, for Greater Holiness and Abilities to Honor God, and persevering Faithfulness to his Truth and Interest, whatever Temptations to desert it may be employed by the World, the Flesh and the Devil: the three Great Enemies of thine and my Salvation.

**DEVOUT REFLECTIONS ON TIME
AND ETERNITY,
THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT.**

I.

**Of the Changeable State, and Short
Duration of Earthly Things;**

Especially of Man, how little is considered and believed: how necessary it should be.

When I consider that yesterday was the conclusion of the last year, and that I now am entered on another; 'tis seasonable to reflect on the mutable Condition, and short Duration of all Thing in this World, which are measured by Time. That as they have their Beginning, so they have their End: And that the distance, or space of Time between the one and the other is very little. Let me not then, O my Soul! Rejoice and please myself too much in New Enjoyments, remembering a Change may be at hand, and the End is certain.

Many who were Rich and Flourishing the last year, may be reduced to Poverty and deep distress, before the end of this: who are now in a capacity to relieve others, within a few months, or a shorter space, may be objects of other Men's charity. The thing which hath been, is that which may be; and that which hath been seen in one year, may

happen in another; so easily, so quickly may a Change be made! Riches may unexpectedly change their Owners, and borrow wings of a thousand Accidents, wherewith to fly to Heaven for a new Disposal. They therefore who possess, should be as if they possessed not; for the Fashion of this world passeth away. Innumerable casualties may effect that change, which no human Art or Skill can possibly foresee or hinder. Afflictive unexpected evils attend us everywhere: we cannot promise ourselves Tranquility for a Day, much less one Year to come. They lay in wait for us on every side, enter at every crevice, and commonly overtake us, when we are least apprehensive of their approach. Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of Trouble: He cometh up as a flower, and is cut down: fleeth as a shadow and continueth not. What then are Riches, Beauty, Strength, and Honor, the accidents of this Substance, which is itself but a Shadow! How false is the Hope of Man, and how frail is all his glory! One day can make an end of all his Riches and Honors. And yet what solicitude, care and labor, to get what we desire of these things (though often we do not need 'em) and then to keep what we have gotten, and then to increase it, and then to defend it, and at last to enjoy it, and in a moment it is snatched from us, or we from it. His Life is but a vapor, on which they all depend; then how much less are they? To how speedy an alteration are they subject! What numberless Instances of this doth one years experience furnish! What saddening Disappointments and unexpected Calamities have befallen many since this Day Twelve-month! And multitudes who are now at ease, and think their mountains too strong to be removed, shall meet with sharper Trials before the end of this year. Alas! How few consider or believe it, till they find it so? All men should count upon trouble and disappointment, suffering and sorrow in this world; and he that hath the least share, is reckoned the most prosperous man; and yet he knows not how soon his Portion may be doubled. We reckon our Joys by the absence of some degrees of

Sorrow and Calamity that others meet with; and before the end of this year, our condition may be as disconsolate as theirs. O my Soul! Though I know this to be true; though I cannot, I dare not deny it; yet how difficult is it to conquer the Love of this World, and of this Body, to that degree I ought! To undervalue the interest of a short, a mutable, uncertain and troublesome Life, in comparison of the permanent possession of an everlasting Good! Though I know that what is earthly and temporal must needs be thus changeable and fading; and that it is as true of Man himself as of anything under the Sun; yet how do I forget what Man is! Not only mutable in his State, his Body, and his Life, but in his Mind too, so as to love and hate, to choose and neglect, to delight in, and abhor, such things at one time as he did not before. He doth not pass the same Judgment, nor retain the same Affections at one time as at another. How do I live, as if all this were as certainly false, as it is unquestionably true? Admire, love, fear, trust in Man, as if he were the direct Contrary to what he is, and seek for Immortality upon Earth, and act as if I were assured of it, and were not liable to any Change; though I acknowledge and know the contrary. Though the last years Experience, and the observation of every day doth convince me of it; though all History, and all the Records of the Grave attest it; though all Mankind in every Age have found it so; though it be a manifest notorious Truth, legible in the various changes and calamities, but especially in the dust and ashes of all who have lived before us (our Graves being often made of our Predecessors Dust, and the Earth we bury in having once been living) yet how little is it believed, how seldom considered! The Confirmation of it which one year gives us, hath little influence on our hearts or lives, with respect to the next. We ought therefore to accustom ourselves to these thoughts, before such changes happen, to which our Final change shall ever long succeed. They will be less efficacious, if never admitted till our minds are oppressed and feebled by the weight of Affliction. We shall then want

that vigor of Reason which should co-operate with the Remedy; and which, if used beforehand, would help to support and stay our minds under all subsequent Revolutions. For those Considerations may be able to fix and stay our minds under Changes, that may not be sufficient to recover and raise our Spirits after they are dejected and fallen.

II.

Of the Change in Men's Inclinations, Opinions, and Actions which one year shows;

How observable it is in Others: how much more discernible in our Selves. Honor and Reputation, &c. how uncertainly preserved, and how easily blasted.

What a discovery doth one Year make of the Mutability of Man, not only of his outward Condition, but of the Man himself, his Temper, his Practice, his Inclinations, his Aversions, &c. He abideth not at one stay; every breath of wind turns him to another shape. We despise today, that which we admired yesterday; and tomorrow hate the object of our present love. We begin Friendships, and cancel them on slight occasions; And a mortal Enmity often succeeds to a tender Affection: The very Persons who are in one year our darling Friends, and possibly deserved to be so, may yet be open Enemies the next, and seek our Ruin. Lord! What is Man? How deceitful and mutable the Heart of Man! We know not what other Men are, or will prove to be till a trial; and we are equally ignorant concerning

ourselves till an hour of Temptation. How patiently do we think we could bear Afflictions till we feel them! How partial and mistaken a Judgment do we make of our Wisdom and Strength in reference to the future! We counsel others to Submission and Resignation in the most difficult trials, and wonder they complain so loud; when we ourselves despond and sink under half their Burthen; and send up our more impatient murmurs to Heaven, when God thinks fit to prove us by a lighter Stroke. We censure and condemn Others, who are in a higher Station, and are called to more difficult work than we; when by a little Advancement, and the like Temptations, we discover that we are as bad as they. They who were reputed Humble, Temperate and Religious, when they have been Exalted higher, become proud sensual, and ungodly. Had some been told a Twelve month since, what now they are, and speak, and act, they would have made Hazael 's Answer, Am I a Dog, that I should do this? A change in the public Affairs of the State, and by that means of particular Interests, or some Alteration of our own private Circumstances (calling us to new Duties, and exposing us to new Temptations) discovers us more to ourselves, and to other Men, than was expected, and proves us to be very different from what we appeared to be. Such a change, for Instance, as from Poverty to Riches, from Sickness to Health, from Obscurity to Honor, from Privacy to a Public charge, &c. or on the contrary. Men cannot bear the weight of Temporal Happiness, but Riches and Honors make us to be Other Men, than before we seemed to be. How weak a thing is Man! That cannot carry his own Wishes, without falling under them: That cannot prosper in his designs, without being changed in the Temper of his mind, upon every success. So true is it that Man in Honor is like the Beast that perisheth; And changed ordinarily for the worse, as to serious Religion. May we not fear, that some, who a year since dared not live a day in the neglect of Closet and Family Devotion, do now omit it, for many Days and Weeks together? And that some, who once were

careful to improve the whole Sabbath to religious purposes, now place the whole of their Religion in attending the public Worship, and think it enough, not for that Day only, but for the whole Week. Under the Afflicting hand of God, or some Apprehensions of an approaching change, or sense of guilt upon great Transgressions, the Convictions of Sin are lively, Conscience is sensible and awake, Affections warm, Resolutions strong, &c. But alas! How soon doth the case alter! Our Spirits cool, our Zeal abates, our good Purposes untwist and die, and come to nothing. By degrees we return to Folly, and boldly venture on that Sin, we lately trembled at. Through the want of continued smart Afflictions, or of a serious awaking Ministry, and friendly faithful Admonition; or through the Temptations of vain Company, and the remaining power of fleshly Lusts. So that we falsify our most sacred Promises and Resolutions, violate our holy Vows, cancel the bonds of God upon us, suffer the Devil to re-enter, and prevail again, to take possession of our hearts, and yield ourselves an easy prey to his Temptations, till our latter end be worse than our Beginning. Oh what a change doth one year let us see! In Persons as well as things! In ourselves as well as other Men! And as it is with Man himself, so with everything that he Values himself upon, or for which he is esteemed by others; and even his Esteem and Reputation is also changeable and uncertain. Not to Instance in Riches, but in what is nobler, Learning, and the Improvements of the Mind by study; how soon may the violence of a Disease disturb or stupefy the Brain to that degree, as shall reduce the greatest Scholar to the pitied Condition of a Fool or Bedlam? And where is his Reputation and Renown, in such a Case? But much less than that will blast the fairest Reputation, with the far greatest part of the world: It may be lost by unwary mistakes, by false reports, by envy and Malice, by the subtle hatred of Enemies, or by the weakness and credulity of Friends, (who will listen to every Backbiters story) or by one or two Indiscretions of the man himself; and no man can be certain to

secure his Reputation whilst he lives; much less after he is dead. Who can content all men, however he live? And who is well spoken of by all when he is dead? Who is so esteemed, that some do not despise him? The wisest Conduct cannot hinder but some will judge hardly and a miss.

How vain and faulty is an Ambition to be talked of after we are dead, which will be but by very few, and that very differently, and but for a little while. There is no Remembrance of former things, neither shall there be of things to come, with those that shall come after, Eccles. 1.11. For how little a while do the proudest Monuments last, that are set over the rotten Flesh and Bones of many, to preserve their Memory? God hath promised, 'tis true, that the Righteous shall be had in everlasting Remembrance; but it must be understood so far only as the frame and state of this World, and the Revolutions and Vicissitudes of Time will permit. But what Good can it do us, farther than the Interest of God's Glory, and the Good of others is concerned in it? The Blessed will not need it, and the Damned have no advantage by it. And no Endeavors can be certain of Success: For People will talk of us as they please; and their Opinions very often change from one Extreme to the other. But he who hath the loudest Fame, shall only be talked of a little longer than his Neighbors; and that by a few dying Men, that must themselves be ere long forgotten. And how small a part of the inhabited World, is acquainted so much as with the Name of the greatest men in Europe? And how different and contrary are men's Opinions and Discourses of them, where they are known and talked of? And how many holy excellent Persons are buried in Oblivion, or mis-represented as unworthy to live on Earth, whose Names will be found in the Book of Life? Our Life is yet as mutable and uncertain as any of theirs. The Time is hastening when we shall be too old to Live, but at any time we are old enough to Die. Our Breath is in our Nostrils, and though there be room enough for it

to go out, we have no assurance that we shall have power to draw it in again.

III.

Of the Uncertainty of Living to the Period of another Year.

The Vanity of this Life: The Swiftmess of Time, and how to be improved.

I now begin another Year: But what Assurance have I to out-live it? I cannot say how soon my Sovereign Judge may call me hence, and summon me to appear before his Righteous Bar. O let me not defer my necessary Preparation for Death, which may be nearer than I imagine! Let me mind the Great things first, which are of absolute necessity to be done, some time or other before I die. This perishing Body which I have pampered and indulged, at the expense of so much Cost and Time, may be putrefying in a silent Grave, before half this Year be past. Lord! Bless this thought, to awaken my diligent endeavors to secure the Blessedness of Eternity! To mortify the Desire of Great things for myself, in future Years, by the considered possibility of dying before the end of this! Let me look into the Graves of others, and consider that this may quickly happen to me, and must ere long be my own case: Let me think what this Body will shortly be, when it hath been six or eight days separated from my Soul; how vile? How loathsome? That I may despise the Beauty, and be dead to the Pleasures of the Body, which so easily, so suddenly, so strangely may be changed. For no Glass is more brittle, no Bubble

more vanishing, no Ice more dissolving, no Flower more fading, no Shadow less substantial, no Sleep or Dream more deceiving, no Sound more transient, nothing more vain and more uncertain than Life, on which all other things in this World depend. My days are as nothing, saith Job, though they lasted above two Ages. There is hardly anything very Frail and Fading, Mutable and Uncertain, but the Spirit of God in Scripture sets forth the Vanity of Life by; as if he would teach us by it, from the Light of every perishing Object, which our Eyes behold, to reflect on our own Mortality. We sleep every Night, in the outer Chambers of Death: And in some Diseases Sleep, which is the image and Picture of Death, is taken away, to give place to the Original, and make way for death. And every year, every week, every day are hastening to our final Change; which may overtake us ere we are aware. Every day we lose some part of our Lives; in our very growth from Infancy to Manhood, our Life decreases and grows less. Every Pulse and Breath doth tell us we are hastening to the End of Time, and calls upon us to dispatch our Work. Every Word we speak, is formed of that Breath whereby we live; and we may not live to pronounce another Sentence, but the Lamp of Life may be extinguished and blown out by a sudden Blast. Everything we do, carries away some Sands of our little Glass of Time; and how little may remain? Or how soon may the Glass be broke? Our Souls are in our Bodies, as a little Air enclosed in a thin Bubble; how easily is that broken, and where are we? How many who are now alive, in health and vigor, who deliberate on their Meat and Drink, and are curious of Air and Exercise, to maintain themselves in Health, and please themselves with the Dream of Years to come, shall never see another New-years-day? It may be not another month, or week or morrow? Many have promised themselves great things on the morrow, but died before Night: Let me not say, I shall not die this Day, when I may this Hour; and 'tis but once for all, there is no amending an ill Death, by another Trial.

When I lie down to sleep, I hope to rise stronger and fresher, and fitter for work; but I know withal, I may rise no more. And may not my Name be on the Roll of those who shall next be called, at least some time this Year? Let me not then neglect or foolishly delay my Principal Business, to provide against a Change, which is inevitable, but the time of it altogether doubtful. Ought not my first and chiefest Care be employed to make my Peace with God, (He alone can be my Happiness; to his final Judgment I am hastening: His Favor alone can give me support and Joy in a dying Hour: To his Mercy I must trust, when I leave this World, and can have no advantage more by anything in it:) that he may mercifully receive my Soul at Death and be my Everlasting Portion? Do I know my Life is thus vain and transient, and shall I not seriously improve it to such a Purpose? Shall these Thoughts leave no Impression upon me? Do I breathe continually in this Element of Vanity, and yet forget where I am, and remain insensible of so near a Change? Shall these Thoughts pass away as a vanishing Cloud, and distil no softening drops on my Soul? Shall the Image of Death, which meets me everywhere, be only like an appearing Ghost or Phantasm, that startles and scares a little, but is presently gone, and no more considered? O! let me now remember to make God my Friend, and secure an interest in his Eternal Mercy, while the Day lasts; yea, while my Reason and Understanding are free, and not disturbed and clouded by Fear and Pain, and the Disorders of the Body, as commonly they are in Sickness, if God should vouchsafe me that Warning, which yet I may not promise myself to have, for I may be cut off by a Sudden Stroke, before the end of this Year, I now begin.

And how great and necessary a Work have I to do in so short and so uncertain a Portion of Time? Endless joy or Misery will be the consequence of spending this present Time. My ignorant Soul must be instructed, my carnal Heart renewed, many false Opinions must

be unlearnt, and sinful Customs changed, and powerful Lusts mortified, and strong Temptations overcome, and many Graces to be obtained, exercised, strengthened and preserved, to please and serve, and gratify an Holy Omnipresent God, my Sovereign; and express the Thankfulness of my Heart and Life to Christ my Savior; and is all this nothing? Is not all my little hasty Time too little for such a Work? To prepare for a safe and comfortable Death in order to a blessed Eternity?

IV.

Of the seeming Difference, between so many Years Past, and the same number of Years to come.

When I look back on the preceding Years of my Life, how easily can I grasp them all at once? They are even as Yesterday when 'tis past. But so many Years to come hath something great and vast, which fills my Thoughts, and affects my Mind, after another manner. Such is the difference between past Enjoyments, and the Expectation of future. Let me suppose the same term and duration of Years, and yet how different are my Apprehensions of what is past, and of what is yet to come! Things past by a remembrance of some remarkable Passages, when they happened, seem to be present with me: But not knowing what may happen in the same number of Years to come, I have nothing whereon to fix my Thoughts. Or the Reason of this Difference may rather be, that Men in this degenerate & necessitous State (with unsatisfied Desires reaching after Happiness, and sensible nothing present can afford it, and knowing by Experience

that nothing past could have done it, (are eagerly desirous of Felicity; and because we know not but what is to come may procure it, we hope it will; which makes the Time seem long by reason of our Expectation and Desire of Good. Whereas the foresight of Evil, and the Expectation of that, some years hence, makes the Time rather seem short and near at hand: So many years to come, in the expectation and desire of Good, are long and tedious; such Hope deferred makes the Heart sick; even though 'tis of that sort as must needs fail our expectations. Prepare me, Lord! For what thine unerring Counsel shall please to order, as to the remainder of my time on Earth; and suffer me not to count upon a great number of Years to come, since this, for ought I know, may be my last; neither let me expect Rest and Happiness in this World, which nothing Temporal can afford. This is not the state or season, wherein, by any promise of God, I am encouraged to hope it. And if fifty or threescore years to come, be thought so great a matter, and really is so, as to our stay on earth; Oh what apprehensions ought I to admit concerning an endless, everlasting State! Especially being as certain of the latter, after Death, as I am uncertain about the former; whether so many Years be yet to come before my Death. Let me not hereafter be so preposterous in any Solicitude, Cares and Fears, as to be anxious for to Morrow, and yet be thoughtless of Eternity.

V.

The little Portion of our Time on Earth considered,

By a Computation of the Life of Man, from the number of Years and Hours.

Think, O my Soul! How short is that Life at longest, made up of Years and Months, and Days; such little parts, and yet in number few. Well therefore may it be expressed, as I find in Holy Writ by Years of number, That is, such as may soon be numbered. When a few Years are come, saith Job, (or the Years of number, as in the Original) I shall go the way, whence I shall not return. By the years of a Hireling, which were not above three, Is. 16.14. We usually compute Threescore and ten Years, to the Life of Man: Let me suppose four score. The Bed with most employs one half; and hardly one in thirty doth reach the Age of Seventy Years. And they who live to such an Age, do yet complain how soon 'tis done. Ignorant Child-hood and heedless Youth, and infirm old Age, may be supposed to take up a third part of that Time. In either of them very little of the great Ends of Life are answered. We ordinarily begin to reckon our Lives from our Birth; whereas for a good while after we know not whether we are alive or no, but are beholding to others to make the account for us. When we first come to the steady use of Reason, or what we call the Years of Discretion; how few are there but from the Prejudices of Education, from the Corruption of Human Nature, from the want of Experience, from the Infection of bad Company, how few, I say, but spend their younger Years in those things, which afterwards they are ashamed of, when Experience hath taught them the Wisdom of Men? How great a part of our remaining Time is taken up in the Necessities of Nature about Food and Rayment, and in lawful Cares, to support the Body? And how much more than needs, in pampering, dressing and adorning it? Out of the small remainder, how much is employed in the concerns of a Family and near Relations, in particular Callings, in necessary Civil Business, and in getting, keeping or improving an Estate? Besides all the Time that is spent in

Recreations, Visits, unprofitable Discourse, impertinent Thoughts, Journeys, Sickness, and innumerable other Occasions, some allowable, some unavoidable, and many needless? After this, how little Time remains wherein to cultivate and improve our Minds, by Languages, Arts and Sciences, or the knowledge of a Trade, &c. How little then after all, may we say, is left for the matters of Religion? For Devotion to God, and serious preparation for another World? Alas! How small a number of Years make up the Life of Man! And how small a Portion of that is employed about the Principal Business, for which we were born, and for which we live? We divide Time into Past, Present and Future: But the Past is not now ours; the Future is not yet, and the Present now is past, ere the sound be pronounced. And yet this is all the Time allotted us, wherein to secure the Blessedness of Eternity. How many Hours more of our little Time might be improved than commonly are by the Best? In every Year there are 8775 Hours: If we allow the greatest half for Sleep and necessary attendance on the Body, and take but 4000 Hours for our Work and Business of consequence: How poor an account can most Men give of all these 4000 Hours in every Year? Not one hour in seven, not one in ten, is ordinarily devoted to God, and the purposes of Religion. Should it not affect us, seriously to consider this? Especially if we remember, at what an uncertainty we are, how small a number of Days and Hours do yet remain. This Year, this Month, this Week, this Day or Hour may be my last. What an unsuspected Accident or a sudden Disease may do, I know not: But this I know, that there is scarce anything that hath not killed some Body; a Hair, a Feather, a Vapor, a Breath hath done it, and when the Apostle James asks the Question, What is your Life? He answers, It is even a Vapor, that appeareth a little while, and then vanisheth away.

VI.

Of the Redemption of Time

How precious and valuable a Treasure it is, and will be thought to be,
when 'tis too late.

Is the Life of Man so short and fleeting, our Days on Earth so few, and so uncertain, how careful should I be to manage every Hour; endeavoring to match the Swiftness of Time by my celerity and diligence to improve it? I can have no Business of greater or of equal Moment to mind, than to secure the Happiness of my Soul in another World. And shall I lavish my Time, and lose my Pains about things unnecessary? What will all other Business signify in the end, if this be neglected? Is there any Interest more weighty, that calleth me from such work? Is there anything else that so well deserves my Time? That may be put into the Scales, or weighed in a balance against this? Shall Eternity, which comprehends all Time, have the least share of my Time allotted for its concernments? How little a part of my Time hath been hitherto employed in such work! How reasonable, how necessary is it to redeem the little Inch of Time that yet remains, but hastens to a Period? For as there is no Covenant to be made with Death, so no Agreement for the Arrest and Stay of Time; it keeps its pace whether I redeem and use it well or not. The greatest part of our Life is designedly employed to avoid Death; we eat and drink, and sleep, and labor, and rest, that we may not die; and yet even by these we hasten to Death. Every Breath, every Pulse, every Word leaves one less of the number which God hath appointed me, and carries away some Sands of the Glass of Time; and yet how little care is taken to employ it well? We seldom value it, till we can no longer use it to any advantage; and though we know it can neither

be retarded in its motion, or recalled when past, yet of nothing are we more prodigal. Yea, how many complain of it as a Burden, and know not what to do with their Time, are exceedingly at a loss wherein to employ it, what to do to be rid of it? But alas! How near is that Change, when they shall think nothing too dear to purchase some few Grains of that Sand, which now seem too many, while they are passing through their Hour-glass? How sad will be the review of our lost and ill-spent Time? How different an Opinion of its Value shall we have on a sick-Bed, or when our Time and Hope is gone? How many Weeks, and Days, and Hours, O my Soul, have I trifled away in Sloth and Idleness, in foolish Mirth, and hurtful Company, in vain Thoughts and impertinent Discourse, in excess of Sleep, and needless Pastimes, Feastings, inordinate Care to adorn the Body, or gratify the sensual Appetite? All that which is past is irrecoverable; and the little remainder flies apace. How quickly will it be gone? How soon, how suddenly may an unexpected Stroke of Death conclude it? And yet this is all the opportunity I shall ever have to make my Peace with God, and prepare for the everlasting World. Did we consider it as we ought, we should not foolishly throw away so much of it in Trifles and things impertinent, or what is worse: How much more might we redeem than commonly we do? To how much better purpose might we husband it? How much more work might we do, were we never idle, or did not loiter? We might walk far, did we not often stand still, or go out of our way. We see it plainly by the great and excellent Effects of some few men's Industry in every Age. Art hath found mean to set Spies and Watches as it were on the Sun, that he cannot look out, but they take hold of his Shadow, and force it to tell how far he is gone that day; and yet while we are curious in making Time give a just account of itself to us, how little do we consider the account of our Time which we must shortly give to God? Oh that such a Thought might effectually persuade me to redeem it! That I may not tarry till the end of Time to know the worth of it! Let

me not undervalue it, while tis given me to be used, that I may not eternally regret my Folly, when Time shall be no more.

God calls me to Diligence and Labor; the Work he calls me to is excellent, and the Reward glorious; to know, and love, and serve, and obey him, in order to eternal Life; and shall I yet be idle? Is this the Use and End of all my Time? And do I know it and believe it? Do I indeed believe it, and yet delay and loiter, and waste my precious Hours in vanity? Am I going into Eternity, and entering into another World, and know that I must be in Heaven or Hell for ever, and have I Time to throw away? Am I fit to die, and to appear before my Judge, or am I not? Am I made meet for Heaven by pardoning Mercy, and sanctifying Grace? Have I the Earnest of the Spirit to witness and assure me of it? Is my Interest in the Promise of Eternal Life as firm, and my Evidence of it as clear as it may be made? Am I not conscious to myself, that much of this necessary Work is yet to be done? And shall such an unprepared Soul as mine be careless and indifferent how I spend my Time?

VII.

Of the Ordinances of Heaven, Day and Night, Summer and Winter, Seed Time and Harvest

Their order and succession established by God, is the effect of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. What they may teach us.

When I consider the beginning of another Year, I can hardly avoid reflecting of its several parts, Summer and Winter, Spring and Fall, Day and Night, and their alternate Turns. This calls me to observe and admire his Eternal Power and Godhead, Wisdom and Truth who is the Great Author of this admirable variety; Who hath fixed the Earth with his Foot, and hanged it on nothing. and settled the Luminaries of Heaven for Excellent Ends: The Sun to Rule by day, and the Moon by Night, thereby to distinguish Times and Seasons, to separate Day and Night, Winter and Summer, and consult the convenience of Man and Beast by their due succession. The Day is thine, the Night also is thine, thou makest Summer and Winter: How wonderful is their Order, Beauty and constant course, that when the Sun withdraws, and the shadows of the Evening cover the Earth with darkness, to conclude the Day; the Moon and Stars supply the place of the absent Sun during the Night: and that though they differ in length, yet gradually lessen till they are both equal at the years end, and have made the same Circuit. How excellent a work of God is that quick succession to one another?

The supposition of a perpetual night, is a dismal gloomy Thought. O what will the Everlasting Darkness of the Infernal Prison be! The Sun by day enlightens the Earth, directs our motion, guides our way, governs our Travail, assists Conversation, awakens Industry, warms the Earth and Air, gives life, and vigor, and fruitfulness to all things under the Sun, and makes the whole Inferior Creation to rejoice. An Emblem of God's universal Goodness, who is kind to all his Creatures. How admirable is its Luster! How glorious is its Light! How loudly doth it proclaim his Power and Wisdom! Who made this, and the other Lights of Heaven, his powerful Word, and preserves them hitherto by his daily Providence. If God be now so glorious, contemplated in his works, considered in the luster of the created Sun, viewed only through the Windows of Sense; how much more

glorious will he appear hereafter, when we shall see him face to face, and nothing interpose betwixt us and his incomparable Light! If mine Eyes dazzle to look upon the meridian Sun, in what inaccessible Light must he dwell, who is the Father of Lights? If this lower World, the common receptacle of his Friends and Enemies, have so much of his Glory vouchsafed them by the Heavenly Bodies; O what a place will Heaven be, where shall be no Sun or Moon nor need of any, but the Glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb be the Light thereof? While I thus consider the Sun and the Day, I must not think the Night is useless, which discovers another part of the Heavens, not discernible by Day, viz. the Stars and Planets, refreshing the Earth, cooling the Air, giving necessary Rest to the Creatures &c. their order, motions, aspects, oppositions, influences, are all useful, and instructive. The agreeable mixture of Light and Darkness, the regular succession of Day and Night within a few hours are exceeding wonderful and advantageous. In other parts of the World, where the Sun beams are more direct and its Heat excessive, God hath made amends by the length of the night, (under the Equinoctial Line it is always Twelve hours) and in the more Northern parts, where the Influence of the Sun is weaker, the days are proportionably longer. So good is God to all his Creatures, in all parts of the world! As the Morning and Evening answer to the day of Twenty four hours; so doth Spring and Autumn to the Twelve Months of the Year, that we may not pass immediately from one extreme to another; but gradually be disposed for so great a change, as is between Summer and Winter, and Winter and Summer. So merciful and gracious, and infinitely wise is God in all his Works! So that we cannot say, one part of the Year is more necessary than another. The winter is as useful for the good of the Universe, as the summer: In this we are supplied with what is necessary to maintain us in that, and the admirable situation of the Sun, (most probably) in the Center of the World, seems much to contribute to it. If it had been at a farther

distance from us, our earth would have been in a manner desolate; because the influence of the Sun could not have been considerable: And if it had been nearer, the Stars above would have wanted Light, and this Earth under, been burnt up. The Excellent order which it hath now obeyed for above six Thousand Years, is also wonderful. The Sun never stood still but once, and that by a miracle; Tho much inferior to that of its daily Progress. What a subject is here to admire the Power, Goodness, Wisdom, and Faithfulness of God? Lord! What is Man! For whom thou dost all this? And because I find every year that the Day dies into Night, the Summer into Winter, and herbs and plants lose their beauty and verdure, and shed their blossoms; may I not hence learn to consider and prepare for my own approaching Change? In prosperity, health, and ease, and life, to expect, and make provision for trouble, sickness, pain, and Death? As every wise man in Summer would do for Winter; and work all my might, while it is called today, while the Light continues, because the Night of darkness is at hand, when none can work.

VIII.

Of Evils to be expected in this Year

The Wisdom and Mercy of God, in concealing from us the knowledge of future Events.

Not only few, and uncertain, but Evil likewise are the days of the Years of my Life, may everyone say, with the Patriarch Jacob. A sufficient portion of Evil for every year may well be expected, when our Lord tells us, there is a certain measure allotted for every day.

Sufficient to the day is the evil of it. Not only is our Life short, but troublesome, full of vexatious Mixtures. We cannot sing a Requiem to our Souls, when one great Calamity is past; for we know not, in this Region of Changes, but another, a greater may be at hand. One Messenger of ill News may succeed and out-do another, as it was with Job. We come weeping into the World in a most helpless forlorn state; and if we escape the dangers of Infancy, and the casualties of Childhood; and after that, out-live the Snares and Follies of Youth, We are tossed upon the Pikes of Time and Chance, and sadden and disquiet ourselves with a thousand Grievs and Sorrows, by inevitable and unexpected occasions; though we increase the number of needless Cares and Fears, and Discontents; Till at length a sudden stroke arrests us, we fetch a groan, and die. Who can give a Catalogue of the Afflictions and Calamities, Perplexities and Disappointments, Incumbrances, Crosses, and evil Accidents of Human Life? By means whereof Millions are disconsolate and sad, mourn and complain, weep and sigh, and from day today are fed with the Bread of Affliction, and the water of Adversity. Not to mention men's fluctuating restless Thoughts of Heart, importunate Desires, baffled Projects, defeated Purposes, which suppose or bring vexation. A good share of these is not to be avoided; and yet very few can be particularly foreseen. Who could prognosticate a year ago the Mercies or the Evils, which have happened since? Public and private, personal and relative, to the Countries, Cities, Families and Persons we are concerned for? And who can certainly foretell the Events of this ensuing Year? God hath intermixt Good and Evil in the Life of Man: He hath set Prosperity against Adversity, saith Solomon, to the end, that Man should find nothing after him. Eccles. 7.14. that he may not know what shall come next, whether a Prosperous or a Calamitous Event. What a change may be made in a year by the mere Casualty of human Events? By the treachery of Friends, or the malice of Enemies, or the more immediate Hand of God? We know not what

shall be on the Morrow, much less what a twelve Month may produce. Because whatever may be disposed to happen, from natural causes, or civil counsels, may be altered by a particular decree of Providence. Prepare me Lord! And every of those in whose Felicity I more especially take part, for all the Calamities and Sorrows, thine infinite Wisdom shall think fit to exercise us with, this following year: and by thy merciful Providence, and gracious Conduct, cause them to work for Good: Furnishing us with suitable strength and wisdom, to acquiesce in thy good Pleasure, and obey thy Will. Let me follow thee, as the Father of the Faithful, 'though I know not whither thou wilt lead me. Knowing the wisdom and faithfulness of my Pilot, let me therein be satisfied, though I know not particularly what course he will steer. I thank thee, O Heavenly Father! That thou hast reserved the knowledge of future Times and Seasons to thyself, and hid Events from Men; Lest by considering them Certain, we should presume in case they are Good; or should despairingly afflict ourselves, by foreseeing the Evil we know, to be inevitable. Did we certainly foreknow the Good that would befall us, we should not Trust in thee to bring it to pass, or heartily implore thy Care and Conduct. Did we foresee the Evils we shall suffer, before they overtake us, we should be overwhelmed with diffidence and Despair. Many a Mother who rejoiceth at the Birth of a Son, would mourn to foresee what a Man, what a Son he will prove. Such an increase of Knowledge would increase our Sorrow; such a Prescience would transport and discompose us, by unseasonable Joys and Sorrows, born out of Time; make us remiss in our Duty to Thee; and weaken our Dependance on thine own unerring Wisdom, Truth, and Power.

IX.

The Supposition of dying this Year, should be improved

The consequence of redeeming Time, and providing for Eternity farther pressed. The Folly of Elder Persons is condemned and checked from the Example of Children. 'It is advisable to familiarize the Thoughts of Death, and to imagine beforehand what Apprehensions of things we shall then have.

The longest Life is but a day multiplied; and who can certify or assure me, which will be my last? He only who was God as well as Man, could say, Mine Hour is not yet come. Is all my Life given me to resolve this Question, Whether I shall be in Heaven or Hell for Ever? And have I any time to lose, and squander away, as superfluous? Have I anymore than needs? It is no impossible or unreasonable Supposition to make, that I may die this year. Let me admit that Thought, and imagine myself on a Bed of Sickness, wearied with Pain, and ready to leave this World: the Physicians gone, despairing of my recovery: my Friends about me weeping: and all things in a doleful melancholy Posture, suited to such a state; feeling within myself the presages of Death; expecting the final stroke, in an hour or two more: What is then the value of sensual Pleasures? Can I then relish or savor them? What then is Honor to me, who shall never go abroad more to receive it, till carried to my Grave? Will it then comfort me to have lived in Reputation, and Applause, if my Heart was not humble under it, and the Honor of God promoted by it? Can Riches and a great Estate support me, when I am just packing up for a removal to the other World? In that hour will it be any satisfaction, to have made a stir and noise for a few years upon Earth, to be talked of for a while longer than other Men? Are these the things my dying thoughts will be most concerned to reflect on? These dignities,

pleasures, and possessions offered to a dying Man, would rather upbraid than tempt him; they come too late, as a Princes Pardon to a Man whose Head is off. Die I must, and appear before my Judge, to answer for all that I have received and done in the Body. Fool that I was, (shall I then too justly say to myself,) not to have considered this much sooner! Not to have provided for it at a better rate! My Sins stare me in the face, my Conscience tells me I am not ready for such a Trial: I have lived a stranger to such thoughts as now I cannot refuse, and which should have been admitted sooner. But if to such a state any hope of Mercy may be granted, (though it be unspeakably little,) yet I cannot promise myself any such warning by sickness. The sleeping Virgins were called at Midnight, and so may I. Where can I pitch my Tents on Earth to be secure against a sudden remove? Lord! Make these Thoughts effectual to prevent my loss of precious Time, which at such a season, will be esteemed precious, though now it be not. O how swift, how short is my Time of Trial in order to Eternity! How difficult, how important a work is it to prepare for an Everlasting State! What is all this World, how little, how mere a nothing, to a departing Soul! And shall I after such Reflections, continue to pursue shadows, and please myself with empty dreams? When being so near my final Judgment, the common wisdom of a Man requires me to mind it in good earnest; and be more solicitous about it than for anything Temporal? O in what manner will Death open my Eyes, by shutting the Windows of Sense! How shall I then see the nothingness of what is but Temporal, and the reality of what is Eternal! We sometimes laugh to see the vanity of little Children, who are greatly pleased with painted toys, and busily employed about trifles. It extorts a smile to see them eager, and industrious, and mightily concerned in their childish sports: to see them fight or weep for little things which we despise: to observe with what solicitude and care they'll raise a little fabric, which three Moments after they themselves pull down, or would otherwise tumble of its

own accord. We laugh at these, but should weep over ourselves, as the greater and elder Fools; who are every whit as silly, yea infinitely more; so that considering we know the frailty of our present Life, and can look beyond the Grave to another World, should yet misspend our precious time on things which cannot profit; and please ourselves with what is so unsuitable to our Age and State; and suffer our Passions to work with violence, for a thing of naught; and our greatest diligence, care, and zeal to be exercised on things impertinent and vain; that are perishing in themselves, and can contribute nothing to our Eternal welfare. And is it not thus with reference to all that Men toil and labor for with the neglect of an immortal State?

The voluptuous Sadducee will not refuse the present gratification of his sensual Appetite, because he is uncertain of another day. Let us eat and drink, for to Morrow we die. Should not the same motive quicken my Diligence in a better work? And because my Lord may come suddenly as a Thief in the Night, immediately prepare to meet him? Let me now therefore, O my Soul! Look forward to the end of Life and Time! And so let me esteem and seek, and choose, and do everything in the first place, which then I shall wish I had! Let me do nothing now, which I verily believe I shall then be ashamed, or sorry to reflect on: that by thinking what a condition I shall then wish to have my Soul in, I may now provide myself, much better than I have done hitherto. That while I am in the greatest probability of living, I may suppose my change to be near, and so not dare to do anything, but what I would or might do, if I were in the present expectation of death. To this end, let me go down to the Potters house, descend to the consideration of my Mortality, and dwell among the Tombs; remembering the Egyptians built themselves better Tombs than Houses, because they were to dwell longer in them. Let every Nights repose serve me as a memorial of my last sleep! And let my Bed

stand for the model of my Coffin! This is the only way, to be dead to this World; to be able to judge of things now, as we shall do after Death, according to immutable Eternal Truth.

X.

The Brevity of Life considered as the fruit of Sin.

There are but three ways of leaving this World, as Abel, Adam, or Enoch. A diligent improvement of Time farther pressed: and the neglect of it bewailed.

The shortening of our Days is the fruit of Sin. All the Funerals that have ever been in the World, have been caused by Sin. We die because we have sinned, and yet we should not sin as now, if this were not forgot, that we must die. From the first Transgression of Adam we derive our death; and therefore some of his Posterity lived longer than he. Which proves that the lengthening of our Days is the peculiar Gift of God; and yet 'tis such a Gift as was more desired formerly, than since the appearance of Christ: for we read of none in the New Testament, since Life and Immortality is brought to light by the Gospel, who desired a long continuance here on Earth. Were we delivered from Sin, the sting of Death, by having made our Peace with God in the Blood of Jesus, Death would not be frightful, or put on such a ghastly Vizard, as to most it doth. But we are uncertain of our Justification, we waver between hopes and fears as to our final Sentence; and are conscious to ourselves that we are not ready for our great Account. This makes Death so terrible. Considering with all

that it is inevitable; the way of all the Living. For though' the curse be removed, and the sting be taken out by our B. Savior; so that the Souls of Believers are safe, and shall not be touched by the second Death: yet God hath not taken away the stroke of it from the Body. Tho' a Christian is assured of deliverance from Hell, he is not exempted from the Grave, as his passage to Heaven.

Prepare me, Lord! By the free Remission of all my Sins, and make me meet for the Blessed Inheritance, by sanctifying Grace; and then thy Time is best; Thy holy Will be done. No matter then, whether my Death be violent, or what we call Natural. It will be one of the two, for I cannot expect to be Translated, by a miraculous change, as Holy Enoch was, and as they shall be, who shall be found alive in the World, when our Glorious Judge shall come again. There are but those three ways of leaving Earth: and the Three first Men of whose departure we read in Scripture, are Instances of all Three. Abel of a violent Death, Adam of a natural one, and Enoch of a Translation. The variety and order of their Departure, as one observes, is very admirable, and deserves to be considered. For all Mankind must follow one or other of those three Examples. Every Man or Woman, that is born into the World, must leave it by one of those three ways; Either be cut off by a violent Death, as Abel, the first Man who died: or die a natural death, as Adam did, who was the second: or be translated, as Enoch, who was the Third we read of.

But though' I know that within a few years at farthest I must leave this World by one or other of these ways; though' I have been dying ever since I began to live; am Dead to the last year, and to all the preceding Portions of my Time; and know withal, that what remains will quickly pass and be gone, after the same manner; yet how have I overloved this Body, as if I should never live out of it! And set my Heart and Affections on this World, as if I should never remove to

another! And trifled away my precious Time and Life, as if a change would never come!

That few do seriously admit such thoughts is too evident, by the general course and practice of their Lives. For to what hazards do Men expose themselves? What pains will they take? What Inconveniencies will they bear? With what unwearied Industry will they toil and labor, to get a little Money, or Honor in this World, though' they know not but they may be called out of it, before the end of this Year? And yet the same Persons are remiss and slothful about a future Life; negligent and unconcerned about an Eternal state; careless and indifferent, yea sottishly stupid, about the welfare of their Immortal Souls. Henceforward, O my Soul! Whatever other others do, let me resolve to live in the expectation of a Change, which I know is certain, and may be very near.

XI.

Of the Expectation of Another Life.

The Vanity and Misery of Man in his Best Estate, if there be none.
The satisfactory removal of that supposition by the Thoughts of God,
and of Eternal Felicity in his Blessed Presence.

Let me retire a little, O my Soul! And bethink myself, what a World this is; what Men design and seek, and do and suffer; with what false and feigned Joys they are pleased, being only happy by comparison; and with what real Sorrows they are afflicted; what innumerable disappointments, sicknesses, (and as troublesome remedies,) dangers, labors, pains, and calamities of all sorts, Multitudes groan under, and loudly complain of? And what little unworthy ends are

pursued by all that do not seriously seek Eternal Rest? And how often frustrated? And withal consider the Cares that disquiet us, the errors that deceive us, the many Temptations that assault and overcome us; how busy we are about Vanities; how often dejected, and melancholy for the breaking of a Bubble; how eager and industrious to pursue a Shadow; active and in earnest to destroy ourselves, and one another; and then reflect on the Malice, and cruelty, the Filthiness, and Impiety, and great Corruption, which abounds everywhere; whereby God is dishonored, and provoked to Anger? After this what a Theater of Tragedies, must this World appear? What a Hospital of sick, and diseased, or rather distracted Persons? How should I be tempted to say, Lord! Why hast thou made all Men in vain? If I could not look from this Sea of troubles, to the Haven of Rest; from this dark Prison, to the Region of Light; from this deceitful, troublesome, and defiling Earth, to a Blessed, Everlasting Heaven: For verily, if there be no World but this, every Man in his best Estate in this World, is altogether Vanity, Selah. Psal. 39.5. 'It is a certain undoubted Truth, the prefixed verily tells us so; and that it deserves to be well considered, we learn from the concluding Selah, Every Man is Vanity. Not the Inferior parts of the Creation only; But Man the Lord of all: And Every Man, every Adam from himself, to the last Man that shall by ordinary Generation descend from him. Not the Ignorant, Poor, or Wicked only, but all the Individuals of this Species. Young or Old, strong or weak, beautiful or deformed, rich or poor, high or low, good or bad, (in respect of the Body, and this present Life,) everyone is vanity; and this is true, suppose him in his Best Estate, not only in helpless Infancy and Childhood, or in decrepit old Age, not only in pain, and poverty, and disgrace; but in his most settled, most flourishing, most envied, and admired condition upon Earth; in the midst of strength, and wit, and honor; when at best, as to body, and mind, and outward Circumstances; when he looks fairest, when he shines brightest; in

the height of all his Glory, with the greatest likelihood of a Continuance; yet then he is but vanity. In his frame, in his temper, constitution, inclinations, actions, and employment; he is a mere Shadow, an empty, mutable, inconsiderable thing, and not to be accounted of. His Heart, his head, his imaginations, reasonings, desires, purposes, projects, hopes, and fears, are all Vanity; and altogether Vanity, in all the parts, and kinds, and particulars of it. He not only may be, but he is so, in his best Estate: if this World be his Best; if this be our All, and nothing more to be expected after death. And how should such a Reflection strike me to the Heart, to suppose that after a few years are ended, I must return to my first Nothing, and my very being be swallowed up of Eternal Death! What satisfaction can I then take in any present Enjoyments, if an Eternal Annihilation be at hand, when I must bid adieu forever to all that I now possess? What delight can I have in the ordinary comforts of Life, with this Belief, that within a year or two, it may be to Morrow, I shall sink into the dust, and exist no more? What Pleasure in anything with this dismal Expectation? The more flourishing my condition is in this World, the more should I dread to lose it, if nothing better, nothing at all, can be enjoyed after Death. Some Philosophers have ignorantly urged such a consideration as an Antidote against the fear of death; but the admission of it may rather deprive a Man of all the comfort of Life. What then is the advantage of a Wise Man above a Fool? The exercise and improvement of our noblest Faculties would render us more miserable than others, if nothing be expected, and certain, when this Life is over. Not only sensual, but intellectual Pleasures would be disturbed and destroyed by such Thoughts; that very shortly, the next Year, or Day, I must disappear; and all my Enjoyments and Hopes be utterly and forever lost, with my very Being. Were the case thus, (which such Consequences evince it is not,) it were better for most Men they had never been Born; whether their condition here be Prosperous, or

Afflicted. For what Comfort or quiet can any Man have in Plenty and Prosperity, when this frightful apprehension of an approaching end is ever present? And what consolation can it yield a Man who is afflicted and Calamitous, and yet loves his Life above all things; to think that he shall not cease to be miserable, but by ceasing to be? And what is become of all Religion, if such a thought be entertained? All devotion to God is thereby extinguished, all the restraints of vice removed, the Flood-gates of Impiety opened, the encouragements of Virtue, the rewards of Holiness; the Foundation of Tribulation, and suffering for Righteousness sake; all at once taken away. Lord! Confirm my Belief of the invisible future state of Rewards and Punishments! And let not Sadducism and Infidelity damp my zeal in thy service, or rob me of the comforts of this Life, which, if I have any solid ones, must suppose the hopes of a Better. Let others therefore, O my Soul! Who expect not an Everlasting Heaven beyond the Grave, place their affections on Earthly things and mind this World, as if there were no better, no other. Let them who doubt, or disbelieve the promised rewards of Eternity, take up with what they must shortly leave, and labor for the Bread that perisheth. But since I profess to believe and seek the Life Everlasting; let me daily entertain myself with the hopes of it, and let all the flattering dreams of what is desirable upon Earth, give place to nobler and better thoughts. Let me derive my principal Joy, from the promise and expectation of that future Felicity, and endeavor nothing more than a meetness to partake of it. O my God, my God! Thou art my Life, and Joy, and Portion; in thee, and in thy love, all my desires, and hopes are answered, and all my wants supplied. However Evil this World is made by Sin, yet thou art the infinite and supreme Good. How mutable, how uncertain, how perishing soever are all sublunary things; yet thou art the rock of Ages, the fountain of everlasting Life, and hast appointed another World, and another Life, when this is ended, wherein thou wilt be better known, and loved, and served,

and honored, and communicate thyself more abundantly than now, to those, the desire of whose Souls is towards thee, that believe and love thee, that partake of thine Image, and are devoted to thy Fear. The assurance of this and nothing else, will answer the objection of the present vanity and misery we are subject to.

XII.

The consideration of the Death of others

Especially of Relations, Friends, and Acquaintance, how to be improved. What instructions we may learn by the sight of a dead Carcass, or a Deaths Head, and the usual Motto on it: and what by the Death of Holy Persons, to quicken our desires to be as they.

Hath divine Patience added one year more to the number of my Days, when so many others were removed by Death the last Year? Others, whom a few Months since I knew in vigorous health; wiser, stronger, more likely to live, and to answer the ends of Life than me; some of them, my near Relations, and useful Friends; in whose converse I took delight, and promised myself advantage by their Company and Examples; But they are taken, and I am left. Thy Holy Will, O Lord! Is done: and they, who were prepared, are infinite Gainers by this my loss. Quicken my preparations by following their Piety, to meet them in thy Heavenly Kingdom. Let thy longsuffering lead me to Repentance; and suffer me not to slight thy warning by the Death of others, to expect my own. Lord! Cure my Earthly mindedness, and practical unbelief; and by all such admonitions of thy Providence, teach me to possess, and use this World, as knowing

I must shortly leave it; and let not the thoughts of my Mortality wear off, as soon as the Funeral of my Friends is over.

Every year some or other of our Acquaintance drop into the Grave, we attend them thither, and lament, it may be, for a few days, their departure and removal; but consider not, that others will e're be long do the same for us; it may before this year is ended. Oh how soon do we forget our deceased Friends, and ourselves, who are likewise dying! And count upon a long Life, which we cannot reasonably expect; and hug the enjoyments of this transitory World, as if our present state would last forever! Will nothing but our own dissolution effectually convince us of our mistake, and folly, in this particular?

Though the Arrows of Death fly continually round about us; sometimes over our Heads, when Superiors are taken away; sometimes fall at our Feet, when Children and Servants, and Inferiors die; sometimes on our Left hand, when an Enemy is cut off; and while I am pleased with that, in that very hour, it may be, another Arrow on our Right hand strikes the Friend of our Bosom and Delight. And can we see all this, that great and small, high and low, friends and foes are all Vanity, and drop down dead round about us; and shall we not consider, that we are as Vain as they, and must shortly follow? Shall we not by a Christian Chemistry extract Spirits out of these dead Bones? And by these Examples learn the End of all Men, and lay it to Heart?

Whenever I see the Funeral of another, let me think thus with myself; why might not I have been that Man or Woman, that is now carried to the Grave? If we had been compared a few days since, 'tis probable I should have been thought as likely to have been his Monitor, by dying first, as he mine. By such an improvement of these

warnings, the request of the rich Man to Abraham were in great measure granted; for 'tis a call from the dead that speaks loudly to us, to consider ourselves, and prepare in time for so great a change: and say, as the Prophet to Hezekiah, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die.

Can we look upon a Deaths Head, and not remember what we shall shortly be? May not much be learnt from its common Motto? *Sum quod Eris, Fueramque quod Es.* I am that which thou shalt shortly be, and have been that which thou art now: that is, I have been as gay and jocund, as brisk and merry, as proud and vain, as rich and great, as careless and secure, as honorable and as much esteemed, as beautiful and as well beloved, as witty and as learned, as Thou art or canst be now. I valued myself as much upon my Estate and Trade, and health, and beauty; upon my Education, Profession, Employments, Parts, Friends, Family &c. as thou hast ever done, or canst do: I lived in ease and pleasure, in mirth and jollity; I minded the World as much, and indulged myself as much in sensuality; and was as careful of my Body, pampered and pleased my Flesh as much as thou, and thought as little of a sudden Death, and prepared as little for such a change, as thou dost: but now my dry Bones are looked upon with contempt and scorn, but thou shalt shortly return to dust, and be as vile as I am.

It cannot but affect us, did we consider it, to see divers snatched away in their Youth, and outward Prosperity; and in the midst of their Sin and Folly, without any visible signs of true Repentance: Or in terrible anguish and horror for their past crimes: And yet how few do take the warning, carefully to prevent the like unhappiness? O Lord! Preserve those strong Convictions, those serious Thoughts, those holy Resolutions, those lively Apprehensions of the Life to come, of the Evil of sin, and the Terrors of thy wrath, which the Sight

of dying persons hath at any time awakened in my soul! O the Eloquence of a dying Sinner, to persuade to Repentance! Even when he hath lost his Speech, and lies gasping, and trembling, on a bed of sickness; breathing out his last faint breath, and passing into the other world, to answer for the crimes and follies of a wicked Life! Lord! Revive these thoughts upon my soul, and let me feel the power and influence of them, in the hour of Temptation, and in every time of need! And let the consideration of the death of Believers, the Blessedness they are thereby entered into, and the Holiness they are possessed of, quicken my desires and diligence to prepare to follow. When I think where they are, and what they are doing, what is their work, and what their state, what their continual employment, and what their Enjoyments; and how different from ours: I cannot but wish to be with them; to be as they are, and do as they do, to know and love and praise God as they. They are not hindered by such a clog as this Body is to us; or tempted by their senses, appetite and fancy, to sin against him: they complain not of a seducing flesh, unruly passions, low and disordered thoughts, of Temporal Afflictions, spiritual Desertions, the snares of the World, and the malice and subtily of the Devil: We who are Pilgrims and Travelers are exposed to these difficulties, and storms which they are freed from. They are now rejoicing in the light of God's countenance, and shall never question his love more, while we are in Tears and Sorrows, groaning to be delivered.

But think, O my soul! That They were lately such as We are now. They were members of the militant Church, before they entered into Joy and Triumph. They had their conflicts and difficulties, their hour of Temptation, and time of trial, as we have ours. They were slandered, and persecuted, and saddened, and disappointed, as their Followers are: They went to Heaven the same way, and got the victory after the same manner, by Repentance, and Faith, and

humble persevering Obedience. They were once imperfect as we are now; and complained of the Body of Sin and Death, and struggling's of unmortified lust, as we do: And were sometimes in the dark about their interest in the promise, and walked heavily by the hiding of God's face, and endured Temptation, even as we. And as we have nothing to do, or suffer, but what they met with; we have the same encouragement, that administered to their support; the same God and Savior, the same way and rule, the same assistance, by the aids of his H. Spirit, offered to us; the same promises, and the same rewards proposed, which they enjoyed, first in faith and hope, and afterwards in fruition. Yea they passed through the dark valley, and so must we: Their Earthly tabernacle was dissolved, and so must ours be. We must expect to go the same way to Rest and Glory; and wait God's Time for our admission. We must finish first the work which God hath for us to do and suffer, and then all Tears shall be wiped from our eyes, we shall grieve no more, we shall sin no more, but be as the Angels in Heaven, or as the Spirits of the Just made Perfect.

XIII.

What Influence the consideration of Eternity would have upon our Hearts and Lives, if soundly believed and considered.

Especially if the supposition of Dying this year be annexed to it.

With what Humility, Mortification, and Self-denial, what Seriousness, Watchfulness, and resolved Constancy, would every

Christian live on Earth, did he act always under the influence and power of a confirmed Faith concerning the Life to come? We should not then grudge at a little labor, or boggle at a few difficulties in our way. What though' I meet with injuries and affronts, hardships and inconveniencies; Being now in a Foreign Country, and every day I live, one days journey nearer my Eternal Home! Shall I not patiently bear momentary Sorrows, while I believe I am hastening to Eternal Joys? Did I look more to the Everlasting World, should I not make the pleasing of God, in order to my Eternal welfare, the great business of my Life? Should I not serve the Lord with more fervency of Spirit, and be better fortified against the fears of man, who can but hurt and kill the Body, nor that neither, without the permission of God? Should I not order all my affairs, answer all Temptations, mortify inward Lusts, live in the Exercise of Grace, and in circumspect persevering Obedience, in order to it? Should I not watch more over my Heart, and Lips and Ways, be more diligent to trim my Lamps, more crucified to this world, more careful to call myself frequently to an account, and renew my Repentance? Would not my converse be more useful and edifying, my discourses more savory and full of Religion, my Prayers to God more humble and earnest, my Charity to men more unfeigned and extensive, and my preparations every way more suitable to such a Faith, and to such apprehensions of an Everlasting State? Could we carry the thoughts of Eternity about with us every day, and often admit them in our civil and secular affairs, did we repeat it frequently to ourselves, at least every Morning, as soon as we are awake, that we are near Eternity; this grain of Incense would perfume the whole Temple; and be an Antidote against inward Lust, and impure Thoughts, against the Infection and defilement of bad Company, and the snares of worldly Business, and do much to prevent vain and sensual actions, and to cure vain affections.

Did we believe it, and believe it near, should we not take as much pains to secure Eternal Life, as we see Men do to get Riches? Should we not use the same diligence, care, and circumspection, the same prudent foresight, watchfulness, and perseverance, to prevent Everlasting destruction as others do to provide against Poverty, and to live in Plenty a little while on Earth? Should we not rejoice as much in the promise and hopes of it, as others do in the prospect and expectation of some Earthly Advantage? Lord! I confess and bewail the weakness of my Faith. How often have I concluded, and said, that Heaven alone is the place of Happiness, and yet my carnal Heart is too much affected with Earthly Things! How often have I resolved, (upon the conviction of the certainty of the Eternal World,) to mind this less, and to affect and seek it no more as I have done! And yet my foolish Heart is hankering after it still. O crucify my affections to things below! And let the believing Thoughts of the next Life, render me victorious over all the Temptations of this. Pardon and cure the staggering trembling Thoughts of an unbelieving Heart, by greater measures of a lively Faith. That my desires may be strong and urgent; and my diligence and steadfastness in the way of Truth, be some way correspondent to this important Article. Let me live only for Eternity, hope for nothing but Eternity, design and intend nothing as my chief end, but Eternity, and seek and mind nothing in comparison with Eternity! Did we believe it, how would everything in this World be looked upon as eligible, or fit to be refused, as it is like to be a help, or a hindrance, with reference to Eternity! We should then endeavor to do nothing unbecoming such an Expectation. Considering this World as our Passage, and the invisible future World as our abiding Country, where we are to dwell forever; whatever we meet with here, whether sweet or bitter, easy or troublesome, pleasing or ungrateful, we should not much matter, but as it relates to hereafter.

And were I certain I should have no longer time of Trial in order to this Eternal State, than this one year, which is now begun: if a Messenger from God should convincingly assure me of it; what would I not do to prepare for Death, and secure the interests of Eternity? With what remorse and deep Repentance should I reflect on the Follies of my past Life? With what importunate cries should I beg Forgiveness? How patiently should I bear Calamity, for so short a time? How little should I value the favors or frowns of Men? How circumspect to improve every Season of doing and receiving good? How careful to avoid Temptation, and how resolute in resisting it? Did I verily believe I had no longer time to live on Earth, than this one Year at most: how insipid would be the offer of carnal Mirth, vain Pastime, sensual Diversions, idle Company, &c.? How should I value every Hour, every inch of my little Time, under the apprehension that Eternity is at hand? O my Soul! Shall I make no provision against the possibility of such a case? Is not my change as certain, as if it were this year, as if it were to Morrow? Though' I am not certain it is so near, nor certain but it may be. Let me then seek first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness: let me fix it well, and make it clear, that I have secured my great Concern, and am ready for a sudden summons.

XIV.

How a Good Man may improve and encourage himself under the Supposition of dying this Year

Even in the most uneasy and undesirable Circumstances.

I may die this Year: then all my Cares and Fears, if I am Rich, all my Sorrows and calamities as to this World, if I am Poor, will die too. I may die this Year: then I shall have no more Enemies, no more Sickness, and which is infinitely better, I shall Sin no more. I must shortly die, it may be, this Year: but there is no other way to come to a blessed Life but by dying; and my Savior hath died for me, and he that believes in him, shall never see death. He lives who was once dead, yea he lives for evermore, and hath promised, that I shall be with him to behold his Glory. He hath the Keys of Death and Hell: He is the Resurrection and the Life; he hath removed the sting of Death; and I need not fear a conquered Enemy. If I die this Year, I must quit the Company of all my dearest Friends on Earth; but I shall go to better Company above: and if they are the Friends of Christ, we shall shortly meet again, and love one another in a better manner than now, and never more be parted. I may die this Year: my Friends and Enemies may die too. Let me enjoy the one as mortal dying Persons, that must e're long leave me, or I them: and not fear the other, who may so soon Perish, and quickly be incapable of doing me or others Mischief. I may die this Year: let me not then think much of Temporal Sufferings, of any Evils which may so soon be over. Oh what would condemned Sinners in the other World give to be able to believe and say so of their Sufferings! I may die this Year: and can I wonder that I am sometimes Sick and in Pain, and that my Body is out of order? Am I not Mortal, and dwell in an house of Clay, which must shortly molder into Dust? And is it anything strange, that such a crasy Building doth sometime shake, and need repair, and threaten a dissolution? 'Tis a greater wonder, I am any time well: That such a Body, compounded of so many little parts, and so easily disordered by innumerable accidents, should be in Health, is hardly less to be admired, than that an Instrument of a thousand strings should be kept in Tune. I thank thee, O Heavenly Father! For the many advantages of Sickness, to weaken the power of Sin, to humble my

Pride, and cure my Worldliness and Sensuality, to reduce me from wandering, to empty me of Self-conceit, to awaken the consideration of Death and Judgment, to impress the Thoughts of the Vanity of this World, and the Eternity of the next, to assist me to mortify the Flesh, to rule my Passions, to exercise Patience, and quicken Prayer, and try my Faith and Love, and excite my diligence to redeem Time, and convince me of the Worth and Uncertainty of it, and thereby promote my Preparations for my final change. The Great Apostle by dying daily, had as many victories over this World, as he lived Days. Oh that I might so far walk by the same Rule, as every day to think of providing for my last! And in Health to do that which in Sickness I shall wish I had done!

I may die this Year: It may be by some tedious painful Sickness, some troublesome and loathsome Disease. But God hath promised his Grace shall be sufficient; he will make my Bed in my Sickness; and put under his everlasting Arms for my support; and not suffer me to be tempted above what I am able: he will increase my Patience and carry me through the pangs of Death, and the dark valley, and when Heart and Flesh fail, be the strength of my Heart, and my Portion for Ever.

I may die this year: What if it should be by a hand of Violence; if for Righteousness sake, in defense of the Truth, for a good Cause, and a good Conscience, and my Peace be made with God, and I am accused for doing well, or innocent of the Evil which is laid to my charge; there is ground enough for encouragement and support. Thousands of my Betters have met with the like, whose names are precious and renowned. Innumerable Christians have died by the Sentence of a Judge, with more Cheerfulness and Joy, than others, or it may be, than they themselves, would have done, by the sentence of the Physician. The Torture of many Diseases is unspeakably more

formidable, as to the mere Pain, and for all else, the Righteous Lord who loveth Righteousness, will clear my Integrity, if it may best subserve his own Great and Holy ends: at least he will stand by and help me, when all forsake me; and if he speak Peace, and give inward Consolation, who can speak Trouble? And his final Judgment, which is near at hand, will distribute rewards and Punishments to all, according to their works.

Suppose farther, that I should want a Sepulcher, after Death. There is nothing I could better be without. If God receive my Soul, and will raise my Body at the last day, whether it putrefy and consume underground, or above it, is no great matter. They who are alive will be more concerned in that, than I shall be; Graves are for the sake of the Living rather than the Dead. The Sun, the Rain, the Air, Birds, Beasts, Worms, will all contribute to give me Burial, if Men deny it. The only difference is, that it will be a little longer ere I am buried. If my Soul rest in the Bosom of my Savior, and by persevering in the love and practice of the Truth, I have secured my Reputation with wise and good Men, I need not be solicitous what become of my Body. My Almighty Judge will raise me a glorious Body, like his own, and reunite it to my Soul; As easily, as certainly, as for any of those, whose Bodies were preserved in Caves and Vaults, in proud Sepulchers, and under stately Monuments.

I may die this Year; and shall not then have the satisfaction to see my Children or nearest Kindred educated and provided for, settled and disposed of. But is not the Everliving God the same? Cannot he as well take care of them when I am gone, as now? Answer all my Prayers after my decease? And exercise that Fatherly Care, Wisdom, and Love, which shall dispose of their conditions, save them from Temptations, and supply all their wants, and exceed all my desires, in reference to them? And fulfill his Covenant promise from

Generation to Generation, to the Children's Children of them that fear him? O how weak is my Faith, that cannot trust God in so common and plain a case!

Lastly, I may die this Year: and not live to see the ruin of the Antichristian Kingdom, and Interest, and the accomplishment of many Excellent Promises, which concern the Rest, and Peace, and Purity and Glory of the Churches of Christ on earth in the latter days. But have I not deserved by my provoking Unbelief, Ingratitude, and Disobedience, to die in the Wilderness, and not behold the promised Land, or see the Peace of Jerusalem? And will not the struggling's of Satan to support Babylon, infer a dismal night of darkness and distress, before the expected Morning of Deliverance? So that it may now, if ever, be truly said, Henceforth, Blessed are the Dead who die in the Lord. And if God will take me to himself in the other World, I cannot possibly be a loser: though' I should not see the Beginnings of a New Heaven, and a New Earth, in this. However I rejoice in Hope, and pray incessantly for the Resurrection of the Witnesses, and the rebuilding of Zion, and the more plentiful effusion of the H. Spirit, (the great comprehensive Promise of the later Times) to effect a glorious Kingdom for Christ on Earth: and my Faith assures me, I shall hereafter see the Son of God revealed from Heaven, clothed with Majesty, sitting on a Cloud, leading the Heavenly Host, raising the Dead by his powerful Voice, summoning all the World to appear to Judgment, gathering his Elect, and finally destroying Death, and him that had the Power of it, the Devil, condemning the wicked to Everlasting Destruction, but acquitting, honoring, and rewarding his poor Members, with infinite and Eternal Blessedness.

Of Dying in a Foreign Country, and of Dying Young.

Considerations proper to Reconcile the Mind to both.

I may not live to the end of this Year; God in his Providence having called me abroad, I may never see my Native Country more. Let me still remember, O my Soul! That wherever I am, I am travelling towards the Grave, and passing to another World: that I may live in all Places, as a Pilgrim and Stranger here on Earth; with Affections suited to my condition, becoming one who is travelling in a Strange Land. Let me bear the Inconveniences I may meet with in this World, as Strangers in their Travels are wont to do. Let me not repine at the ill accommodations of an Inn, where I am to lodge but a night or two: but encourage myself with the assurance of better Entertainment at home, when my Pilgrimage is ended, and my Journey over. One of my dearest Holy Friends; and Fellow Travelers, (whose memory will be ever precious, with those who knew him) quickly arrived to his Journeys end, and is entered into Rest betimes. Which of his Companions shall next follow, we know not, or how soon. Lord! Make me apprehend the nearness of my change in every place: and if I am prepared for dying, no matter where it be. There is no one Country farther from the Presence of God than another. The whole World may be considered as one Great House, and the several Kingdoms and Countries of it, but as different Apartments in the same House: and they who tarry at home are no more exempt from Death, than they who travel abroad.

The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; I can go nowhere to be out of his Territories, I shall still tread upon my Father's Ground. I had rather be an Israelite in a Wilderness with the Presence of God,

than a Courtier in Idolatrous Egypt. Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, and the friend of God, was banished from his own Country; and should I never set foot again on my native Soil, there is no reason of murmuring against my God, who hath dealt thus with many of his Favorites. And while I have been in a strange Land, he hath not suffered me to feel the wants and necessities, and heart of a Stranger. Among a People of a strange Language he can, and doth provide for me all things richly to enjoy. I may set up my Ebenezer, Hitherto hath God supplied all my wants.

The Presence of my Gracious Father is everywhere the same: in some measure, Blessed be my God, I have hitherto found it so. And may I not rejoice in God in a Desert, though all the World should forsake me; though all the World should be against me? Should I have no other Friend or Helper; is not God, an infinite God Enough? And without his Favor and Presence, what can all this World do for me? If I am sick, and in danger of Death, among my Relations and Friends, if the comforts of the Almighty do not refresh and delight my Soul, they cannot: and if I want not these in my last Agonies, no matter in what part or corner of the Earth I breath my last. If the word and promise of God be my Foundation, a holy Hope my Anchor, Christ my Pilot, and Heaven my Country, I shall not fail of being landed there at last. Suffer me not to forsake thee, O Heavenly Father! While I live; and do not thou forsake me in my last Hour; and let it come when, and where thou wilt! If my blessed Savior will receive my departing Soul at Death, I am not solicitous in what Country, or part of the Earth it be.

And that I may not be unwilling in the flower of my Age and Time, in Youth and Strength, to leave this World; let me think often, that no one age or part of Life is more privileged against the stroke of Death than another. If I have done my work betimes, as my deceased

Fellow Traveler had, is it not better to receive the Blessed Recompence, than to tarry longer, in a World of Sin and Suffering, absent from the Lord? Shall I not thereby escape a multitude of Temptations, Sins, and Sorrows, which others by living longer are exposed to? If my Peace be made with God, what should make me willing to live at this distance from him? What should render this World so desirable, where God is so dishonored, where I am so often tempted to displease him, and so often yield to such Temptations? And may I not fear lest I should fall into such scandalous and grievous sins, that may bring a public reproach on the Gospel of Christ, and sadden the Hearts of all my Acquaintance who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity? By dying early, I shall contract less guilt, and commit less Sin, and see and feel less Sorrow than others who live longer. And though' I should maintain my Integrity, yet in this World my highest love and obedience to God, and my sweetest Communion with him, is but imperfect. How many impediments and Diversions do I daily meet with, that deaden my Heart to Heavenly Contemplations and Affections? What disappointments, and sorrowful disasters, to convince me that this is not the place of Rest and Happiness? What smart afflictions may some of my Relations prove? What dangerous Snares may attend me in the remaining Portion of my Time? What Opposition and Hatred from Men may the steadfast professing of the Truth, and fidelity to God expose me to? What public national Calamities may I have my share in, &c.

But if I consider old Age itself, which we do desire to reach; what and how many are the Infirmities and Grievs, and troublesome Circumstances which attend that State, which dying young will prevent? Are not most Men who reach a very great old Age, helpless objects of Pity? A Burthen to themselves, and to all about them? And (which commonly happens,) may I not then be as unwilling to die, as at present? As loath then to leave the World as now, though' in a

manner it will have left me? For how many old Men, past the relish of sensual Pleasures, are yet inordinately fond of a longer Life!

Have I not been told by Heathens, as well as Christians, that 'tis not the length of time, but its improvement, that doth really make a Long Life? If I have answered the ends for which I were born, 'tis not too soon to die. No Man ever miscarried as to his Everlasting Interest, because his Life was short, but Evil. He that is prepared for Death, he that dies in the Lord hath lived long enough, and should thank God for a speedy call to the possession of that Felicity, which the Holiest Saints on Earth desire and breath after. Gideon lost nothing by returning from Victory, while the Sun was yet high. He hath fought long enough who hath gained the Victory. If I have wrought but a few hours in a Vineyard, and done but a little Service for my Lord and Master; and yet am dismissed, and rewarded, before the rest of my Fellow Laborers; shall I repine, and think my Lord doth not befriend me? If he hath any farther Service for me, he will prolong my days, and make me diligent, I hope, and contented. Otherwise I pray he would make me ready to die, and make me willing, and desirous to depart this Life. For to be only content to die, that I may be perfectly Holy, and fully Blessed, is methinks too low for a Christian who acts like himself, believing the Certainty of his avowed Principles and Hopes, and knowing that while we are present in the Body, we are absent from the Lord.

XVI.

**The contemplation of our approaching
Change may assist us to mortify the Lusts**

of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life; to cure Ambition, and promote Contentment.

All that is in the World, saith the Apostle, is the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life. The Dust and Ashes of our own Mortality duly considered and applied, will help to deaden and extinguish each of these. By Pride of Life, we lift up ourselves against Heaven, and despise our Maker: by the lust of the Flesh, we overlove and indulge the Body, and study to gratify the sensual Appetite: by the lust of the Eyes, our Desires are immoderate after Temporal and External Goods. the thought of our approaching end hath a tendency to oppose and mortify these Lusts; to humble us before God; to take us off from the inordinate love of the Body; and to moderate our Passions to Earthly Things. It may help us against Pride, by showing us the infinite distance between the Eternal self-sufficient God, and such poor Dust as we; who are but of yesterday, and if he uphold us not, and maintain our Souls in Life, shall be laid in the dust tomorrow. It will mind us of his Justice against Sin, the Parent of Death, and of all the miseries of our mortal State; and convince us of our weakness to resist his Will, or avoid his Wrath. As to our fond Affection to the Body, it may instruct us, that it deserves not to be so much accounted of; it will open our Eyes to discern the Preference of our immortal Souls, and what concerns them, to the interest of a perishing Body. It may convince us, that we are Cruel and unkind to our very Bodies, by overloving them, because we thereby contribute to their Eternal Sufferings: and so teach us to love and use our Bodies, as Servants to our Souls in this World; and as expecting to share in Glory with them, after the Resurrection. It may also help to moderate our Desires after Earthly Good, and so cure the Lust of the Eyes, by letting us see the vanity, uncertainty, and short duration of

these things, and their insufficiency to make us Happy, and give us true Content.

The Thoughts of an approaching Change may, if anything will do it, damp the mirth of the Luxurious Epicure, and strike him into a fit of trembling, as did Belshazzar's handwriting on the wall. It may discover the distraction of living in Pleasure, and of care to please the Senses, and the fleshly Appetite, when the End is so near. It may likewise check the folly of Ambitious Designs: that Men should make so much ado to get into slippery places, from whence they may so easily fall. Where being puffed up with vain applause, they forget themselves, and their latter end, till their Life, and Glory expire together. Where are now the Great, and Mighty, and Honorable, who have made such a noise in the world? What is now the Difference between the Dust of an Alexander or Caesar, and that of their meanest Slaves or Captives? Could their Dignities and earthly Glory preserve any of them, from the stroke of Death, or the Judgment of God, or without Repentance, from his condemning Sentence?

Think, O my Soul! How little it will shortly signify, whether I have been known and honored among Men or no; any farther than God may be glorified by it. How should it suppress vain Glory? To think of being one day esteemed, and worshipped, revered, and applauded by dying Men, and laid in the Grave the next? Let me rather seek that Glory and Honor, to which Immortality is annexed: and labor to be accepted with God, at whose Bar I must be judged, endeavoring to keep the testimony of a good Conscience; and then it is not much whether I pass through good Report or evil Report: no contempt, or frowns, or threatening's of Men need then discourage me. Tho' I should be trampled on by the foot of Pride, while others are happy in a dream for a little while; and it may be have a prosperous passage to damnation; I will rather thank God for

delivering me from their Temptations, and giving me the opportunity, and call, to hasten my Preparations for a better World. Let God dispose of my Condition here, and Reputation too, as best shall please his Sovereign Will: only be pleased to keep me upright, and to preserve me from everlasting Shame and Confusion of Face, after the general Resurrection, and final Judgment. Vouchsafe me a Portion now in thine approving Love, and own me for Thine at last, in the Great and terrible Day of Reckoning; that then I may hear the Blessed Euge, and enter into my Lord's Joy!

XVII.

The same Argument considered farther, as dissuasive from Worldliness, and Earthly mindedness:

And as proper to confute the vanity of long Projects, and great Designs for this World.

Are the Years of my Life but few, and they hastening to a Period, and may this be my last? Let me not then greedily covet Riches and abundance, and waste my little time to scrape together large Provisions, for many years to come; when I have no assurance to see the end of this. Is it becoming such a belief, to toil from day today, that I may lay up that which I must so soon leave? As if I were to spend an Eternity here on Earth, and in the mean while neglect the one thing necessary. Am I not upon the shore of Eternity? May not the next Tide carry me off? And shall I spend my whole Life in Diversions from the main business of it? Have I nothing else to do,

but to gather Shells, (if they were Pearls, the absurdity were still the same,) and pile them upon heaps, till I am snatched away past all recovery? Shall I be regardless of an Eternal State, and run the hazard of being undone forever, by solicitous care about pretended Necessaries for a long abode on Earth? Much less for Superfluities; when I am not certain of the Possession, this one Year? Shall I magnify and admire what is so soon to be parted with? Value myself upon these things, so as to despise those that have less, and envy such as have more? And suffer my Mind to be distempered, and my passions immoderate on every Change of these things? Tho' I know besides my own Mortality, that to enforce the Argument, there is a principle of Corruption in all these things; that our very Manna here in a little while will stink; and Bread, which is the staff of Life, molder; our richest Garments wax old, and rot; Silver and Gold rust, and the greatest Beauty wither, and everything that is Earthly, decay and perish. And shall not this teach me to sit loose from all such things? Can I imagine, that in my last hour it will be easier to part with much, than little? Or better in the day of Judgment, to have a great Estate to answer for than a lesser one? We read concerning the Patriarch Abraham, (who rightly understood the transitory nature of Riches, and his own mutable Condition,) that the only purchase he made with his Riches, was a Grave: choosing to take Possession of the Land promised him rather by a mark of his parting with it, than of his possessing it. Did I think oftener and more seriously, O my Soul! Of tarrying here but a little while; I should more easily be persuaded, that a little of this World were sufficient to carry me through it. I should consider more that my Heaven-born Soul is made and designed for another, an endless World: and therefore should not so far forget his own People, and Fathers House; as eagerly to pursue and seek what is suited only to the Body, for a little while, and whereof a little with Contentment will be sufficient.

The same Reflection may be useful to contract our Thoughts to present Duty; that we may not perplex our Minds with long designs and Projects; which if we die this Year, will come to nothing. Our great Business in this World is adapted to the little portion of Time, which is allowed us. Not that good Designs for the public Benefit, may not be begun by one, and finished by others: or that we are not obliged prudently to provide for those who shall come after us, by attempting many Things of probable Advantage to Posterity. But considering the shortness, and uncertainty of Life, not only should the most necessary Things be first minded, and not put off by prosecuting such designs, as may signify somewhat to others, when we are Dead: But we should not now omit that which we may hope to compass ourselves; to begin such things, whose accomplishment must depend on the Pleasure of our Successors. Consideration and faithful Counsel would in this case have prevented the fruitless Expense of many Men's Time and Money; which if otherwise employed, might have turned to good account to themselves and others.

And this heightens our Folly, that while we pursue great Projects in reference to this World, and die without effecting them, our preparations for Eternity are neglected; and so we are suddenly cut off in the midst of our Folly, and all our Thoughts perish. How easily, how soon may they do so! The difference and distance between Death and Life, being no more than that of a Candle lighted, from its being blown out; and if it is exposed to all Winds, how quickly may that happen?

XVIII.

The consideration of the certain near Approach of an Everlasting State amplified, and pressed, to enforce a Holy Life.

In this World we begin a Year, and quickly come to the end of it; and ere long the little number of our Years, and Days, will be expired. But when Death conveys us into the World of Spirits, the day of Eternity shall never be closed with an Evening. Of how fearful consequence is that Death, by which an Eternity must be decided! What attention, what seriousness, what diligence, what care, doth the decision of so important a matter call for! ETERNAL! What will be the next word, O my Soul! How much am I concerned to know it! Will it be Blessedness, or Misery? Will it be Life or Death? This one word is the Joy of Angels, and the Horror of Devils; the unspeakable delight of blessed Saints, and the confusion and despair of condemned Sinners.

At the Creation of the World, Time got the start of us, and was five days elder than we: but our Immortal Souls shall endure beyond the utmost limits of Time, and last as long as the Everlasting Father of Spirits, of whose duration there is no end. Shall I then exist and live, though my Body perish and see corruption? Shall my Soul, my Self exist beyond the Grave, in Felicity or Misery, and that forever and according to my present Actions? What am I then most concerned to mind? What am I to choose? What am I most to fear, to wish, to do? What is a shadow of Honor and Reputation among dying Men? What are a few drops of fleshly Pleasure for a Moment, to eternal Rivers of Pleasure, at God's right hand? What are the sufferings of an hour or two, to the pains and anguish of Eternity? What can the World, Flesh, or Devil give me, comparable to eternal Life? What can I suffer in the way of Holiness, that may be set in the Balance against an

Everlasting Hell? And yet how often, O my Soul! How boldly, how unconcernedly, how foolishly do I hazard the one, and forfeit the other, for the Sins and Vanities of this World! Whereas one prospect of Eternity should make everything that is Temporal, appear little in my Eyes: the highest elevation of earthly Greatness, abundance of Riches, the great Affairs, Business, and Employments of the World, Pomp, and Splendor, and Reputation, and all that now flatters the Senses, and the vanity of Mankind.

Oh that I could but live as believing and expecting an Eternal State! As having it in my Eye, managing all my affairs with a visible reference to it; discovering to all the World by my Behavior and Deportment, that I do in earnest believe it certain; for be it never so Certain, if I do not apprehend, and consider it as such, it will no more affect me than a Fable. Neither is it enough to consider it as certain, but as near: for the most weighty, the most terrible things, apprehended as at a great distance, will little move. Thinking of the long Interval between the advantage of being exempted from such Evils for so long a time, will please me more than such distant Calamities will affright.

Let me therefore endeavor to impress the consideration of Eternity, as at hand, more deeply on my Heart, that I may walk, and live, discourse, and pray, and demean myself in everything, as near an unchangeable State. Am I not convinced that this is certain, from the nature and operations of my Soul, from the reflections of Conscience, from the Righteousness of God, in his Government of the World, from the present unequal distributions of Good, and Evil by his Providence, and from the plain and frequent assertions of his Revealed Will? I have nothing to object, nothing to reply; but I find a necessity of inculcating and urging the consideration of it in order to its influence. I find it needful to reflect often, how near I am to such

an endless State: that in one Instant, by Death, I enter upon it: and that this Instant may be as near me, as my next Thought. That the holy Scripture describes the two contrary Conditions after death, (and every Man and Woman in the World shall share in one of them) as both Everlasting: the one, by Eternal Life, Eternal Glory, an incorruptible Crown, that fadeth not away, an incorruptible Inheritance, an House Eternal in the Heavens, &c. the other, by unquenchable Fire, a Prison whence no escape, Eternal Damnation, Everlasting Burning, everlasting Punishment, everlasting Destruction, a Worm that never dies, wrath that is ever to come, blackness of darkness forever, ever, &c.

Think, O my Soul! That in one of these two contrary States, I must abide forever; In endless Joy, or Sorrow: Blessed in the Presence of God, or forever banished from it. And whoever thou art that readest this, apply it seriously to thyself, 'tis thine own case. Yea I tell thee from God, that Holiness of Heart and Life is absolutely necessary to the former, and that without it thou shalt never see his Face, but be punished with Everlasting Destruction from the Presence of his Glory.

Is this an unquestionable Truth? O let me consider it, till I feel the Power and Efficacy of so important a Principle! Let the Impression be deep and lasting! Let it pierce and enter into my very Soul! To cool the heats of Lust, to quench sensual and earthly desires, and to mortify all inordinate affections to this World; and fix my resolutions to mind and seek Eternal Life with all my Heart!

These are not difficult and perplexed Niceties, which wise and holy Men differ and disagree about. They are not Metaphysical Subtleties, which few can understand; but the express Word of God, and the daily dictates of my own Reason and Conscience, which all

Christians, and almost all Men in their Wits, except in an hour of great Temptation, confess and own; or whether they will or no, are forced to expect and fear, if they are not in a condition, to consider them with a joyful Hope.

Lord! Cure the unbelieving doubts concerning these Great things, which notwithstanding the plainest Evidence, the Devil may at any time suggest! Let a confirmed Faith, be the Reality of what is thus future, that my Soul may be influenced by them, as it is wont to be by things present! Let it be the Substance of things hoped for, and the Evidence of things unseen, and as yet at a distance; as if the Day of Judgment were already come, and there were no intermediate Time to pass between this and that.

O Eternity! Eternity! The more I consider it, the more unfathomable still I find it. Unchangeable Blessedness, or remediless, endless Torments! An Eternal blissful Day, or everlasting Horror, Darkness, and Despair! Life or Death, Glory or Destruction, to last as long as the immutable Living God! None of the Patriarchs who lived longest, arrived to the period of a Thousand years, which in comparison of God's Everlastingness is set forth but as one day. But strictly considered, millions of Years and Ages have no proportion with it; because no multiplication of them will amount to Eternity. Whereas one hour hath some proportion to an hundred thousand years, Because a certain number of Hours will amount to so many years. But no number of Years or Ages, never so often multiplied, will make up Eternity: as no subtraction of Millions of Years will lessen it: and entire Eternity will be still to come, and will ever be to come. When innumerable myriads of years are past, Eternity shall then seem but to begin; because when as many more are over, it shall be as far from an end. Oh that the thoughts of Eternity may be powerful and prevailing above all others! That I may Judge of everything by its

relation to it, by its influence upon it! Choose now, my Soul! Whether Everlasting Joys, or Miseries, shall be thy Portion: but consider well, that thine Eternity is concerned in thy present choice: and that this choice must be pursued with steadfastness and constancy, as long as I live: And what are a few years to prepare for an Eternal State? Were we obliged to spend several hundred years in serious humble preparation for it, with the greatest strictness and severity of Life, during all that Time; it were infinitely less than to spend an hour or two in preparing for the greatest Dignity and Employ on Earth, which can be enjoyed but for a few years at longest. For to these an hour hath some proportion; but a hundred or thousand years have none, with an Everlasting Duration. Therefore to consider how many years of toil, and pains, and diligence, many bestow on the probable prospect of some Temporal Good, should reprove and shame my negligence and remissness in providing for Eternity.

XIX.

The Punishments of the Damned considered, as Intolerable, and Everlasting, and as unquestionably Certain.

What the Reflection upon Hell-Torments, may and ought to teach us.

The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom, the entrance into the way of Life, as it is ordinarily one of the first means to awaken the Soul to a serious concern for Eternity: Let me therefore first consider the Endless Punishment of the wicked, in the other World, before I

enter upon the ravishing Prospect of the Blessedness of Heaven, promised to the Righteous. And with what serious trembling should I think of the Terrors of an Everlasting Destruction, which our Lord shall be revealed from Heaven to render, to All who know not God, and obey not the Gospel. When the wicked shall go away into Everlasting Punishment; as the Righteous into Life Eternal. The dreadfulness of that Punishment, the endless Duration of it, joined to the consideration of its unquestionable Certainty, deserves the most attentive Thoughts of every Man, who loves his Soul, and would manifest he doth so, by securing his greatest Interest.

The description of that Misery, under insupportable and Eternal Torments, demands more than a transient view: because no words can sufficiently express the Horror of that State. What is it, O my Soul! To be banished from the Blessed Sight and presence of God forever, and all the impressions of his holy Image and likeness? And to know that this is the fruit of my own choice, that I lost it by my own Fault and Folly; that I deserved to lose it; that the Sentence is as Just, as it is irrecoverable? Who can fully imagine the dismal despair of a condemned Sinner, under this anguish of a Guilty self-accusing Mind? While under the stroke of God's Almighty revenging Justice, with a distincter view and knowledge than now, of God and his Excellencies, of himself and his own vileness and malignity, which must greatly increase his rage and Torment. Add to this, his being enraged by the accusations and cries of wicked Acquaintance, and Relations; and his being mocked, and insulted over, and tortured, by malicious damned Spirits; with a clear understanding of that glorious Felicity he despised, refused, and forfeited; with a deep sense of his former Madness in preferring the sinful Pleasures and Advantages of this World; and this after so many warnings, and invitations, and calls from God, to have prevented it; never to be diverted one Moment from the consideration, sense and feeling of

his Misery, and the duration of it; to have all his Passions let loose with the greatest violence, and nothing to satisfy them; and continually to preserve an Hell of wickedness and Horror in himself; and to endure the reproaches, convictions, regrets, and stinging Reflections of Conscience, the gnawing Worm, which shall never die; who can conceive the unspeakable misery of such an accursed State? So great Calamity, and yet Everlasting! How long doth one Day or Night now seem, to a Man under some violent racking Pain, in any one part of his Body, though' he be under the means for Cure, and have his Friends about him to pity, comfort, assist him, with the hopes of Ease in a little while, and the certain, knowledge that it cannot last long? Oh what then will be the dismal state of tormented Sinners in Hell! How infinitely must it exceed the most terrible Idea we can now frame of it! To languish out a long Eternity in that Gulf of Darkness and Despair, under unpitied intolerable Torments, without Intermission, or hope of End! Miseries without measure! Judgment without Mercy! Pains and Sorrows intense, and yet endless! Without the least succor or relief, relaxation or remedy, diminution or change! Without a drop of Comfort, without a moments Rest, without the smallest beam of Light, or the least glimmering of Hope! Perpetually dying, and never dead! Under unsufferable Wrath, which yet will be forever Wrath to come! Seeking Death, and never able to find it, but Eternally to endure all that Calamity, which the Conjunction of Death and Life together can render dreadful! What Groans and Cries will these Thoughts, and these sufferings wring from their Hearts? But no refuge will then be found, no excuses admitted, no Prayers, no entreaties will then prevail no Tears move Pity. He that made them, will show them no Mercy, and he that formed them, will show them no favor. 'It is Never, Never that is the killing word that breaks the Heart of those hopeless Prisoners in the place of Torment. When once delivered over to that Prison of God's Wrath, they shall no longer be prisoners

of Hope. Judgment shall be brought forth unto final victory: and the Redemption of the Soul shall cease forever.

The vain hopes of Sinners shall then be ended in eternal desperation: Hell will be full of those, who did once hope they should never come there, and full of those who despair of deliverance from thence; but shall suffer exquisite Pains that cannot be numbered, or measured, or endured, but that every Minute of an hour will seem an whole Year, and yet must eternally be endured by miserable Sinners, who will not be wise in time to prevent such an intolerable Portion. Let me therefore, O my Soul, descend into Hell by Meditation whilst I live, that I may not descend thither when I die, and be shut up forever in that Prison, the place of endless Torment.

Might we but suppose, that one of those Miserable Souls did let fall but one Tear, in a hundred thousand years; and if after he had by this means wept so much, as that his Tears would equal the drops of water in the whole Sea, his Misery should have an end; this were Hope, this were Comfort. But alas! After that Period, his Misery will be as far from an end, as when he first began to feel it. It will then be but the Beginning of Sorrows, which will never, never, never End.

Think, O my Soul, that this is the Portion of the Sinners Cup; this is the wages of Sin, and the certain doom of final Impenitence and Unbelief. 'It is no politick Cheat, or melancholy dream, but the express repeated word of God, and Christ, the holy Prophets and Apostles, and the voice of Reason too, supposing but the Immortality of the Soul, and the power of self-Reflection, the punishment of Sinners must needs be Everlasting, as carrying continually a Hell within them; unless God work a miracle to prevent it, which there is no ground to imagine he will, or shadow of reason why he should. God hath pawned his Truth, and his Eternity, to execute this

Sentence of his threatened wrath. He is a God of infinite Mercy, 'tis true; but he hath told us how far his Mercy shall extend. He will not exercise one Attribute to the dishonor and the disparagement of the rest. That obstinate and impenitent Sinners, shall thus perish, is not because the goodness and mercy of God are not infinite, but because his other Perfections are so, viz. His Holiness, Justice, Truth, Sovereignty, and Wisdom. Was it Wisdom and Goodness to annex such a Penalty to the violation of his Law; and can it be inconsistent with them, to inflict his threatened wrath? Shall we suppose God to uphold his Dominion and Government by a Falsehood? To keep the World in awe by the menaces of such Punishments, as shall nowhere, never be executed? Is it unlikely, that God should exercise so much severity? And is it not as improbable, that his repeated Word and Oath should prove false? Is it not a righteous thing with God, as the Governor of the World, thus to punish the obstinate Despisers of his Grace? Who slighted his Authority, disobeyed his Law, affronted his Sovereignty, derided his Power, denied his Truth, contradicted his Holiness, and joined Issue with the Devil, to pull him from his Throne; who abused his Patience and Long-suffering, and scorned all his threatening's; who thrust away their own Happiness, and would not take warning; who burst all his bands asunder, and broke through all obstructions; and would not be stopped in their course of Vanity and Folly, or so much as consider their danger; who rejected his calls to Repentance, and refused his Mercy, when it was offered; and preferred a Lust before his favor, and the Pleasures and Profits of this World before the Heavenly Glory; and notwithstanding all the methods of his Grace, and the checks of his Providence, and of their own Conscience, they will go on, they will Dye? Let me, O my Soul! Adore the Sovereign Justice of God in all his Judgments; and tremble at the threatening's of that Eternal Wrath, which so few consider or believe, till 'tis too late. Let the foresight and the fear of such an intolerable endless Punishment, be a means to save me from it! Let

me herein read the evil of Sin, and learn to abhor and avoid it. Let me pity, and warn, and counsel, and pray for those of my Relations and Acquaintance, who live in Sin, and run the hazard of this Eternal Ruin. Let me not envy the foolish Mirth, and momentary Prosperity of the Wicked, whose present joy must ere long expire, and an everlasting Destruction succeed in its room. How short is the Joy of the Hypocrite! And the triumph of the Wicked is but for a Moment. Let me fear and dread everything, that leads to this dismal issue, and improve everything that may help me to escape it. And by consequence, let me less value all the Good and Evil of this present Life; judge of all things by this light; be patient under temporal Calamities, and thank God that it is not Hell; and thank him more, that present sufferings do help to save me from Eternal ones.

Whatever I can suffer in this World, let my condition be never so dark and sad and afflicted, it is not, it cannot be such, but that every one of the Damned would think it an infinite Happiness to exchange with me, and be as I am. Let me think of those exquisite and eternal Flames, to cure my Impatience under the sharpest Trials and Afflictions I may now suffer.

Did I believingly consider an Everlasting Hell, I should not think much of anything that is required to prevent it. The severest exercises of Religion, the strictest Temperance, the nicest Chastity, the largest Charity, the greatest Self-denial, all the hardships of Repentance and Mortification, and continuance therein to the Death, though for many years more than I am like to live, would be reckoned easy, as well as just, if set in the balance against the Eternal Mischiefs of the Damned.

What will not men do and suffer to prevent a Temporal Death? They will endure a painful course of Physic; tear out their very bowels, by

Purges and Vomits: and are content to be cut and scarified, and to suffer anything almost to save their lives: But how little will they do to be saved from the wrath to come! One would think, they should have no Rest, or Peace, or be able to live a quiet hour, till they had made some Provision against the hazard of this Eternal Destruction: and look upon all men as their Friends, or Enemies, according to the help, or hindrance, they received from them, in reference to it. But the direct Contrary is everywhere apparent. Men are careless and secure, jovial and merry in the way that leads to Hell; and esteem, and love, and choose that Company that will help to bring them to this place of torment: Yea, such is their stupidity, and strange perverseness, that they will not suffer to be told of their Danger. If you tell them, that by such a Course, or such an Action, they will lose so much Money, or their Lives will be in danger; they reckon it an obligation, will take it kindly, and return you thanks: But when they are told, by such Courses and Actions they will lose their Souls, and the Favor of God, and the Hopes of Heaven, and must Perish forever; this they will not receive, they despise the message, and scorn and hate the Messenger; are displeas'd and angry at such faithfulness.

O bless the Lord, O my Soul! For any good hope through Grace, of escaping this Intolerable and Endless Misery. And let all that is within me bless his holy Name. I have deserved the same endless and unsupportable wrath, which Thousands are now under, and shall be under to all Eternity; but he did not suffer me to fall into it. To be delivered out of those Torments after many years misery, would be thought an admirable, unspeakable kindness; And is it not a greater favor never to be thrown into Hell, which I have so often deserved? How grateful would a damned person be, to be freed from those Flames, and placed in the same condition I now am in? What a Life of serious, self-denying obedience would he lead? And hath not God done more for me? Am I not more indebted to his Goodness? He

hath kept me out of Hell, and offers me the Heavenly Glory upon reasonable, honorable, and easy Terms. Blessed be God, I may yet escape the wrath to come.

Let me heartily compassionate the delusion of those multitudes of deceived, perishing Souls, whose eyes are blinded by the God of this world; who will not believe it, till they are convinced by the light of that Fire which shall never be extinguished. Yea, when I read, or hear of Ten or Twenty thousand men slain in a War, (whether of Infidels or Christians) let me think of it, with other apprehensions than formerly I was wont to do. Considering that many, it may be, the most of these shall never have any Comfort or Mercy more; fearing lest the same Sword or Bullet that gave them their mortal wound, hath fixed them under God's Everlasting Wrath; and that by dying, they are undone forever. In very many other cases, the Faith of this Article would rectify my Opinion, and direct my Actions, if seriously considered and improved. This would make me think of Death under another Notion, than 'tis commonly considered. For without the consideration of Hell annexed to it, it is not so very formidable, but that Heathens have been able to despise it. The most contrary Sects among them, on different grounds have been able to do it; but consider Death as a passage to Eternal misery, as the Gate of Hell, as the end of all Comfort to a wicked Man, and the beginning of an endless Calamity, and nothing can be imagined more dreadful to a Guilty unholy Soul. Some of my Acquaintance, it may be, who died this last year, are now among those Hopeless, Despairing Wretches, who expect the final Judgment of God, to consummate their insupportable Misery. If they were permitted to come, and tell us what they suffer, and what they know; what a terrible consuming Fire God is; what Vanity, Lust and Folly, brought them to this place of Torment; what diligence they would advise us to, while in a State of Hope, to prevent the like; if we have any love and kindness for

ourselves, any Bowels of Compassion to our own Souls; what a Change do we think it would work upon us? But if we will nor hear Moses and the Prophets, Christ, and his Apostles, neither should we believe, though one came from the Dead.

XX.

The Eternal Blessedness of Heaven considered, as the Perfection of Holiness

To quicken our desires and endeavors after greater Meetness to possess it.

Doth one year after another hasten me to the end of Time? And doth the Blessedness of Eternity depend on the Communications I now receive from God? On the Preparations I now make, and the Meetness I can now attain for Eternal Felicity in the Presence of my God and Savior? O, with what Intenseness of mind, should I now prosecute that glorious Object! With what unwearied diligence should I run the race that is set before me, lest I fall short of the Incorruptible Crown of Life? How should everything be undervalued and rejected, that would divert, retard, or hinder me from pursuing this end? Lord! Be not a stranger to my Soul in this distant Wilderness state! Let me see more of thy Light! Be transformed more into thine Image! Experience more of thy Love! Feel more of thy vital Presence, and quickening Spirit! Let the Divine Life in my Soul be more powerful! And the Characters of thy Likeness be more legibly stamped upon it! By the daily exercise of Faith, and Hope, and holy Affections, carry me through this World! Till my Pilgrim state be

over, and thou hast brought me to perfect Everlasting Holiness! And let the believing fore-thoughts of it, till all the Powers of my Soul with Joy, and Wonder, Desire and Love!

Give me, Lord! To think a right of the Heavenly Glory; as a confirmed State of positive perfect Holiness; of heavenly Light, Love, Liberty and Joy; with the satisfying Vision of God, in the Face of Christ, and his impressed Likeness; dwelling forever in the direct and steady view of his transforming Glory; with complete conformity of the Soul to Eternal Goodness, Truth and Love, as its Perfection; esteeming nothing, desiring nothing but that God and Christ may be glorified with an entire Subjection to his Will, adherence to him; Rest and Confidence in him, swallowed up in the Love, Admiration, and Praise of God, and our Lord Jesus, living in joyful repeated Acts of Subjection, Adoration, and acknowledged Dependance; ravished to behold the Glory of God, in the Face of Christ, to see his blessed Image perfect in every one of the Saints, &c. When all the present Blindness of our Minds, the Errors of our Judgment, the Perverseness of our Will, the Disorder and Rebellion of our Passions, the remaining Aversion from God, and Disaffection to him, which in this World we complain of, shall all be done away: The Flesh shall no more Lust against the Spirit; or the Law in our Members against the Law of our Minds; but an everlasting Tranquility and holy Peace take place; a Peace which passeth all understanding, without any outward Molestation, or inward cause of Disquiet.

Our corrupted Nature shall no more cast forth Mire and Dirt as now; we shall have no more vain or wicked Thoughts, no more sinful Fears, or foolish Hopes; unbecoming Heats, unruly Desires, sensual Inclinations, earthly Affections, feeble, slothful, spiritless Duties, dead and heartless Prayers, cold Thanksgivings, &c. but as we shall then know God without Error, and see our Lord Jesus face to face, so

we shall love him without reserve, more than now we can think, and serve him without Dullness and Distraction, and Praise him without Weariness; the spiritual Acting's of our Souls shall have no allay of Dross. And thus shall we be with him, and admire and enjoy him, without end.

Thus when Death is swallowed up in victory; and what was imperfect is done away, and what was Corruptible and Mortal, hath put on Immortality; God in Christ shall be All in All: And when it is truly and perfectly so, Then it is Heaven. The blessedness whereof is inconceivable. A Blessed Person is not expressed in the singular Number by the Hebrews, but in the abstract, and in the Plural. Beatitudes instead of Blessed, because the Blessings are as many and great, as they have Powers and Capacities to partake of Blessedness; so will it be in Heaven. A Word, though commonly used as little understood, as Holiness; which is one of the greatest Mysteries in the World. But will hereafter be fully and delightfully understood by the Blessed Saints; as the Malignity and intrinsic Evil of Sin shall be, by the damned Spirits.

Oh, that I might now feel more of this Heavenly Life, begun and carried on in my Soul, by a farther Participation of his holy Image, and Conformity to his Will! By more vital Effects of his indwelling Spirit in my Soul, forming it to be a Temple to himself, for his own delightful Residence! That forgetting that, which I have received, I may still be Covetous, and desirous of more; forgetting what I have attained, I may press on with an holy Eagerness and Fervency towards the Mark!

When I seriously examine my own heart, had I nothing else to prove the weakness of my Grace, and the sinful remainders of Unbelief, but the low desires, and few comfortable Thoughts, the seldom joyful

prospect of this Blessed State; how sad an Evidence were it of my low attainments, that I breathe with no more Impatience, after that Blessed, Holy Rest, in the enjoyment of God and Christ; and labor no more in preparing for it? When we profess to believe that all the Desires of our Souls shall be fixed on Him, and filled with Him, as our Infinite and Supreme Good; and all the Expectations of Faith and Hope, swallowed up in endless Admiration, Gratitude and Joy; being fully satisfied, and at Rest in the Presence and Vision of God; without the least Inclination or Desire of Change. And by consequence,

There will be no need of Novelty, as now, to give a relish to our Happiness. All Happiness in this World is by comparing a Man's present Condition, with his past, or with that of some Inferiors. But the Intrinsic Good, Felicity, and Joy of Heaven, will need no such Foil to set it off; no such Comparison to make it prized. The Blessed Spirits will never lose the lively Sense of that low and miserable Condition, from which they were raised to so great a Glory; and so will ever equally rejoice in the Happiness of their Translation and wonderful Change. And what was at first delightful, will forever be so; and not be disdained or lessened by a continuance; as it happens in this World, from the Emptiness, Shallowness, and Vanity of the Creature. An Affectation of Variety, and desire of Change, proceeding always from a Sense of Want. But Holy Souls shall never be weary of seeing, loving and enjoying God; his blessed Presence will afford us undecaying and endless Satisfaction; Pleasure, never to be interrupted, or abated, and never to cease. The blessed Object is absolutely Infinite, and so will be always new to a finite understanding; and continual fresh Communications from his infinite fullness, must needs make our subjective Happiness to be always new, and eternally such.

Let me by such Thoughts quicken and excite my diligent Endeavors, after a greater meetness to enjoy so great a Bliss. And to that end, consider whether any of those happy Souls, who have finished their Course, and obtained the Prize, do now regret their utmost Diligence, Patience, and Perseverance, during their short abode here, to secure the Blessedness of an endless Life: No, no, they are far from repenting the Time they spent, the Trouble they were at, the Care they used, the Difficulties they met with, the Sufferings they endured; to conflict with the World, and the Flesh, to resist Temptation, to watch over their Hearts, and Words, and Ways, to work out their Salvation, to please God, and be faithful to him, &c. They find to their unspeakable Comfort, and everlasting Joy, that Heaven makes amends for all they could do or suffer in order to their coming thither. Yea, they find that they were not Diligent, and Humble, and Patient, and Circumspect enough. That they did not love God, and seek his Glory, redeem their Time, and improve all their Talents and Opportunities of doing and receiving Good, and give up themselves entirely to prepare for Heaven, to that degree they should have done. They find by the transcendency of the blessed Recompence, that it deserved infinitely more than the most Active, Zealous Christian upon Earth did ever do, in order to it.

Lord! Quicken my Resolutions and Endeavors by such thoughts as these? Inspire my sluggish, carnal Heart, with holy Light, and Life, and Zeal, and Fervor! That looking to the things which are not seen, which are Eternal: I may lay up a good Foundation against the Time to come, and so lay hold of eternal Life!

But alas! How much have I neglected the great Duty of Holy Meditation? How little skill and experience have I in it? How tasteless and insipid oftentimes are my Thoughts of God! How confused and unsteady! How little Pleasure or Advantage have I by

contemplating his highest Excellencies? Yet methinks, could I but retain the same awakened, lively thoughts of Heaven, and Eternal Life, which sometimes I have had; might I continually feel the sweet and sacred Influence, as for a little season I have sometimes felt it; how little, how very a Nothing, would all this World be to me! How comparatively weak, its strongest and most alluring Snares, to draw me off from God! With what an unshaken mind could I refuse and resist 'em! With what an unconcerned indifference could I look upon all its most charming Glory!

Could I maintain such a frame of Spirit, as I have sometimes had for a little while, in the serious Contemplation of Divine Mysteries, in Fervent Prayers, and other Solemn Duties of Religion; when the acts of Faith were strong and lively, my Heart set on fire with love to God, and holy breathings after him; admiring his matchless Grace to fallen Sinners, (and to my Soul in particular) when he brought me to the very Suburbs of Heaven, (though alas! how seldom!) by the delightful Thought of what the Blessed Spirits above enjoy, in being where Christ is, and beholding his Glory; when I was ready to say within myself, 'It is good to be here; this is no other than the Gate of Heaven; Oh, when shall Mortality be swallowed up of Life! But when I thought at any time to fix and settle in such sweet Contemplations, how quickly did my lazy backward Heart fly off! How soon did the flame decay and die away! How soon did I find myself fallen down to Earth again! Sunk down from the Bosom of my Lord, presently forgot myself and Heaven, to dwell among the Pots, and embrace a Dunghill! 'Twas not on my own Wings, O Lord! That I soared so high; but I hope by the breathings of that holy Spirit of Light and Love, who bloweth when, and where, and how long he listeth. Who gave me at any time any such first fruits of the Spirit; who convinced me of the Certainty of the Heavenly Inheritance, by a lively believing foresight of it; who made me earnestly desire the Wings of a Dove to

be gone, and appear before God in Zion; made me Pant and Groan to be delivered, and to be with God and Christ, with inexpressible Desire and Joy, inconceivably mixed with Sighs and Groans. O my God! Let not this experience be only such a Taste of the Powers of the World to come, as is consistent with final Apostasy! Only the seeming Zeal of the stony Ground! The rapturous Joy of a Hypocrite! From the Power of Imagination, and a heated Fancy; from the workings of mere natural Self-love; upon mistaken apprehensions of God, and a false Opinion of Heaven; but by the holy effects, let me be assured of the Cause and Principle; that it was of God!

Teach me from the sweetness of a Spiritual Communion with God now in any of his appointed Ordinances, to argue to myself what that most ravishing Satisfaction will be, that the Enjoyment of God in Heaven will afford the Soul. Our Holiness is now imperfect, to what it shall be: and therefore our Consolation, Peace and Joy, is but in part, and incomparably less than we are assured it will be, when we shall be admitted to behold the Glory of the Lord. 'It is now at most, but as the Break of Day, to the Luster of the Meridian Sun. But if in this low imperfect State, we can sometimes obtain so near a View of his Glory, and feel such sweet Communications of his Grace; how much more of this Consolation and Joy is reserved to Heaven? If in this Pilgrim State, the Gifts and Graces, and Comforts of the Holy Spirit are so refreshing: O! What hath God prepared beyond the Grave, for those who love him? If now he sometimes shed abroad his love in our Heart, after such a manner; how much better shall I love him, and feel the influence, and evidence of his Love to me, when I shall be with him, and see him Face to Face? If the apprehensions of this future. Blessedness, do now encourage, raise, and animate my drooping Soul: O, what shall I know and see? And how shall I rejoice, when the Vail is removed? If a Sacramental Communion with God and Jesus Christ, be sometimes so sweet, and so affecting; what will

the Blessed Communion with God, and all his Saints above amount to! When I shall sit down with all the Children of God, in the Presence of the Bridegroom, at the last great Supper of the Lamb in Glory! If the Earnest of our Inheritance be so reviving, what will be the full Possession of it? If the Hopes of that glorious Day, by holy Meditation, be so transporting; what will be the end of our Faith and Hope? If a Grape or two in the Wilderness, be such a Cordial; what will be the whole Vintage in the Land of Promise?

Shall I after all this, forget my own Experience, and run from God and Heaven, to embrace or seek a perishing Toy? Shall I hide myself with Saul, among the Stuff and Lumber of this World, when God is calling me to a Glorious Crown? Art thou, O my Soul! A King's Son, an Heir of Heaven, an expectant of such great Felicity, and yet stoop so low? Hope for Heaven, and yet grasp this Earth, and hug the vain Appearances of earthly Good? Hope to be like to God; (and oh how Glorious a Hope is that!) to partake of his Image, and live Eternally with him; and yet be solicitous, anxious, and disquieted about Honor and Money, and a Temporal Interest? And mightily concerned about the momentary Gratifications of the Flesh, and the Enjoyments of this World? Art thou a Pilgrim and Stranger here, and travelling home to the Heavenly Country, and yet eager and passionate about earthly Things? Should a Heart that is set upon Heaven, (or may be so, and ought to be so) should it burn with such Kitchen, such common Fire? And neglect the inconceivable Riches and Pleasures, and immortal Honors of the other Life, and the dawning's of that Glory upon my Soul, by the foretastes of it in this? How great is the disproportion between the Heavens and the Earth? How vast the Circumference of the one, and how small a Point the other? How many thousand Miles doth the Sun travel in the Heavens, while it passeth but one Inch upon a Dial? Oh that my Affections were carried to heavenly Things, with a swiftness somewhat answerable to

the glorious Object. And let their motion to earthly Things be rather slow and insensible, like that of the Sun on a Dial. Since I profess to believe, and wait for the heavenly Glory, should I not live, as seeking such things, as expecting such a Glory? And are careless and indifferent Thoughts, sleepy heartless Prayers, faint and weak Endeavors, becoming in such a case? Shall I not mend my Pace, and double my Diligence in my preparatory Work? When I can believably foresee the blessed Recompence; waiting for that Everlasting Light of the Sun of Righteousness, which no Eclipse shall ever darken or obscure; for that Eternal Glorious Day, which shall never be closed with an Evening. When I shall see the Face of God in Christ, and be like him, participate more of his Image, rest in his Love, and dwell forever in the Light of his Countenance, according to the Prayer and Promise of my Blessed Savior.

And ought not such a prospect to sweeten the Bitterness of all our intermediate Sufferings? We are now oftentimes in Heaviness and Sorrow; but Eternity will be enough for an interrupted Joy. When we shall exchange all our Troubles for everlasting Rest, our Prisons for perfect Liberty, our Poverty for the Riches of God; Darkness for Light; discord for Love; Deformity for Beauty; our Weaknesses and present Languishing's, for Strength and Vigor; Folly for Wisdom; Disgrace for Glory; Sickness and Pain for eternal Ease and Health; the Animal for the Angelical Life; Imperfection and Pollution for consummate Holiness; our Sighs, and Tears, and Sorrows, and Complaints, for triumphant Everlasting Praise; our Losses, Affronts, Disappointments, Perplexities, Fears, Groans, and Death, for Crowns and Scepters, Hymns and Hallelujahs, Light and Life, and Bliss unutterable; and such great things as are fit for us to hope, but too great to be now particularly understood and talked of; while we know but in part, and see through a Glass darkly; yea, it seems as if it were not lawful to utter 'em, 2 Cor. 12.4. and now they cannot be

expressed, or fully known; for Eye hath not seen, or Ear heard, or can it enter into the Heart of man to conceive that prepared Glory.

XXI.

A devout Meditation upon the 73. Psalm v.25.

Whom have I in Heaven but thee? And there is none upon Earth that I desire besides thee.

What is there in Heaven or in Earth, O Lord! But thy Presence to be valued, loved, desired, chosen, sought, or delighted in? There is nothing in either World desirable without Thee, nothing certainly above Thee, nothing in Comparison with Thee. In Thee alone I trust; on Thee I depend; in Thee I repose my Confidence and Hope; from Thee I expect all my Felicity and Salvation. What ever I can lose, yet with the continuance of thy Favor, which is my Life, I have still Enough. With that I am Rich, without it I am Poor and Miserable. And if I want the Love of God, all that Heaven and Earth can give besides, will not make me Happy. In Thee, therefore, I would terminate all my Affections, all my Devotions! There is nothing of Heaven to be had on Earth, but in thy Favor, Image and Love, and the reviving Sense of it. And all the Heaven I expect hereafter, 'tis in the more full and immediate Communications of these in thy blessed Presence. I can desire nothing upon Earth; I can enjoy nothing in Heaven, but Thee! Both here and there, thou art, and shalt ever be

my all-sufficient satisfactory Portion, my Everlasting All! None else can be the Portion of my Soul. Nothing else can fill up all its Wants, answer all its Cravings, be suited to all its Capacities, appease and charm all its restless Motions, and give complacence to all its Desires, and be the proper Object of all its Affections.

What is there else can justly claim my Love, or pretend to my supreme Affection in comparison with God? Thou art alone the proper Center of it. Thine infinite and incomparable Excellencies, (who art Love itself) deserve my choicest Love; and thy numberless Mercies and Benefits, challenge it as a just Debt; as a piece of Homage due from all, and of special Gratitude also from me. Oh that I could love thee above all things! Who alone art worthy of all my Love! O that Divine Love might be the ruling Principle within me! To inspire all my Thoughts, to regulate all my desires, to set all the Powers of my Soul on Work! O that it might take the full Possession of my Heart, and so animate and order all my Actions to please him, whom my Soul loveth! If as yet I cannot say with thine Apostle, Lord! Thou that knowest all things, thou knowest that I Love thee. Yet I can say, Lord, thou knowest that I would Love thee! Thou hast provided for our Happiness, by that first and great Command of loving thee with all our Hearts, and Souls, and Strength. But alas! How backward is my sluggish carnal Heart, to this delightful Exercise? Tho I have so oft been told, that God is Love, and that he that dwelleth in Love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. O shed abroad thy Love into my Soul! That I may feel the vital Power and Influence of it, and live continually in the Love of God, and that nothing may ever be able to separate me from it.

Whom have I in Heaven or Earth, to Hope in, but Thee? I expect more from Creatures, than they can or will perform; but God can do for me more abundantly than I can ask or think; exceed my largest

thoughts, out-strip my highest Expectations. And no man was ever disappointed, who made Thee his Hope. When I meet with Crosses, and Wrongs, Unfaithfulness, Contempt, Hatred, and Persecution from Men, I need not wonder; I was never told by God, it would be otherwise here. Did I look for less from Creatures, and expect more from God; Did I reckon this World to be a state of Trial, and not a place of Rest and Satisfaction; My Faith and my Desires would be stronger with respect to God and Heaven; and temporal Calamities and Disappointments less afflictive and vexatious.

And what is there, O Lord! In Heaven, or in Earth, my Soul can desire besides Thee? Is there anything desirable, but as it is thine, of thee, and from thee? And bears some Impression of thine Excellence, or brings some Intimation of thy Love? And what can I reasonably desire; what that is worth desiring, or having, but thou art able to be, and do, and give?

In whom, or what, shall I Rejoice, but in Thee, O Lord! Shall I solace myself in transitory Goods, that slip between my Fingers, and perish in the Using? Or relish carnal Joys, which pollute and debase the Soul? When I may and ought to Rejoice in Thee at all Times, as the only Source of perfect Everlasting Joy. Let me then stir up my drooping, desponding, unbelieving Heart, to rejoice in God; who takes Pleasure in the cheerful Service and Obedience of his Children; who delighteth in those, who delight in him. Is not Delighting in God, a most essential, vital part of Religion? Should it not be my constant Frame? Hath not God sufficiently provided, that it may be so? Can I say and believe, that God is the Portion of my Soul; that he is my God, and I hope to live with him forever, and not Rejoice? Or can I consider the Grace of the new Covenant, the matchless Love of Christ, and the precious Promises of the Gospel, and not see reason to Rejoice? Yea, doth my Soul love God, and endeavor to please him;

and is not the very Act and Exercise of holy Love, mixed with unspeakable sweetness?

Whom is there in Heaven, or in Earth, or Hell, that I ought to Fear, but Thee? Who hast a negative Voice in all the Designs of Men and Devils; a hook in their Nostrils; a Bridle in their Mouths; to make them fulfil thy Pleasure, and in everything accomplish thy Sovereign Decree.

Is there any other, in whom I may repose my Trust, but in Thee, O Lord! The Rock of Ages? The might of thy Power, the unsearchableness of thy Wisdom, the righteousness of thy Nature, the stability of thy Truth, the riches of thy Grace, and the immutability of thy Promise, are a sure foundation, for my Soul to trust to, and rely upon. Thy word stands firm forever: and the Truth of thine ability, and readiness to help, in every time of need, endures the same throughout all Generations. At all times, and in all places, my soul may trust in thee, and find relief. And they who know thy name will do so: for in the Lord Jehovah is Everlasting Kindness and Strength. To answer all my doubts, to supply all my wants, to fill all my desires. May not God take it unkindly, that I trust him no more? And is it not a criminal unkindness that I give him not the glory of all these Excellent Attributes, which are the grounds of Trust; by a constant, steady, entire dependence on him for all that I need?

I have none in Heaven but Thee, O Lord! As the object of my Invocation and Worship. Let other Christians have recourse to new Mediators, and call upon other God's: I will make mention of thy Name, and of thy Righteousness only. And ask of thee whatsoever I need, for the sake of thy Christ, my only adorable Mediator. Him thou hearest always; with him thou art always well pleased. I honor the holy Angels, as glorious Attendants about thy Throne: and bless

thee for them, as Ministering Spirits, for the good of thy Servants; but I dare not invoke, or worship 'em, because they are Fellow Servants. On the same account I honor the memory of Departed Saints, but neither invoke them, or pay them religious worship. That Glory, thou wilt not give unto another. I have no precept in Holy Scripture to direct, no promise to encourage, no Example to authorize the invocation of any other but Thee; in whom I believe, and trust, Rom. 10.14.

Having such a God in Heaven, what can I need on Earth? His Eyes behold me, his Wing is over me, his Hand can supply me, his Grace provide for me. I can want nothing that is Good: unless I should need somewhat which God, the infinitely Blessed and All Sufficient God, cannot bestow. If thou art the Portion of my Soul; all mine Enemies cannot make me miserable: unless they can void Heaven of the presence of God, hinder his care, bind up his hand, or obstruct his Love. But though my Enemies cannot, I fear my Sins may. They alone can separate between God and my Soul. And considering the multitude and aggravations of them, and thine unspotted Holiness and Justice; I should have too much reason to fear and tremble, yea, and utterly despair, If I had none in Heaven but Thee. But thy word assures me, that I have a Mediator there: a faithful and a compassionate High Priest, Jesus Christ the Righteous: whom thou hast exalted to be a Prince, and a Savior, to give Repentance and Remission of Sins. Who lives forever in Heaven, to make Intercession, till he hath brought me there, to behold his Glory, and partake of it.

That Glory, O Lord! Thou hast reserved for Heaven: in this world we only desire, believe, and hope to enjoy it. Whom have I in Heaven? That is the place of Fruition. What can I desire upon Earth? This world is the place of Desires, as the other of full Enjoyment. Most of

that which men call Enjoyment in this Life, consists but in Desire. Desire or Lust is all that is in the wicked world. 1 John 2. c. 13. the Riches of a Covetous worldling makes him desire more: and the great mystery of Intemperance is to create and increase desires: and Desires of another kind are the portion of good men in this world. O that I could breathe after a state of perfect Fruition in Heaven with more importunate desires! Who will give me to be in Heaven with Thee? On Earth I desire nothing. So one version. Let me, O my Soul! Think of Heaven, as such a place, or state of blessed Enjoyment! Speak of it, seek it, long for it, prepare for it, as such. And let Jesus Christ, who is the desire of all Nations, (through whom all Divine Communications are made to fallen Sinners) be the great object of my present desires and love! Let me desire nothing but as in him; and for him; that believing his Word, obeying his Law, adoring his Person, imitating his Example, trusting his Promise, constrained by his Love, partaking of his Image, filled with his Grace, and comforted by his Spirit; my meditations of him may be sweeter, and my love stronger; and I may have nothing more left to desire for myself, but that God who hath raised and exalted Him, would keep alive my faith, and hope, and holy desires, till he hath made me meet to be with him; and after having guided me by his Grace, and Spirit, and Councils, here on Earth, would receive me to his most Blessed and Glorious Presence in Heaven. Amen, Amen.

XXII.

The Glorious Appearance of Christ to Judgment considered as Certain

The Terror, and Astonishment, Confusion, and Despair of Wicked Jews and Christians, to behold their Judge: and hear his condemning Sentence to Everlasting Destruction.

When our Blessed Savior shall appear to judge the world, I read that it shall be, in his own Glory, the Glory of his Father, and of the Holy Angels. If by the glory of his Father, be meant that of the Divinity, as the Original and Author of all things in nature, as the Almighty Creator of the World; and by the Glory of his holy Angels, be understood that of the Legal administration, the Law being given by the disposition of Angels; and by his own Glory, that of the Gospel, as he is the Messiah; that in the Glory of all these, he shall come to Judgment: we have a summary account of the three different Revelations which God hath made of himself to mankind; by the Light of Nature; that of the Law, and the more manifest one of the Gospel. According to which every man is to be judged at the last day.

Tho we cannot distinctly tell what or how great our Lord's Glory will then be; we may be certain, it will be suitable to the dignity of his Royal person; suitable to the grandeur of his Father's Majesty; with the splendor of a Triumphant Prince, who is Heir of all Things, and hath all power in Heaven and in Earth committed to him; the Great Lord of both Worlds, Head of Angels and Men: and suitable to his glorious office, as Mediator, and the appointed Judge of Quick and Dead.

If at his Transfiguration his Face shone, and his Rayment was white and glittering, How much more splendid will his last Appearance be? When the Bodies of his Saints shall be seven times brighter than the luster of the Sun? And if his Members shall then be so glorious, how transcendently more so will their Head, their Lord appear? If the delivery and promulgation of the Law, on Mount Sinai, was

accompanied with such circumstances of terrible Majesty, how much more may we suppose the Great Assize will be attended with? When he comes to judge for the violation of the Law, and the contempt of the Gospel. And if even Moses did then exceedingly quake and fear, what will be the consternation and trembling of the wicked World at the Coming of Christ? When he shall be revealed from Heaven, in flaming Fire, with a glorious retinue of his mighty Angels, as so many bright Stars about the more glorious Sun of Righteousness. The lights of Heaven shall be Eclipsed; the visible Sun shall veil its blushing head as infinitely out-shone: the present glory of the Creation be all benighted, by reason of his transcendent Brightness. Yea, the Heavens shall be wrapped up as a scroll; the Elements melt away with a mighty noise: the Earth and all its works be burnt up; and the whole Universe as one great Bonfire, to adorn the Triumph of our Lord's Appearance. And this ushered in by the voice of an Archangel, proclaiming his approach: and the voice of God supplying the use of a Trumpet, to raise the Dead, and possess mankind with an awful Reverence of their Judge.

Thus in Triumph, as a Conqueror, and a Judge, shall he come again, who once appeared in the form of a Servant to be judged and condemned by Man. Then he was called King in scorn: now he will appear as much above all Earthly and Human Greatness, as once he stooped for our sakes beneath it. Then the Contempt of Nations, and no way esteemed Desirable, when he came from the womb of his Virgin-Mother: now the Terror of the World, when he comes again from the right hand of his Father. No more to be subject to a state of Meanness, but to render vengeance to all, who know not God, and obey not the Gospel: and to be glorified in his Saints, and admired in, and by all them that believe.

He was put to shame in the days of his Flesh, made himself of no Reputation, and accounted unworthy to live; but when he comes again, he will put on a Garment of Vengeance, to repay Fury to the Enemies of his Cross, and make his wicked Despisers rise again to shame, and everlasting Contempt. They that once bowed the knee to him in mockery, and shook their heads at him in derision, shall then see every knee bow before him, of things in Heaven, things in Earth, and under the Earth; Angels, Men, and Devils in subjection to him as Lord and King. Pilate, who condemned him as his Prisoner, shall appear before him as his rightful Judge; and know, that he was another-guess King and Monarch than the Roman Emperor. The false-witnesses, who accused him of Blasphemy, shall be impeached by one another, and their own guilty Consciences, before his Bar, with the other Jews, who once dragged him before their Tribunal; and be confounded to stand before his Judgment Seat. His Crucifiers shall behold him on a Throne of Glory, whom they Nailed to an infamous Cross. They shall be astonished to behold him sitting at the Right Hand of God, whose Hands they bound, whose Body they scourged, whose Side they pierced. They who Crowned him with Thorns, shall (with all the World) behold him with a Crown of Glory. They that spit on him, and smote him on the face with the fist of wickedness, shall have their own faces covered with Confusion. They that approved his Condemnation to Death, as a Criminal, shall be sentenced from his mouth, as their Judge, to Everlasting Destruction. They that scourged him, as a Malefactor, shall be beaten with many stripes. They that made him stagger under the weight of his Cross, shall sink under the Guilt and Punishment of despising it. They that Nailed him to the accursed Tree, between Thieves and Robbers, shall be sentenced to endless Punishment in much worse Company. They who gave him Gall and Vinegar to drink, shall not be able to get a drop of water to cool their own Tongues. Where then shall the wicked and ungodly of the Christian World appear? Who

Crucify the Son of God afresh, since he hath declared himself to be so, by his Resurrection, and the Mission of the Holy Ghost, and fulfilling his threatened vengeance on the Nation of the Jews, &c?

If the Jews shall have a sorer Condemnation than Ignorant Heathens, who never heard of Christ, never saw his Miracles, or were informed of his Doctrine; How shall we escape? For he will come again as a Conqueror, and a Judge, and not as a sufferer and a surety, as he came at first; and though he was numbered with Transgressors, and made his Grave with the Wicked, at his first Appearance; he shall hereafter be attended with the shouts of Angels who excel in strength, and the joyful Acclamations of his Saints, glittering as the Light, and paying Homage to him as the Judge of Quick and Dead. He, whom we have despised, shall then be encompassed with a dazzling Glory that will confound us. He, whom we have affronted, will be clothed with a Majesty that shall astonish us. He, whom we have offended, shall be armed with Power, and with Wrath to punish us; and all that continue to lift up the Heel against him, shall then be made his Footstool: all that refuse to kiss the Scepter of his Grace, shall be broken in pieces by his Iron Rod.

The holy Scripture doth frequently and expressly assure us, that he will thus come again, and for these ends. He is exalted, and gone to Heaven, as the Head of his Church, and the King of Glory; and when he foretold his Ascension, he gave a promise of his Return. The Heavens are to contain him till the restitution of all things. By his Providence, and by the Holy Spirit, he now carries on the designs of his Death: and when these are accomplished, he will appear, to the Joy of Believers, and the Confusion of the Wicked. He is entered as our Forerunner, within the Veil, to prepare Mansions, and to take possession for us, and will not always leave us in this dark and defiling World. He knoweth our Sorrows, and heareth our Prayers,

and bottles our Tears, takes notice of our Groans, and in all our Afflictions he is afflicted. Being reconciled by his Death, at his first coming, we shall be saved by his Life, since he lives to make good his word of coming again.

How comfortable is the News of it? How joyful will be the Meeting, to such as expect and prepare to see him? When the Sea and the Graves shall yield up their Dead, and all the Prisoners of Hope lift up their heads, arise, go up, and meet the Lord in the Air, and ascend with him to the Heavenly Glory. But who can express how dismal a sight this will be to the Secure, and the Impenitent, to all who die in their sins? To behold their Judge (who formerly offered to be their Savior) upon a glorious Throne, and all the Children of Adam summoned before his Tribunal! To have nothing to answer against his Charge, and no way to escape his condemning Sentence! They despised him as a Lamb offered in Sacrifice to take away the sins of the World: but shall no longer do so, when he comes as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, to devour and destroy the Enemies of his Cross. Now they will not own him for their Lord, but shall then find he is so, by the Vengeance he will execute. As a Jesus, as a Savior, they rejected him, making light of his Salvation, despising his Mercy, refusing his Grace: but the neglected Gospel will then be a more killing Letter than the Law. He who by his Ambassadors doth now entreat Sinners to be reconciled, will then be as deaf to their Entreaties, as they have been to His: Because they would not turn at his Reproof, hearken to the Call of his Word, and obey its Voice, they must hear the Sentence of Condemnation, and feel the Execution of it, whether they will or no; yea, the Blood of his Cross will upbraid, accuse, and plead against them. And whatever foolish Evasions they now make, to continue in security, they shall then be Speechless, and Self-condemned. Nothing will be able to hide them from the amazing Presence of their Judge, or from the Wrath of the Lamb. He then will inflict an intolerable

and righteous Vengeance, an Everlasting Destruction, upon all the ignorant and ungodly World: the Greatest, the Stoutest, the Boldest of them, shall then be humbled, and stand before Christ's Tribunal, upon an equal Level with the meanest; seized with horror, filled with guilt, anguish, and despair; and find, to their eternal Confusion, that the Judge is no respecter of persons, but every man shall receive according to his works. The Mighty shall not be spared for his Greatness, nor the mean man for his Poverty. O Fool! O Wretch that I am! Shall many then say, who now brave it out in Pride and Vanity, unconcerned about a future Judgment! Not to be persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, which I was so often warned and foretold of! What Refuge of Hope can I now fly to? What can I say for myself? What can I do to escape, to die, to exist no longer? I would have no compassion on my own Soul; I would not so much as consider its danger; I shall now find none from Christ, I can expect none! His Mercy is gone, and gone forever! I am lost, undone, tormented, and must eternally be so! O the Amazement, Horror, and Despair of self-condemned Sinners in that day of Vengeance!

O my Soul! What is there of greater consequence, or of greater certainty from the Word of God, than that I must appear to Judgment, when Christ shall come again? Lord, teach me to believe it firmly, to consider it often, to lay it seriously to heart, to act under the Influence and Power of it as long as I live; that at the Great Resurrection from the Dead I may lift up my head with a joyful Hope, and find the Judge to be my Friend, my Advocate, my Jesus, and not my Enemy and Destroyer.

Meditations of the Glory of Christ in his Glorified Saints

And of the thankful Admiration of Believers when He shall come again from Heaven, which shall be continued to all Eternity.

The terror of our Lord's Appearance to Judgment cannot be greater to the Wicked, than the Comfort and Joy of it will be to the Saints. When they shall see Him whom their Souls love, ascend with him to Heaven, and be welcomed, according to his promise, with those endearing words, Come, ye blessed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the World.

'Twas for your sakes I assumed Flesh, lived on Earth, and died on the Cross, to purchase this Glorious Kingdom for you, which I now come to give you the Possession of. 'Twas for this I prayed and suffered on Earth, for this I interceded ever since in Heaven: I was heard in that Prayer, accepted in those Sufferings, and my Intercession granted, that where I am, you may be also, to behold my Glory. Come therefore, good and faithful Servants, enter into your Lord's joy.

O what ravishing words will these be! What an Ecstasy of Love and Kindness is implied in them! What matter of rejoicing may it now give me, to admit the Hope, that my Blessed Savior will say such words as these to me, and bid me stand upon his Right-hand, among his Sheep! O what an exulting frame of Soul will such Expressions raise! How shall all my Doubts and Fears and Sorrows be scattered in a moment, and cease forever! O Glorious Day! When my blessed Lord shall thus publicly acknowledge me for his own, and plead my Cause against all the Accusations of Satan, and the malicious Calumnies of all his Instruments! when I shall be able to say of all my

Sins and Sufferings, as my Lord upon the Cross, It is finished, it is finished! My warfare being accomplished, being more than Conqueror over all, through him who loved me, and died for me, and now is come to wipe away all tears from mine eyes, as it were with the Napkin that was bound about his Head, when laid in the Grave; all being the fruit of his meritorious Death. Then shall I have nothing more to fear, or wish, or beg. I shall offend, provoke, and dishonor him no more; or by my folly and scandal discredit his holy Name and Gospel: but by consummate Holiness be fitted to rejoice in his Presence and Love, and celebrate his Praise forever. I shall never more lament his Absence, or complain of his Anger; never see a cloud on his Face, or a Frown in his Look anymore. Now I must wait and pray, struggle and strive, labor and suffer, desire and expect, believe and hope, &c. but then perfect Rest and Holiness, Love and Joy, Vision and Fruition, Bliss and Glory, unutterable and everlasting, shall take place.

All the Attributes of God, all the wonderful Perfections of Christ, will then be glorified in Believers, and admired by them. His invariable Truth will then be honored, which they trusted to, and waited for; for now they shall know and find they did not wait in vain: They hoped in his Word, and ventured their Salvation upon it; and now they shall receive the end of their Faith and Hope, infinitely beyond what they ever expected or believed.

The Glory of Divine Wisdom will then appear, when the Constitution, Administration, and Design of the Mediator's Kingdom shall be fully known, in the admirable Order and Beauty of every part of it, with the exact tendency of all the particulars to one Glorious End, and the whole Undertaking crowned with so blessed an Issue. What is now a Mystery even to Believers themselves, and hath a Veil upon it, shall then no longer be so; all the Riddles of God's Grace and Providence

shall be plainly understood. O how transporting a View must it needs be, when the Glory of all the Divine Attributes which God intended to accomplish, in and by Christ, shall be manifest to his Redeemed Saints. The whole method of our Salvation will then appear to be the fruit of unsearchable Wisdom, when we shall all see the Reality and Substance, and entire Scheme, of all that God designed in and by him; all that was typified of him, and foretold concerning him, in the Old Testament. How will it all appear to be the manifold Wisdom of God! Ephes. 3. c. 10.

As in uniting Heaven and Earth together in the Person of our Mediator; fulfilling the Truth of a terrible threatening in his Death, and by the same way accomplishing many gracious Promises; satisfying Justice, and at the same time showing Mercy; manifesting infinite Grace and Kindness by shedding of Blood; conquering Death by dying, and disarming the Law by Obedience to it, &c. afterwards subduing the world to the Faith of the Gospel, by the foolishness of Preaching; making men wise to Salvation by the knowledge of the Cross; and spreading that Faith the more by all the opposition made against it, &c. How wonderfully will a clear View of these things discover, and glorify the Wisdom of God.

But the Love and Grace of Christ; the infinite Goodness and Compassion of God, will then be magnified in an especial manner. What but Sovereign Love in the whole Contrivance and Counsel of God about our Redemption? What admirable Love and Grace in the whole management of that design? What unparalleled kindness in the accomplishment of it, by the Sacrifice of the Son of God? And how Glorious will this Love appear, when he shall come again to give us the full Harvest of all his Purchase? With what admiring Thankfulness shall Believers then contemplate the unsearchable Riches of his Grace? In all the Parts and Instances of his

Humiliation, from his Conception to his Crucifixion and Burial; in all the Evidences and Discoveries made of it, from the first Promise to its Completion; yea, from before the Foundation of the World, in the Covenant of Peace between the Father and the Son, until his second Coming, to Judge the World, and deliver up the Kingdom to his Father.

How shall we then admire and adore his Powerful Grace, which snatched us as Firebrands out of everlasting Burnings; that effectually shined into our minds by heavenly Light; conquered the Opposition of our stubborn Wills; Sanctified our carnal Hearts, rescued us from the Tyranny of Satan, and the Dominion of Lust; giving, cherishing, and preserving the holy Seed of Grace, and making it Spring up to Eternal Life; defeating the malicious and subtle Endeavors of the Devil to destroy it; enabling us to endure Tribulation, and persevere to the end; giving us Victory over Death; conducting us through the dark Valley; raising our Bodies, reviving and reuniting them to our Souls, and rendering them glorious like his own Body; and at length rewarding our imperfect Services with Eternal Life. Yea, though our best Services were mixed with Sin, our holiest Duties spotted, our most courageous Sufferings mixed with unbelief, yet rewarded with a Blessedness that hath no alloy of Evil, but all the ingredients of a Perfect Felicity, and nothing to lessen and interrupt it: How shall we then admire the Bounty of our Gracious Lord, the Freeness, Tenderness, Riches, and the exceeding Greatness and Glory, of his Infinite Goodness and Grace to poor Believers?

With what Ecstasies of Joy and Gratitude may we imagine that our Lord will be then admired by all his Redeemed ones?

Saying, This is He, who made our Peace with God, and reversed the Sentence of Damnation, which we were under; who bought us with

the price of his most precious Blood, bore the Wrath of his Father, and submitted to an infamous and cursed Death for us. He assumed our Nature, that we might partake of his; became the Son of Man, that we might be made the Children of God; for our sakes he became poor, that we through his Poverty might become Rich: He stooped to bear the greatest Ignominy and Reproach, to confer Honor on us: He was for a time forsaken of his Father, that we might not be so eternally: He felt the stroke of his Anger against Sin, that we might not perish under it. He was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grievs, that we might Rejoice: His Agonies and bloody Sweat were for our Refreshment, and by his Stripes we are Healed: He bowed his Head on the Cross, that we might lift up ours in Triumph; and because we had eaten of the forbidden Fruit, he hung on the accursed Tree. 'Twas for us that he suffered the Frowns of Heaven, the Enmity of Hell, the Rage of Devils, the Hatred and Persecution of the World: He was judged, that we might not come into Condemnation: He was Crucified, that we might be Glorified; and he is now Come again finally and fully to effect it.

O the Height, and Depth, and Length, and Breadth of the Love of Christ, which passeth Knowledge, but calls for Admiration, and everlasting Gratitude! This is the Blessed Day, we longed and waited, and prayed for! This is our Gracious, our Glorious Lord, whose Love melted our Heart, whose Promise was our Support, whose Word was our Rule, whose Spirit was our Comforter, whose Cross was our Crown, and the hope of his Appearance our chief Consolation!

Lord! What am I, what was I, that the ever Blessed Son of God should do and suffer, and purchase all this for me? I can remember when I was ignorant of God, a Stranger to him, at Enmity with him, under the Power of Darkness, and the Devil, serving divers Lusts and Pleasures, hastening to Hell, and liable to his Wrath. But he chose

me out of the World, stamped his Image upon me, pardoned my Sins, and embraceth me in the Arms of his unchangeable Love. O happy Change! And yet how little did I prize his Grace, admire his Love, and express my own, or promote his Glory, and honor him in the Eyes of others? How did I dishonor my Profession and holy Calling, as his Disciple, by aggravated Apostasy? But he recovered me by Repentance, and healed my Back-sliding's, and received me graciously, because he loved me freely. O admirable Grace! To pardon, and save, and bring to Glory such an unthankful Wretch, as I have been! To make such a Difference between Me and Others, whom I knew on Earth! that the same Power, which makes them Miserable, now makes me Blessed! That when they are banished from his Presence into Everlasting Destruction, I am admitted to behold his Glory, and shall dwell with him forever!

O, how much more do I now see and find, than ever I believed, of the Love of Christ, and his promised Salvation! How much more glorious is the Person of my Redeemer! How much more Excellent is the heavenly State, than ever I thought or expected! I could not have imagined the thousandth thousandth Part of that which I now see and feel. I cannot but admire, and spend an Eternity in admiring, and praising the incomparable Grace and Glory of my blessed Redeemer.

Such holy Admiration will certainly produce the most thankful Adorations of our Lord Jesus. Saying one to another, O Bless the Lord of Love and Glory! Who humbled himself so low, as our Mediator, and hath exalted us so high, as the blessed Fruit of it! How can we ever enough adore and praise him, who condescended so far, and hath done and suffered so much for us? See how the holy Angels worship this King of Glory! And have not everyone of us more reason to do so? O let all the Choir of Heaven celebrate his glorious Love!

And let us his Redeemed, his Glorified ones say continually, Let the Lord be magnified; who hath loved us, and washed us from our Sins in his own Blood, and made us Kings and Priests unto God his Father, and through him ours.

O merciful Savior! O glorious Change! O happy Society! With whom we shall Eternally adore our Common Lord. We can some of us remember when we lived together on Earth, how we wept and prayed, and fasted and mourned together, how we suffered, and complained, and sinned together. O the marvelous Change our Redeemer hath now wrought for us, and in us! These Bodies, these Souls, this Life, this Place, this Company, these Enjoyments, are not like those in yonder World. But alas, who can describe what Believers shall then think and say to extol their Savior! How small a Portion is it we understand of that World? How little can I conceive, and how much less express? Blessed be God we know so much, as the matter of our joyful Hopes; and forever Blessed be God, who hath promised and provided such a Glory for us, as cannot now be fully known.

What inexpressible Sweetness might Believers taste by rejoicing in Hope, did a more lively Faith realize all this to their Souls? We might listen as it were to the Shouts and Acclamations of the Saints above, and say Amen to their Thanksgivings. We might behold them about the Throne of God, and of the Lamb, with Palms of Victory in their Hands, a Crown of Glory on their Heads, and Songs of Triumph in their Mouths, saying, Hallelujah; Worthy art Thou, O Lord, to receive Glory, and Honor, and Power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy Pleasure they are, and were created. And worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honor, and Glory, and Blessing. And again, Blessing, Honor, Glory, and Power be unto him who Sits upon the Throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever.

Whence is it, O my Soul! If indeed, I believe and expect all this; that I can Hear, and Read, and Think, and Speak of these great Things, with no more ardent Affections, suitable Preparations, importunate Prayers, and vigorous Desires? How should the believing Thoughts of that Day promote my heavenly Mindedness, Self-denial, Contempt of the World, Patience and Perseverance? Quicken my Zeal, secure my Steadfastness, and give Life and Spirit to my Prayers for the hastening of it? How should my Soul rise towards Heaven, by holy Love and Desire? Ascend and meet him, get as near him as I can, breathe after more of his Presence, and beg him to prepossess my Heart, to anticipate his second Coming by clearer discoveries of his Love, and fuller Communications of his Grace? Even so, Come Lord Jesus!

XXIV.

Concerning the Examination of a man's Heart and Life

The Reasonableness, Advantages, and Necessity of it. Some Direction and Advice concerning the Time and Manner. That we may know in what Preparedness we are for Eternity.

I am hastening every Year, every Day, to the period of this Life: I must shortly appear before my Glorious Judge; and experience these Terrors or Comforts, this Blessedness or Misery, which I have now read of. Shall I not therefore inquire, which of the two belongs to me? Is it not worth considering, whither I must go, and how I shall fare, when I quit this Body? What is like to be my next Habitation? To

which of the two unchangeable States I shall be adjudged? Shall an Inquiry of so much consequence be put off, to an indefinite hereafter? Do I not desire to know the worst, while a remedy may be found? Or am I content to die, through an unwillingness to discover that I am Sick? The question to be resolved, is of infinite weight. Shall I not spend a few hours to know what will become of me forever? An error is more than possible, 'tis easy to mistake; and the hazard of doing so is unspeakably great. How many thousands perish eternally, even under the Light of the Gospel, who never suspected their Danger? How ordinary, how common a thing is it, for Men to be thus deceived! How successful is the Devil in this stratagem against the Souls of Men! Is it not then a most criminal stupidity, to be contentedly ignorant, and unresolved, whether I am reconciled to God or no; whether I am led by the Flesh or the Spirit; whether I am in the broad or narrow way, which lead to such contrary ends; that is, whether, if I die in this condition, I shall be saved, or perish? Can such an enquiry be frivolous or indifferent? Is the subject of it so contemptible, or my concern in it so small, that it merits not to be attentively considered? Shall I never ask my Soul, till I am leaving this World, (the unfittest time of all to begin so important an Affair) what am I? To whom do I belong? Whose Image do I bear? How have I lived, and what do I do? What do I love most? What do I most constantly desire, and choose, and seek? How doth the Pulse of my Soul beat? Is it quickest towards God, or towards the World? Whither am I going? What will be the final upshot and issue of my present course? Is it Heaven or Hell I must be translated to by dying? What security have I got for Eternal Life? What provisions have I made? What foundation have I laid?

How strangely infatuated are most men, who talk of an Everlasting Life as an Article of their Creed, and say they count upon it that they must dwell in Happiness or Misery forever; and seldom or never

bethink themselves in good earnest, and for any time, with a settled composed exercise of thoughts, which of these Two is like to be their Lot. Or if they begin to search and try themselves, they come to no Conclusion, or conclude too hastily; they pluck off the Plaster as soon as it begins to smart; they are either frightened with the horrid prospect of past Crimes, or, having escaped the grosser Pollutions of the World, judge too favorably of their own ease. They commonly do the work but by halves, and so go from the Glass, and forget what manner of persons they were.

Let me therefore, O my Soul! Sequester myself from the World, to commune with my own heart, to reflect upon my past life, and look into my present state, to recollect and review the most considerable passages of my course and time hitherto. O how neglected and disused a Practice is this, which doth challenge and require our principal and most serious Concerns about it! And how many begin it, and are discouraged, and leave off without reaching the end of such an Enquiry!

How much wiser in this respect are the Children of this World, in their Generation, than the Children of Light? Who is so exact in his Accompts between God and his own Soul, as Trades-men in their Dealings with one another? Who is at the pains to write down his Sins and his Mercies? The grounds of his Fear, and the encouragements of his Hope? Or keeps a Journal and Diary of his Spiritual State? Who doth at set times, once a Month, or once a Quarter, or even once a Year, take a just view of Himself, his Heart, and Life, and State, as a Christian; that he may see what he hath received and done, what he owes, and what he may expect; that he may know whether he thrive or decay; whether he increase or decrease; whether he go backward or forward; whether he be Richer or Poorer this year than the last? And is it not a symptom that you

are declining, when you love not to examine your Accounts? Is there not ground of jealousy and suspicion, that you are behind hand, because you are loath to inquire, whether you are or no? And unwilling to know the worst of your Condition? Nevertheless, without such Enquiries, and bringing the matter to a Determination, at what uncertainties must we live? And how inconceivable an hazard do all Hypocrites and unrenewed Sinners run? And how reasonable, how necessary is it that we should know, and in order to it, prove ourselves? We must therefore bestow Time and serious Diligence about it, that we may examine matters to the bottom, and come to some Result; so that we may form a right Judgment concerning our own case.

He that would do it to good purpose, must endeavor to understand clearly the terms of the Covenant on God's part, and on ours: and take care not to Judge of himself by mistaken rules; by a false Standard, that God will not justify; or by any such characters as will not conclude. But most men are unwilling to bring themselves to a Trial, or to let Conscience deal plainly and faithfully with them. They are stupidly secure, and see not the necessity of this duty. Or do not suspect themselves. They presume they need not be at that Trouble: or are so taken up with the World, that they cannot find time and leisure for it. And many men dare not bring their Hearts and Ways to a Trial. There is commonly some secret Lust indulged, which they are loath to let go. But most go on in sin, and perish Eternally, because they think there is no danger of perishing: and never Repent, and make their Peace with God, because they fancy and presume 'tis done already.

Therefore let me beg of thee, whoever thou art, who readest this, to put the case to thyself, seriously to admit the doubt, whether you are not mistaken; make the supposition, that you have not hitherto

sufficiently considered the State of your Soul. You are confident that all is well; and thereupon are unwilling to examine farther: but for that very reason you ought to question, whether it be so or not? Do but ask yourselves seriously, what is the ground of your good Opinion concerning yourself? For what reason can you thus conclude?

Did you ever seriously lay to heart the Characters, and Description, which the Scriptures give, of those whom Christ will own at the last day; and of such whom he will reject and reprobate? With unfeigned application to your own case, have you therewith proved yourselves? And come to a settled Judgment, after a deliberate Enquiry? And was the Conclusion to your Comfort and Joy? If so, what influence hath it since had upon your Heart and Life? Hath it promoted Purity, Thankfulness, Heavenly-mindedness, Contempt of this World, and stronger Desires after the Image, Love, and Presence of God, and the Glory of Christ? Moreover, consider,

Is not this a good while a-go? How have you behaved yourself ever since? Have you not reason to look back with shame? If you but slightly examined yourself formerly, resolve to do it more effectually now: Review the sins you have been since guilty of. And if you have not done anything considerable of this kind, you ought now to begin. It is seasonable to begin the year by such an Exercise, and it will be found of great use, in all the following parts of it: especially when you come to examine yourself afresh, in order to the Lord's Supper. For we ought frequently to renew the sad remembrance of our former Sins; that from time to time we may renew our Repentance, which is the work of our Life, and not of one day. And he that comes to the Sacrament, and will look no farther back, than to the last Communion, may possibly presume too much, that all was then as it should be, and not be humble enough.

If anyone therefore resolve in good earnest upon an holy Life, and seriously design to prepare for Eternity, as it is necessary to make a general review of his Life, so I desire to afford him the best Counsel I can, in order to it.

It may be advisable, if you have not formerly begun this work, to employ one hour at least in a Day, for several Days following, in writing down the most considerable Passages of your Life you can remember, desiring God's Assistance therein; and keeping your Eye upon your End, in the whole; that is, thinking seriously that 'tis in order to Eternity, that you now examine yourself. Choose a place of Retirement, and the most convenient Time, that you may not be interrupted, and when your Heart is most serious. Every man may divide his Life into several parts, as from Infancy till he left off going to School, or was bound Apprentice, or settled in any way of Education. From thence, 'till fixed in some Employment: If a married person, till entered into that Condition. And from thence to another remarkable Period, or to the present Time. It may better assist some persons memory, to consider the several Places of their abode, and compute according to them. In each portion of time, recollect what sins you were most addicted to: in what Instances, with what Frequency, and with what other various aggravations, you committed 'em: and what have been the effects and consequences of those sins, to yourselves, and others, in order to Repentance, and godly Sorrow. Which must not be judged of by Tears, but Grief, and inward hatred of Sin. Remembering that no man is the better merely for being examined, if there follows nothing after it. 'It is in order to a Judgment to be passed upon ourselves. 'It is to search out our own Iniquity, our Beloved sin, in order to the mortification of it. That Goliath must first be slain, if ever the other Philistines are conquered. In some it is Pride, in others Worldliness, in some

Uncleanness, in others Drunkenness, Gluttony, &c. That you may discover it, observe,

What sin 'tis you are most unwilling to part with: which you could even wish were not forbidden.

Which you have formerly been most apt to plead for, to extenuate or excuse, and hide.

The thoughts whereof do most frequently occur; especially when alone: first in the morning, and last at night: and are most distracting in Prayer and Worship.

Which an awakened Conscience hath most plainly told you of; under a Sermon, or at a Sacrament, or under some heavy affliction, or on a sick-bed, &c.

Which you can least bear to be reproved for.

Which the Temperament of your body doth most incline to.

Which your Calling, Employment, Company, and Converse, administer the greatest Temptations for.

That especially which hath the Throne of the Heart, and sets all the faculties a work to contrive fuel and opportunities for its Gratification.

Observe likewise what Passion was most Predominant in each Period of Time, or is yet so; and what ill effects it hath produced. Consider farther what dangerous Temptations you have met with: how you have fallen by 'em, or been enabled to resist. Consider withal the Time, and the Means, whereby God hath at any time formerly awakened, convinced and humbled you; what Purposes of

Amendment, and Promises of Reformation you have ever made; and how far you have, or have not performed 'em. Recollect likewise all the special Mercies you have received from God in every State and Period of your Life, in order to thankfulness. The last Section of these Papers may give you some assistance therein, and consider what Returns you have made to God, for all his Kindness.

You may do well to consider yourself also, in the Relations you have stood to others; as Inferior, Equal, or Superior; in Family, Church, or State; in your Calling, Profession, Employment, &c. And examine in what more notorious Instances, you have been faulty in your Relative Duties. How you did ordinarily carry it in your Place and Station; for that is the best, the truest Picture of a Man, which is like him in his ordinary every days Habit. Particularly reflect upon the Sins you have committed in Company with others. By whose Example you have been drawn to Sin; who may probably have been tempted by yours, and bewail it; and if the Persons are living, admonish them to Repent; and if you have injured and wronged any, acknowledge your Fault, and to the utmost of your Power, make speedy Restitution, If any of your Companions in Sin are dead, and you fear died without Repentance; humble yourself particularly before God for having contributed to their Damnation. I know of some who have made such a Catalogue of their Sins, with the most observable Aggravations of them; which they constantly preserved, and frequently reviewed, to keep them Humble, Penitent, Watchful, and Thankful; and on some occasions of secret Humiliation, have spread them before the Lord (as Hezekiah did the writing of his Enemy) covering themselves with Shame and Confusion of Face, by considering what they have been, and thence admiring the Riches of free Grace, in the forgiveness of such Crimes, through the Blood of Christ.

Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my Reins, and my Heart, for thy Loving kindness is before mine Eyes, and I will walk in thy Truth. Thou hast searched me, O Lord, and known me; thou knowest my Thoughts a far off; all my secret Sins are in the Light of thy Countenance; and thou art acquainted with all my ways; set my Sins in order before me, that I may Repent, and forsake them. Show me mine Infirmities and Weaknesses, that I may watch against them. And teach me to Judge and Condemn myself, that I may not be judged of the Lord, or condemned with the World.

XXV.

How Christians ought to examine their Decays of Grace and Piety.

The greatness of their Sin, and of their Loss under such a Declension: God's Displeasure, and departure from them, considered, to awaken Endeavors of a Recovery. In what manner the Faith of Adherence may be acted by one, who hath no Assurance.

It cannot but be of use to Believers also, at stated Times to examine themselves, concerning their Languishing's and Decays in Grace, falling from their first Love, to a Spirit of Indifferency and Lukewarmness, disorderly walking or unfruitfulness; whether gray Hairs are not here and there upon them, and they know it not. For God may withdraw by degrees, so that his departure may not presently be perceived. And some kind of Activity in Duty may be continued upon false Principles, and from Common Assistance, while a Christian, as to his spiritual State, may be under a dangerous

Consumption. 'It is not difficult for others to observe it sometimes, and would be visible enough to themselves, would they spare a few hours to examine the matter. The Punishment of such Backslidings, the loss of the quickening and comforting Presence of the Holy Spirit, deserves likewise to be inquired into, in order to a speedy Remedy, and should enforce the Counsel.

I mean not barely the Ebbing of Affections in the Duties of Religion, or the want of Life, and quickening from sensible Consolations, which new Converts, (especially such as have been reclaimed from a course of notorious Impiety) have more of at first than afterwards. This doubting Christians should particularly take notice of, by the Instance of the Prodigal, who was extraordinarily feasted at his first return, but was doubtless contented afterwards with the ordinary Provisions of his Fathers house. Neither doth God dispense the same measure to all alike, nor to any alike at all Times: Some, who are called to greater Services and Sufferings, than others, or had greater Conflicts before Conversion, may have a greater share than the rest of their Brethren. Neither will the same degree of Grace imparted to some Persons, so discernably move and comfort, as it will do some others of a different Temper. 'It is not therefore so much to be the matter of our Enquiry, (if at all it need to be so) whether we have more or less of sensible Joy in the performance of Duty. But

Whether we are not fallen and declined, as to the inward vital Acts of Grace, and in the outward Fruits of Holiness. Whether we have such clear convincing Apprehensions of Divine and Spiritual Truths, and the Mysteries of the Gospel, as formerly; whether our minds are not become more vain and heedless; whether our Knowledge of God, and of the Revelations of his Will, be as powerful and efficacious upon our Hearts and Lives, as heretofore; whether there be no less Frequency, less Consistency, less inward Satisfaction in holy serious

Thoughts, than formerly. You were wont to pray and endeavor, that God might be first and last in your Thoughts every day, and by frequent Ejaculations in civil Affairs, to maintain a daily converse with God; but now you mind not whether it be so or not; yea, you cannot but know, that it is not thus with you still. It was once your Burden to be pestered with foolish, filthy, worldly, vain Thoughts, especially on the Lord's Day, or in the Worship of God; you rejected and disowned them, you lamented and prayed against them; do so much as examine, whether it be thus still.

Consider all your Affections, and their several Objects; and see whether a criminal Lukewarmness hath not diffused itself into every of them. Examine every Grace; and see whether your Faith, Hope, Love, holy Desires, and Delight in God be not miserably abated; as to the strength and vigor, the efficacy, and frequent exercise of every of them; so that your Thoughts of God are few, cold, and lifeless, without desire, delight and love.

Consider the Opportunities of Public Worship, and solemn Occasions of approaching the Divine Presence: Are they as much the desire of your Souls, and the rejoicing of your Hearts as once they were? Are you not more easily diverted from them, less satisfied and refreshed by them? Are not all Gospel Ordinances less powerful and quickening, and your profit and advantage thereby unspeakably less than formerly? Do you hunger and thirst, and pant as the Hart after the Water-brooks, to draw nigh to God, and come into his Courts? Do you make Conscience of preparing before hand? Do you come with a real desire, and design, and expectation of profiting, and bettering your Spirits? Do you join in every part of Divine worship, with that attention, seriousness, and composure of mind, and taste the sweetness and benefit of such solemnities, as formerly? Are such services performed with that Awe of God, with that Humility,

Fervency, and Intenseness of Spirit, as sometimes they were? Are you not more negligent and unconcerned before and after, whether you find anything of this or no? Tho your Desires are weak, your Hearts flat, your Thoughts wandering, your Spirits trifling, so the work be done, and the duty be over, (in how formal, customary, and careless a manner, soever it be) you consider it not, you lay it not to Heart, you reflect not upon it, you bewail it not, or at least are better contented and sooner quieted, and take less notice of the frame of your Heart in such Duties, than formerly?

Examine farther, how 'tis with you as to the great distinguishing Duties of an upright Christian, (if performed as they ought to be) I mean Secret Prayer and Meditation: Are you as strict and careful, constant and Conscientious, frequent and abundant in these, as formerly? May not our Closets and places of Retirement witness against us? How seldom are we there? How quickly are we gone? How easily diverted? How soon tired? How do we trifle in that work, and shuffle it over, and take up with the shadow and image of Prayer? Our former humble and importunate Prayers, joyful Thanksgivings, and sweet Contemplation of the Mysteries of Religion, compared with our present daily practice, will testify that we are declined and fallen.

Moreover consider the Evil of Sin, and how your Heart stands affected to it. Is not your Hatred of Sin, and Zeal against it, much decayed? Especially with respect to inward Spiritual sins, such as the secret workings of unbelief, and distrust, pride, envy, uncharitableness, &c. Do you bewail it, strive against it, and shun the occasions, and fear the temptations that may lead you into Sin, as once you did? Have you not lost much of that tenderness, and holy Jealousy over your heart and ways, you formerly had? Do you not now make more bold with Temptation? Are you not oftener

conquered? and with less Reluctance? And by smaller Temptations?
&c.

Are you not more Unserviceable? Root and Fruit in a withering condition? God less Honor'd, and others less profited, and edified by your Example and Life? Do you not adhere more to the world? Conform to it, and comply with it in many things, which formerly you durst not have done? And are every day waxing worse? Make a pause a while, and bethink yourself, what this will come to at last? When even the little Good that remains, is ready to die.

May I not ask such Christians, or desire them to ask themselves; What is already the effect and consequence of this Declension? Is not God's Spirit removed, and the Light of his Countenance Eclipsed? Yea as to many of them, are they not under sad apprehensions of God's displeasure? Do they not feel the terrors of the Lord? Do they not walk heavily from day today? They that could once converse with God on all occasions as a Friend, and a Father, do now think of God and are troubled: Thick Darkness doth encompass them round about: They have lost the sense of his Love, the comforts of his presence, and their Song in the night, and see no relief. This is a more hopeful case however, than theirs, who are under great Backslidings and Desertion, and hardly sensible of it. To awaken and assist both; Consider I beseech you, whence you are fallen, and what you have lost, and what will be the issue of this; if Sickness, or some smart Affliction overtake you; or if you should die in this condition. And inquire seriously, and presently, into the cause of all this Evil: for a few transient thoughts will not affect the Heart and persuade to Action. And do it presently, because by every delay your work will be the harder, your danger the greater, and your recovery the more difficult. Reflect upon the Sinfulness as well as Affliction of this case. Know that you have displeased God, and run from him, neglected his

Presence, and grieved his Spirit, and in what Instances you have done so; that hath made him weary of his dwelling? What Ordinances you have slighted; what Duties you have omitted; what sins you have given way to; in order to Repentance and deep Humiliation.

Can you contentedly sit still, with this dismal State of things? While God hath somewhat (yea a great deal indeed) against you, for having left your first Love? Will you not endeavor to remove that, which hath made such a separation between God and you, and brought you thus low? What Communion with God, what Communications of his Grace, what Influences of his Spirit, and Evidences of his Favor have you lost? And will you not acknowledge your Iniquity, and abase yourselves in the Dust, and return to the Lord, and do your first works? That he may heal your Backslidings, and receive you graciously; that you may again take hold of his Covenant, and be at Peace with him.

But to be at Peace with God, is not the whole of your Concern, you need not only a Pardon, but a Physician to heal you; as doth a Malefactor, that is not only liable to the Law, but desperately sick. Your State is sinful, and dangerous, as well as troublesome. From performing duties in such a manner as you now do, you may quickly be Tempted to let them altogether alone. God may be so far provoked to suffer Satan to make attempts upon you of that kind: (and he is forward enough to make use of such an opportunity, to try all his Snares and Stratagems against you:) till he prevail with you, to think hardly of God himself, unthankfully to overlook all his former kindnesses, to put the worst Interpretation that can be upon all his Providences; to distrust and quarrel with him, as if his faithfulness had failed, and his Mercy were clean gone forever, and there were no hope left, for one in your case: and so run into Desperation, and

through the subtlety and violence of Satan's Temptations, try the most foolish and unlawful means for ease and cure; either open Licentiousness, or it may be Self-Murder.

Therefore speedy present Repentance is necessary, to find out, and mortify every Corruption, and that especially, which Conscience tells us, you have most indulged; from whence your Distress doth principally arise: Confessing your sin freely, fully, and without reserve, and waiting on God in the diligent use of all means, for the recovery of that which you have lost: and Justifying God in his Righteousness, Truth, Wisdom, Holiness, in all his Rebukes. That you may regain a Spirit of Prayer, and taste the sweetness, virtue, and efficacy of every Duty, and of every Ordinance; and God may give you the Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness, and the Joy of the Lord may be your Strength, for future service and suffering.

In the meantime, do not cast away your Hope, but though you have (too justly) deprived yourself of the Faith of Assurance, yet endeavor to maintain and exercise the Faith of Adherence . Say unto God, that because there is forgiveness with him, therefore he is to be feared. My sin is not too great to be forgiven. 'It is not the Unpardonable Sin: for I desire to repent, and am resolved to return. I will still cleave to the Lord, and wait upon him, and follow hard after him, and take no other course for Deliverance and Comfort. Mine is not a single Case: I am not the only Soul that hath been so distressed, and yet found relief, by seeking unto God. 'It is therefore good for me to hope, and quietly wait for the Salvation of God . I will draw near to God; I will lie at his foot; and continue in all ways of Worship and Duty, wherein I may hope to meet with the quickening, and comfort, of his Spirit: I will seek relief from no other; I will keep as near him as I can;

whither else shall I go, he alone hath the words of Eternal Life; he alone can create (what is the fruit of his own lips) Peace, Peace.

I will encourage myself in the consideration of his General Grace, and the probabilities of his special Love: I will recollect my former Experiences, when I had some good hope, through Grace, concerning my Adoption: I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. If God will give me so much Grace as to continue waiting, I will hope still: and though I walk in darkness, and see little or no Light, I will stay myself upon the Lord. And if by the want of sensible Consolation he will make me more humble, and keep me in a greater Submission to his will, I will bless his holy Name; and derive more comfortable hope from thence, than from the most sweet and sensible Considerations I ever had; and look upon Humility, Self-denial, Dependance on God, Resignation to him, and Hatred of sin, as a better sign of his Love, than the highest fervors of Affection in his service can be.

Oh that I had formerly done as much for Holiness, as I have for Comfort! By the enjoyment of the one, I should have had more of the other: the Exercise of Grace would have discovered the Truth of it. Let me therefore accuse and condemn myself; but still trust, and love God, and wait upon him. Let me resolve never to choose a new Lord or Master. Or take up with any Portion beneath God himself; or any way of Hope or Salvation, but by J. Christ, my only Savior; neither let me forsake the way of Faith and Holiness, for all the hopes and Happiness of this World, if put to my choice. But be always able to say, (Blessed be God I now can) that I will return to my former Husband, for then it was better with me than now. I had peace and refreshment in my former ways, I will return to them. Lord, forsake me not utterly! Keep not thine Anger forever: Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy H. Spirit from me: Restore unto me

the Joy of thy Salvation, that my Heart may be enlarged to praise thy name, and to run the way of thy Commandments.

XXVI.

Confession of Sin, Humiliation, and Repentance must follow upon Self-Examination.

Advice concerning Repentance of some particular Backsliding. The great Perplexity and Distress of a Penitent Sinner represented, as a Caution against returning to Folly.

That we may turn unto the Lord, is the end of searching and trying our Ways. Lord! I have been searching my Heart, and considering my ways, but can find little or no good; neither can I discover all that is evil in both. But I find enough to make my own Heart condemn me, and Thou, who art greater than my Heart, and knowest all things, mayest much more condemn me. I am altogether unclean, polluted, and abominable.

If I go about to enumerate the Sins of my Thoughts, Words, and Actions, in all the periods of my Life hitherto; if I consider my Omissions of Duty, and daily Crimes by actual Commission; if I reflect upon my Sins according to their respective Object, as either against Thee, O God, and against my Neighbor, and against my own Soul or Body; and compare my Heart and Life with thy strict and holy Law, and think in how many Instances I have transgressed every of thy Righteous Commandments: I find they are more than

the hairs on my head, they cannot be numbered. Who can tell how oft he hath offended? Many of my sins make little Impression on my Memory, (I observe them not, I remember them not): but this hinders not, but they may make deep Impression on my Conscience, which will one day be awake, and set them in order before me; and they are all written in thy Book of Remembrance, in order to my final Judgment. All my sins are before thee: but thou requirest my humble Confession of them, in order to Repentance; and as a part thereof, that I freely acknowledge their heinous aggravations to shame, and humble myself the more before thee, whom I have offended and provoked.

How long did I serve divers Lusts and Pleasures, with the neglect and forgetfulness of God? How sad a prospect may I take of the far greatest part of my Life past? Especially of my younger years, which have been trifled away in vanity and folly? And since I have known the way of Truth, how shamefully have I prevaricated with God? I am confounded to consider, how often I have despised the Commandment, and rebelled against the Light; against the Principles of Education, and the checks of Conscience, frequent warnings from God, and reproofs from Others; contrary to my Profession, and Experience, contrary to the obligation of peculiar Mercies, solemn Promises, Resolutions, and Engagements, and a nearer Relation to God than many others; Which sins have more dishonored my Lord, discredited his Gospel, gratified the Devil, scandalized the world, and strengthened the hands of the ungodly, than the sins of others. And alas! How much of my precious Time is thus gone, which if duly improved, would now afford me comfort to review.

How much Guilt have I contracted every Year, particularly in this last? I now begin another, which will soon be gone as that which was

concluded yesterday. And shall I only advance in Age, to increase the number of my sins, and heighten my Account against the Day of Reckoning? In Temporal and Civil Affairs Day unto Day uttereth knowledge, and Night unto Night teacheth Wisdom. We are Taught by Experience many useful Lessons which we should not else have learnt; to reform many Errors and mistakes, to correct many rash and foolish Actions and Speeches, &c. And shall I not learn wisdom by the Experience of another year, in what concerns my greatest, my Eternal Interest? Shall not the reflection on my past sins prevent my Commission of the like? Especially considering how my sins are aggravated by every Mercy I have received; by every Affliction I have undergone; every awakening Sermon I have heard; every motion of God's Spirit, and every check of my own Conscience that I have resisted; every offer of his Grace; every warning of his Providence; every invitation and call of his Word; every purpose to Repent, and every resolution I have made to forsake sin: The greater knowledge I have had of my danger, the longer time I have deliberated about it; the oftener I have confessed my sin, and been sorry for it; every reproof I have had from others, and every promise I have made myself, doth aggravate and increase my Guilt.

How many Years hath God vouchsafed me to work out my Salvation? But how little have I done towards it? Had I died this last year, how unprepared must I have made my Appearance before his Tribunal? What opportunities of doing and receiving good have I let slip? Have I not made it more my business to seem Religious, than really to be so? How much of the Patience of God have I abused? Refusing his calls to Repentance, resisting the strivings of his Spirit, smothering my Convictions, and turning the Grace of God into wantonness? Instead of returning gratitude for all his Love, I have repeated my Transgressions after Forgiveness: and gone in a circle of Repenting and Sinning, even to this day. Lord, I am ashamed, and lay myself in

the dust before thee. To me belongs nothing but shame and confusion of Face. If God should condemn and punish me as a Rebel, and a Traitor, and give me the Portion of Hypocrites, I cannot but own his Justice; even in Hell I must do it, with my flaming Tongue and Breath.

O Spare me for thy mercies sake! Enter not into Judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified: if Thou lay Judgment to the Line, and Equity to the Plummet. Give me Repentance unto life, never to be repented of, never to be retracted again. Bring me to the Blood of Jesus, which cleanseth from all sin. Behold the sighing's of a contrite Spirit: For I acknowledge my Transgressions unto thee, against whom I have sinned: O Lord, forgive the Iniquity of my Sin. I am unworthy to lift up my Hands and Eyes towards Heaven, unworthy to be called thy Son, or thy Servant: I am vile in mine own eyes, because I have made myself vile in thine. For this I am troubled, and mourn, and my Soul is grieved within me.

O thou Heavenly Physician of Souls! From thy Pity alone I expect my cure. I am miserable and undone without thy Compassion; and expect no relief but from the Treasure of thy Grace. I must perish, and sink under the burden of Sin, if thy merciful hand do not save me, and lift me up. I am entangled and ensnared by the Devil and my Lusts, and without thy Succor can never hope to get free. O Lord forgive my Sin, and heal my Soul: Deliver and save me for thy Mercies sake.

May I not yet hope in thy Mercy? Thou hast mercifully born with me hitherto: thou callest me to repent; thou commandest me to return, and promisest to forgive those Sins which are confessed and forsaken: O do not cast me out of thy Sight and Presence, now I

desire from the bottom of my Heart to return to thee! I abhor myself in dust and ashes, for my past Iniquities. But alas! Such is the hardness of my Impenitent Heart, that I am even ashamed of my humblest Repentance: how much more may God despise and reject it? But hast thou not given thy Blessed Son to die for Sinners? And exalted him to this very end, to be a Prince and a Savior, to give Repentance, and Remission of Sins? And by the word of thy Grace, thou beseechest all, (even the Greatest Sinners) to accept of mercy; and art more willing to pardon, than we can be to Repent. 'It is thy Delight and Glory, agreeable to thy Nature, and declared Name, as a God gracious, and merciful, slow to Anger; and of great Kindness, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin. O Pardon mine Iniquity for it is great; and receive a humble Penitent, who implores thy Grace, according to the Tenor of thy new Covenant, flying to the arms of thy Mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

Lord, hear my Prayer, and let not the mixture of my weaknesses and unworthiness turn it into Sin: but graciously vouchsafe to look upon a returning Prodigal; and cause me to hear the voice of Joy and Gladness, that my sorrowful Heart may be comforted, and my life be directed to thy Praise. Lead me into the path of life, that I may no longer err from the way of thy Commandments: Teach me to do thy Will, O God, and write thy Law upon my Heart, that I may never more return to Folly. I am convinced of the Evil of Sin, of thy Right to govern me, of the Equity and Justice of thy Law, of the sweetness and rewards of keeping thy precepts: O sanctify my Heart, and make me Sound in thy Statutes, that I may hate every false way, and be devoted to thy Fear, the remainder of my Life.

If there be any particular Lust, or Wickedness, which through the power of Temptation, and the deceitfulness of Sin you have fallen

into; that hath wasted Conscience, and robbed you of your Peace, and provoked God to write bitter things against you; be sure to humble yourself without delay in an especial manner for that Backsliding: Confess it freely, with its aggravations. Consider whether it was not after some special manifestation of God's Love, after some special warning, some strong Conviction, under or soon after some great Affliction from God, or some more than ordinary kindness of his Providence, &c. And impress such Thoughts, to humble yourself the lower, search into the grounds and causes of such Apostasy, such as the abatement of your Watchfulness, the neglect of serious closet Devotion, making bold with Temptation, too great compliance with vain Company, venturing too far in lawful or indifferent Things, too much Confidence in your own Wisdom, Strength, and steadfastness, not fearing sufficiently the Approaches and Beginnings of Sin, or avoiding the fuel, incentives, and occasions of it, &c. Palliate and disguise nothing, that may make your sin exceeding sinful, lest by some little Art of the Devil, you deceive yourself by an half-Repentance; and the Evil Spirit, you think to be cast out, return again with seven worse than himself, and so your latter end be worse than your Beginning. For if the sin be not truly hated, but only covered over with penitential Ashes, it will quickly flame out again, when it meets with combustible matter, and a strong blast of Temptation.

But if you are grieved to the very Heart, and abhor the Sin, and resolve to quit it, you need not doubt of God's readiness to receive you to Mercy. His Spirit is yet striving with you, if you are willing to Repent, and return to God. He sought you, and called you to return, when you were wandering as a lost sheep in the broad way; and can you think, he will not be found of you, if you seek him with your whole Heart? Therefore renew your Repentance, and beg more earnestly a Spirit of Humility, Holy Fear, and Watchfulness: And

every morning implore Divine succors against that Sin, and all Temptations to it. (Which, as much as possible, you must avoid.) Constant and fervent Prayer, after Repentance, must be your refuge, and your Remedy. If you let fall your hands, this Amalek will prevail again: As soon and as far as you fail in the constancy, and fervency of that Duty, your Sin will get strength, and successfully attempt you another Time. But by this practice, God may turn Evil to work for Good, make you gain by your loss, stand the faster by your Falls, and become stronger by the discovery of your weakness, and so be better established for the future.

But take heed that you pervert not the Grace of God, and encourage yourself to sin again by the supposition, that if you should Fall, 'tis but to Repent, and renew your Resolutions, and all will be well. This is a subtle Artifice of Satan, but such methinks, as should take with none, who have ever known by Experience, what it is to Repent. Who have felt the burden of Sin to be heavier than a Millstone; than the weight of a Mountain. Who have tasted, how evil and bitter a thing it is, to depart from God. Who have loathed and abhorred themselves, with deep Remorse, and Sorrow, and Anguish of Spirit: wishing with all their Hearts, that they had not sinned; and if it were in their power would give all the world to retrieve it; and would rather die than commit that Folly again, they then repented of. Let those who have not their own Experience to confirm this, read over (and consider the case of David, when he wrote) the Penitential Psalms. How many like him have roared and cried out under the sense of sin, of stings and furies in their Conscience, of the poisoned Arrows in their Souls, and his Terrors surrounding them wherever they went: from the sense of sins Malignity, the apprehensions of God's Anger, and the consequent Fears of his Wrath. Serious Repentance after great Transgressions is another Thing than most imagine it. When their aggravated Sins shall beset them behind, and before, be placed

in order before their eyes, and set in array against them. 'It is always a work of Difficulty as well as Importance, to crucify corrupt affections, to tear a beloved Lust from the Heart, with self-indignation to abhor and cast away what before you loved and delighted in. How did David's Sin stare him in the Face? It is continually with me, it is ever before me, saith He. It haunted him like a Spectre, or like Belshazzar 's handwriting on the wall, it still appeared before him in some horrid shape.

However Sin may smile in its first address, and bespeak us in flattering language, and promise Pleasure, and Profit, and great Advantages and Satisfaction; these are but fair Appearances; This is but the outside of the Cup, and the color of the Liquor: it will prove Gall and Wormwood, and a mixture of deadly Poison, if ever God set it home upon the Conscience, and awaken us to a true sense of it. And the Continuance of daily Repentance for Sin, which all Christians are called to, is no such easy matter neither. Constant self-abasement and Humiliation before God, from a sense of his Majesty and Holiness, and of our many Sins, and pollution thereby: The imperfection of our best duties continually to be bewailed; inordinate affections to be still mortified; always resisting and opposing Sin, in its Root and Branches; conflicting against the whole Interest of the Flesh, the World, and the Devil; seeking after more Holiness; to be derived unto us by the Grace of Christ, to be wrought in us by his Spirit, and maintained by his Power; and making daily applications to the Fountain of all Grace, for spiritual strength, to continue our warfare against Sin, in all Instances of outward duty, and inward Acting's of Grace, even as long as we live; all this is included in it. Due Apprehensions concerning Repentance, as so comprehensive and difficult a Duty, would teach us to beware of Sin.

XXVII.

The necessity of Christian Resolution to Upright, Persevering Obedience

How full and extensive it ought to be, and yet humble; by what means we may be assisted to perform that which we resolve.

Having acknowledged my transgressions unto God, and begged forgiveness, and experimentally learnt the Evil of Sin by the bitterness of Repentance, I resolve for the future to watch against it more narrowly, and against everything that leads to it; endeavoring to please and honor my God and Savior by an upright, obedient Heart and Life. And for the remission of my former contracted Guilt, I trust to Jesus Christ, according to the Revelation made in the Gospel, of what he is, hath done, and suffered, and continues to do in Heaven, for the Salvation of repenting Sinners, who desire to come unto God by Him.

But how often, O my Soul! Have I mocked God, and deceived myself, with formal and faint Purposes of Amendment? My good Resolutions have been all of them as the morning Cloud, and the early Dew, which quickly passed away. One fresh assault of Temptation hath swept away all my good Purposes as a Spider's Web. I have falsified so many, and broke my word so often, that I dare not trust to anything I now resolve, or rely on any promise I should farther make. Succor me therefore, O Lord, by thy powerful Grace, that what was defective in my former fruitless Resolutions, may be now rectified. Let me be more humble in the sense of my weakness, more dependent on thy Grace, and more heartily seek it from time to time. Strengthen me with Strength in my Soul, with Might and Power in

my inward man, that I may so resolve and purpose, as to perform; that I may not be one day hot, and the next cold; zealous in the Beginning, but faint and lukewarm in the Progress; fervent and serious only in Resolving, but weak and impotent in the Execution.

Having changed my Master, my End, and my Hopes, by returning unto God, from whom I had gone astray, I firmly resolve, through the assistance of his Grace, to change my Course of Life; that Old things being done away, all things may become New; that being made free from sin, by pardoning Mercy, and become the servant of Christ, I may have my fruit unto Holiness, that my End may be Eternal Life. In the interim, whether I live or die, let it be unto the Lord, resolving both in Life and Death to be absolutely His. And to that purpose, O my Soul! Let me seek for continual supplies of Grace from Christ my Head, to enable me to yield ready Obedience, in the most difficult, hazardous, painful, and humbling Duties. In vain do I resolve it, without the assistance of his mighty Power, to strengthen my Heart and Hands, whenever I am called to such a trial of my Sincerity. Without it I shall never recover my Liberty, or break asunder those Bonds and Cords wherewith I have formerly been held Captive, as the Servant of Sin and Satan. Such is the Weakness and Treachery of my own Heart, the influence of ill Examples, and the subtlety and cunning of the Tempter, that otherwise I shall quickly change my mind, and return to Folly, as the Dog to his Vomit. The Spirit is so weak, and the Flesh so frail; the Snares of the World so many, the Power of remaining Corruption so strong; and of myself I am so unsettled and wavering, fickle and unsteady, and prone to backsliding, that all my strongest purposes will not be sufficient, without daily strength from above. My Senses are so deceitful; my Passions so ungovernable; the Rule and Law I am to walk by, so strict, and spiritual, and extensive: Criminal Omissions may be so frequent, and so easily overlooked; so many several and difficult

Duties are to be performed; and by every change of my Condition, or of God's Providence, so many new Dangers and new Duties may arise, that I fear the issue of my firmest Resolutions. So strict a Watch must always be kept; such Humility and Caution is everywhere to be practiced; such speedy Repentance required after every fall; with thankfulness and contentment in every State, under all Calamities, be they never so many, or never so pinching; and perseverance herein absolutely necessary, though never so many Stratagems be used to discourage me from proceeding, or to entice me to go back, or turn aside to some other Path; insomuch that if God had not promised me his continued Presence, and that his Grace shall be sufficient for me, and that I shall not be tempted above what I am able to bear; I should utterly despair of making good what I now resolve.

But besides these Promises to encourage my Resolved Obedience, he hath left upon Record in his Word many glorious Examples of his assisting and rewarding the Courage and Resolution of his Servants to continue faithful; as in the case of Joseph, Daniel, and his Three Friends, &c. If Christ stand by, and strengthen me, I know I shall be able to do all things; I shall not then be flattered, or frighted out of the way of my Duty; no Wind that can blow shall then turn me to another Point; nothing shall then be able to prevail for my consent to a willful and deliberate forsaking of God; no Argument, no Temptation, though Privacy, Opportunity, Impunity from Men, with Rewards of Worldly Gain and Honor, should all concur to enforce a Temptation. But, by that Heavenly Assistance, I shall be preserved Humble, Temperate, Chaste, Patient, Thankful, Self-denying, Crucified to the World, and hold fast my Integrity till I die; still perfecting Holiness in the fear of God, growing in Grace, and in the Knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, waxing stronger from day today, be seldomer surprised, offend less, and repent more

quickly, and watch more narrowly afterwards, till at last I receive the Crown.

Especially, let me watch against my Constitution Sins, such as I am most inclined to, and where a Temptation doth most easily enter; where the Devil can take the fastest hold, and be least suspected; where he hath formerly sprung a Mine, and made a Breach: I have known some humble watchful Christians, after being recovered from their Backslidings, who abhorred every Temptation to that sin, by which they had been defiled and wounded: they can hardly put up a Prayer, but they mention it; hardly have their hearts affected in any ordinance, but they are inwardly ashamed of it; hardly hear of any one guilty of the like, but they are ready to burst out into Tears.

Fix therefore, I beseech thee, most Gracious God! My unfeigned Resolutions of cleaving to thee, with full purpose of Heart: and show thy strength in my weakness, by enabling me to do what I now resolve. To that end, teach me to watch over my Heart, to keep it with all diligence, to be more conversant with my own Thoughts, examining the motions that arise in my Heart, whence they come, and whither they go, and what they tend to, that I may suppress the beginnings of Sin. The unsearchable Deceitfulness of the Heart, the roving's, straggling's and wanderings of the Thoughts, the ungovernable motions and stirrings of the Passions and Affections, with the corrupt Inclinations that are ready to comply with Temptation, make such a constant Watchfulness necessary. Let me live no longer as a stranger to myself, but by Self-reflection dwell more at home, reckoning my principal Work to be within doors, to keep my own Vineyard. Teach me to watch over my Senses, to guard the door of my Lips, to govern my Passions; to be wary in the Choice of my Company, and in the Right Use of it; to be Circumspect in every step of my daily walk, to call myself frequently to a Reckoning,

to cast up my Accounts at the foot of every page, by every days review of my Actions, to live always as in God's presence, and be awed everywhere by the thought of his Holy Eye, to shun the occasions and appearances of Evil, &c.

By the neglect of this, Spiritual Distempers will insensibly creep upon us. There is such a venom and malignity in Sin, to wound and weaken the Soul, to put us off the Hinges, to disorder and unfit us for any Spiritual Service, to make our Hearts vain and frothy, lazy and listless, that we shall easily let slip our Opportunities, lose our Seasons, and languish and pine away, notwithstanding all the means of thriving and growth. And hence it is that so many Professors mourn and complain, lick the dust, and lie among the clods, are dead under the most awakening Ministry, and barren under the most fruitful means. Hence it is they do little Good, as well as taste little Comfort; some duties are neglected, and others performed slightly; and in none of them do they meet with that Sweetness and Satisfaction, that Refreshment, and Advantage, Fruit and Benefit, as formerly. And all from the neglect of Watchfulness, making bold with Temptation, and not standing upon their Guard in the use of their Christian Armor.

And because no Place, no Condition, no Employment is exempted from Temptations, let me fortify myself every morning against all Assaults for that day, by Serious Prayer, as Holy David was wont to do. My voice (saith he) shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my Prayer unto thee, and will look up, Psal. 5. v. 3, 4. Let the Law of God be my daily and delightful study: that I may be able presently to bring my Words and Actions to the Touchstone; and know how to manage the sword of the Spirit, on all occasions, against the fiery Darts of the Devil: that knowing the rule, I may not be doubtful, or at a loss, whenever I am tempted: I may not make a

stand to parley, but immediately summon all my forces to Resist, and reject the Snare; being assured from God, that the Continuance of this Warfare shall end in a most Glorious Victory. He will shortly tread down Satan under my feet. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, my Lord.

XXVIII.

The Import, and Obligation of our Baptismal Covenant.

The renewal of it by a solemn Dedication of ourselves to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, exemplified and recommended.

All this, O my Soul, which I have now resolved on, is no more than what I am obliged to, by my Vow in Baptism; to renounce the Devil and his Works, the Flesh and the Lusts thereof, the World, and conformity to it, that I may Love and Serve the Lord: agreeable to the undoubted Right which God hath in me by Creation, Redemption, and his innumerable other Benefits. But the outward washing of Baptism, and a visible profession of obedience, will not save me, without the Answer of a good Conscience towards God; 1 Pet. cap. 3. v. 21. May I not by the consideration of my Baptismal Covenant suppose God speaking to my Conscience, to this effect?

Will you take me for your whole Portion and Felicity? And my Law for the constant Rule of your obedience? And fight against the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, to your lives end? Will you believe in

Jesus Christ, and receive him as a Prince and Savior? And adhere to the faith and obedience of the Gospel, how hazardous and difficult soever the profession and practice of it may be? Will you receive the Blessed Spirit as your Teacher, Sanctifier, and Comforter? And cherish all his Motions, to enlighten, purify, confirm, comfort, and assist you?

'It is my hearty consent to these Terms, and resolved compliance with them, which Baptism obligeth to; and this is the Answer of a good Conscience towards God.

I have often renewed this Covenant on several occasions; but did I ever duly consider the tenor and obligation of it? How have I lied unto the God of Truth? Dealt deceitfully with him? And been False and Fickle, Treacherous and Unfaithful to what I promised? O let me now again repeat it, and give up myself once more to be the Lord's, more unfeignedly, more firmly than ever I have hitherto done! That the Bonds of God upon me may be strengthened, and my Soul more thoroughly engaged to be the Lord's. O help me to do it with the greatest seriousness, as the most important Affair of my whole Life! By thine aid and Grace alone shall I be sincere and cordial in this surrender, and Dedication of myself. O breathe upon my Soul, most Holy Spirit, (the Power of the Highest) that there may be no Hypocrisy, or Reservation, in this so weighty and solemn Transaction between God and me!

O most Blessed and Glorious TRINITY! Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Thy favor is my Life, and thy Lovingkindness is better than Life: Thy Will should have been my Rule, thy Word my Law, thy Glory my end, to please thee my principal Business, and to enjoy thy Love and Presence my ultimate Felicity. But I am one of thy revolted Creatures, who have lost thine Image, and rebelled against thy Law,

slighted thy Authority, and rejected thy Grace, and deserve to be cast out of thy sight, and banished from thy Presence forever. Nevertheless, O most merciful God, and Father, upon thy gracious invitation and call, I now return to thee my rightful Lord: acknowledging thee, as my Almighty, Wise, and bountiful Creator, my absolute Owner, my Righteous Governor, my End, my Happiness and Chief Good. I now accept thine offered Mercy; I now submit to the Scepter of thy Grace; and give up myself to Thee, as my King, and my God; to rule and sanctify me now, and be my Everlasting Portion. I desire to be no longer my own, but Thine, to whom of right I belong, and ought to be devoted. I yield myself to Thee, O my Lord! Accept and possess that which is thine own. I lay myself at thy Foot, at all Times, and in all Conditions, to be at thy dispose, and in everything to acquiesce in thy Good Pleasure. Deliberately resolving, with unfeigned and free consent of my Will, to walk before Thee in Holiness and Righteousness all the days of my Life. Hereby I consecrate and devote myself to be thy perpetual Avowed Servant: Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant, the Son of thine Handmaid. Though other Lord's have had dominion over me, I will now make mention of thy Name, and of thy Righteousness only, by Jesus Christ.

O Blessed Jesus, my All-sufficient Savior! Thy dying Love, infinite Condescension, and matchless Grace hath at last overcome me, and constrained me to resolve to be wholly Thine, who hast redeemed and bought me with thy most precious Blood. I now acknowledge and own Thee, as my Lord, and my Jesus, my Prophet, Priest, and King; my Sacrifice, Surety, and Ransom, to satisfy for my Sins, and reconcile me unto God, to instruct me in his Will, and teach me the Mysteries of his Kingdom, and the way to the Father. How often hast thou opened thine arms, and called me, yea beseecht me to come unto thee, and accept of Life? But I refused to come. I adore thy

merciful Condescension, that yet thou wilt receive me on such easy Terms. O thou Lord of Life and Glory, now accept of an unworthy helpless Sinner, who flies to Thee as his only Refuge and Hope! Who is convinced, that None but Christ, None but Christ can make his Peace with God, and save from wrath to come. I acknowledge thy Title to me, and my obedience, and to all I have, by dying for me. I desire to take thy Yoke upon me, for it is Easie; and thy Burthen, which is Light. I desire to be entirely, and forever thine, in an Everlasting Covenant, never to be broken: to take up the Cross, and follow thee, whithersoever thou shalt lead me; through the straight Gate, and the narrow way. I will reserve no Lust, refuse no Labor, grudge at no Suffering, stick at no difficulty, so I may please, and honor thee, and continue in thy Love. O shed abroad more of thy Love in my Heart, to make all Things easy for his sake, who hath loved me, and washed me from my Sins in his own Blood.

O God the Holy Ghost, I acknowledge Thee as my Great Teacher and Sanctifier, and give up myself to Thee, as the Author of all saving Knowledge and Holiness: By Thee I have been convinced of my Sin, against the Law of God, and the Gospel of Christ, and of my necessity of his Merit, Satisfaction, and Righteousness, to justify my guilty Soul, by procuring the Forgiveness of Sin, and my acceptance with God; and of the freeness of his Love, the Riches and all sufficiency of his Grace, towards all who come unto God by Him. I adore Thee, O most Blessed Spirit, as proceeding, and sent from the Father and the Son, to renew all the Powers of my Soul, and restore the Divine Image there; to enlighten my mind, to know and receive the Truth, as it is in Jesus, and purify my Heart: and to sanctify all the Members of my Body, and make them Instruments of Righteousness unto Holiness, which before were Servants unto Sin; and gradually to deliver me from the power, the defilement, and abode of Sin; as from the Guilt and Punishment by the Blood of Jesus. And as the Witness

of God to the Truth of the Holy Scriptures; and as the Great Paraclete, to comfort and establish the Hearts of Believers, sealing them up to the day of Redemption, and giving them the Earnest of the Heavenly Inheritance. O blessed Spirit, be thou my Witness, that though I have violated the Law of God, and defaced his Image, and formerly undervalued the Love of Christ, and the Grace of the Gospel, yet by thine Aid, I now accept what I have so long neglected: and thankfully devote myself henceforward to be the Lord's in a Covenant Relation.

But fearing and distrusting myself, I give up myself entirely to the conduct of thy Grace, depending upon it for my establishment and perseverance. O form my Heart into an obediential Frame! That in everything I may endeavor to answer the Ends and Obligations of this Devoted State.

To this One God I have once again dedicated and resigned myself; to serve, and please, and honor Thee, in Thought, Word, and Act, to the last moment of my Life: in the Performance of all Duties, even those which I have been most averse from; in the mortification of every Lust, and the forsaking of every Sin, even those which I was once most addicted to: Resolving deliberately to allow myself in nothing, great or little, secret or open, which I shall know or believe to be contrary to thy holy Will; making it my business to be fruitful in good Works, to the praise of my Redeemer; waiting in the use of all his appointed means for higher measures of Grace and Holiness, to be more victorious over inward Lusts, and outward Temptations, still pressing towards the mark for the prize of my high and holy Calling, even Eternal Life.

I call Heaven and Earth, O Lord, to witness this day, That I own and avow this to be my Mind, and the settled Prevailing Purpose of my

Soul. This I again ratify and confirm, without any Clauses, or Exceptions. So help me, O my God. Glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

XXIX.

Practical and Consolatory Reflections on the preceding Self-dedication, or Covenant with God.

I have this day solemnly avouched the Lord to be my God, to walk in his ways; thereby to fortify my Resolutions, that I and my House, (and All that I can persuade to be of my mind) will serve the Lord. I intend, desire, and hope never willfully to violate the Faith, which I have now plighted in the presence of God; but to continue steadfast, immovable; always abounding in the work of the Lord, &c.

Should I undertake any new Employment, or enter into any new Condition, or change the place of my Abode, where I might see more of God's dishonor, and meet with more and stronger Temptations to Sin, and be called to the performance of more difficult duties, greater watchfulness and self-denial, &c. I would hope hereby to engage the presence of God with me, and his Blessing on all my Affairs, (on which depends the success of all that I undertake:) and would hope the better to preserve my Integrity, not only This Year, but in all the remaining portion of my Time, by the abiding sense of my Covenant with God; thus seriously renewed.

This is the method I have been often advised to, for Peace of Conscience, under doubts and scruples concerning my spiritual State: to put the matter out of doubt, by again accepting the offered mercy and Grace of the Gospel; and heartily consenting to the new Covenant: giving up myself to God in Christ, to be ruled and saved by him. Blessed be God, I have now done so. Lord, say Amen to thy part of the Covenant, that Thou art and wilt be my God; as I desire unfeignedly to do to mine, that I will be thy Servant.

But because Articles are sooner consented to, than made good; (though I seriously intend never to disown this my solemn Act and Deed, but firmly to adhere to it as long as I live; that having sworn, I will endeavor to perform it, that this shall be my Everlasting Choice, never to be recanted or altered, yet) considering the sad Instances of my former weakness, and the vigilance and subtle malice of my Great Adversary, I again implore the succor of Divine Grace, to keep it forever in the purpose of my Heart, that it may be as the Laws of the Medes and Persians, never to be reversed. I have given up my name to be Thine; O put thy fear into my Heart, that I may never depart from Thee! Imprint thy Laws upon my Heart, that my obedience may be uniform and universal, unwavering and perpetual; suitable to so honorable and near a Relation to Thee! I am sensible I want Wisdom and Strength to that purpose, but thou hast bid me ask it of Thee, who givest liberally, to All without desert, and upbraidest not, with present unworthiness, or former faults. O lead me not into Temptation, but deliver me from Evil. Stand by and Strengthen me in the Hour of Trial, lest I forget my vows, and deny Thee. O that my Soul may never draw back, lest Thine have no Pleasure in me. I can serve no better Master; O let mine Ears be bored to the door of thine house, as the Token and Assurance of my being thy Servant unto Death. I know 'tis my Duty, I am sensible 'tis my Privilege and Honor; I am convinced, that 'tis my Interest and Felicity; my Soul,

my Life, my present and everlasting Welfare, and All depends upon it, that thou shouldst be my God forever: O conduct me by thy Holy Spirit of Grace, that I may walk and act, as having heartily consented he should be so: and direct my Heart into thy Love, and the faithful keeping of thy Commandments. That when so many Professors make shipwreck of Faith, and a Good Conscience, and discredit the Religion of my Lord, by their shameful Falls, thou mayst make me to stand, and improve the warning of their Examples, to walk humbly; and while I stand, to take heed lest I fall.

Having thus surrendered myself to God, what is there, O my Soul! That is ever like to prevail with me to go back, and revolt from him? Is the gratification of a Lust, the securing of an Estate, compliance with a Friend, the pleasing of a Superior, living in Ease and Honor, and outward Prosperity for a little while, the saving my Body from Suffering, or my life from Violence, (or whatever else be the Motive of my unfaithfulness to God, and Apostasy from Him) Is Any, is All of these any way considerable, compared with the Blessedness of having God to be my God? For thereby I have the forgiveness of all my Sins, and the Assurance of his Favor; the certainty of present Protection, and Provision; all Creatures reconciled to me, and to be employed for my Good, as the Friend of God; All things to work together for my Advantage; and by the evidence of my Adoption, a well grounded Hope of Eternal Life. God as my Sun and Shield, will give Grace and Glory, and with-hold no Good Thing. So unspeakably Comprehensive are the Privileges of so near a Relation to God in Christ. O happy are the People who are in such a case! Blessed are the Persons whose God is the Lord.

Do I resolve to abide by my Choice, and to trust in Christ, for persevering Grace? And shall I not, ought I not to take Comfort in it? Shall I not give God the Glory of his infinite Goodness, by adhering

to him, and rejoicing in him, notwithstanding all Temptations to the Contrary? Casting all my Care upon him, and quieting myself in the All-sufficiency of my Heavenly Father: having a God in Covenant, who will supply all my wants, and take care of me as his own. Shall I not give him the glory of his Truth and Power, by trusting him in every Condition? By confidence in his Promise, Dependance on his Word, Faithfulness to his Interest, and Constancy in his Service to the end? Is it not a most encouraging Thought, That God doth never Abandon any, who do not first forsake him? And after such strict Engagements, as I have laid upon myself, shall I ever strike the fatal stroke with my own Hand? Shall I be off and on, say and unsay, promise and retract? And after I have proceeded thus far, shall I forsake the Fountain of Living Waters, and turn again to broken Cisterns?

After I have examined myself, considered my ways, confessed my Sins, and upon serious Deliberation am come to a Resolve, and in pursuance of it have devoted myself with such solemnity to be the Lord's, shall I ever after this, forsake Him, and my own Mercies, and lightly esteem the Rock of my Salvation? Now I have learned in some measure what Sin is, by the sorrows and anguish of an Hearty Repentance; now I have discovered so much of the Snares and Devices of Satan, whereby I have formerly been betrayed: now I am sensible of the dangerous and powerful influence and infection of bad Company; the Treachery of fleshly Lusts; the bewitching Temptations of the World; and have tasted a little, by my own Experience, of the Pleasantness of Wisdom's Paths, the Peace and Satisfaction of Devotedness to God, by the present Rewards of a calm Conscience, the communications of Divine Grace, and the Encouragement of an Holy Hope, &c. and am persuaded of the Stability of his Word, and the Certainty of Eternal Life to all who continue in well-doing; shall I, after all this, ever break with God

again? Shall I ever cancel this Engagement? Violate this my Vow? And falsify so many repeated Promises and Resolutions? Oh that his Power may rest upon me! And his Grace work in me both to will and to do! That this God may be my God forever, and my Guide unto Death. Let me never reassume this Gift, and Surrender of myself, or defraud God of his Right and Propriety. His I am, and Him I will serve: living wholly to Him; using all I have for him: being willing he should do what he list with his own, and consequently dispose of me, and of all that any way belongs to me, as shall seem Good in his Eyes. I am Thine, O Lord save me. Command me my work, appoint me my Duty, direct my Station, order my Condition. Let me be Thine, though employed in the meanest service, and the most laborious self-denying work. Tho I should be but a Doorkeeper in thine House, a Hewer of Wood, or a Drawer of water; Tho I must pinch the flesh, and swim against the Tide, and renounce what before I valued: yet This God shall be my God forever.

By this means when I come to Dye, (if God should add more years to the little number I have past, besides this I have now begun) I may be able to say with Upright Hezekiah, Remember Lord, how I have walked before Thee in mine Integrity. That in the face of Death, and the Grave, in the view of another World, and the near prospect of Eternity, I may be able to Rejoice in Hope, and Say, Lord Jesus, Receive my Spirit. Thou art my Savior, and I have waited for thy Salvation. I have sought Thee with my whole Heart; I have chosen thy Favor rather than Worldly Grandeur and Prosperity; I have prized thy Love, and endeavored to obey Thee, (as the best Expression of my own) though with many Imperfections, which I bewail; I have delighted more in thy Service and Presence, than in the Pleasures of Sin and vanity; thy Testimonies have been the Joy of my Heart; I took no delight in the Company of the ungodly, after I was devoted to Thee; O let me not have my Portion with them in the

other World! Fortify me now against the King of Terrors, strengthen me in this my last Conflict, enable me to triumph over Death by the Cross of Christ, (my victorious Redeemer) and carry me through the dark valley, at the divorce of Soul and Body; and grant me an abundant entrance into thine heavenly Kingdom; Let me be numbered among thy Chosen, and my Body wait in Hope, 'till the general Resurrection, that I may then see thy Glory, and dwell with Thee forever.

I gave up myself to Thee, and do not Repent my Choice; acknowledge me now for Thine, and do not lose that which is thy own. Lord Jesus! Thou hast paid my Ransom, to deliver me from Satan, and from Eternal Wrath, oh do not now reject me, and cast me off. Is it not thine Office and Covenant to save those that Trust in thee? Oh remember thy Word unto thy Servant, wherein thou hast caused me to Hope, when I ventured my Salvation on thy Promise, and trusted to thy Gracious Word for Eternal Life. Thy Love hath already overcome the greatest impediments of my Salvation. 'It is as easy now to receive me, as to Love me. Thou hast prepared Glory for thy Redeemed ones; and hast bid me believingly to follow thee, and wait for thy Salvation. Thou hast begotten me to a lively hope, by the Incorruptible Seed of the Word; Let me not now be deprived of the Inheritance. Can that Love that pitied me in my Blood, and fetched me from the Gates of Hell, now suffer me to fall into it? Oh Crown thy Grace, and perfect thy Preparatory Mercy, with Everlasting Mercy.

By voluntary Consent and Choice, thou art my God; and thy Presence in Heaven, my ultimate Felicity; I have trusted to thy Gracious Promise, to prepare me for it, and bring me to it; O fulfil thy Word unto thy Servant, wherein thou hast caused me to hope; and mercifully receive my departing Soul, that seeks Thee, that loves

Thee, that breathes after Thee, and desires nothing but to know Thee better, and love Thee more, and be more entirely conformed to thine Image, and live always in thy Blessed Presence. Thou hast called me out of the World, placed thine Image upon me, enabled me to make it my Business, though with many Imperfections, to serve, and please, and honor Thee; Oh Receive me to the fullness of thy Love and Grace, and present me faultless before the Presence of thy Glory, with exceeding Joy. Amen, Holy Father, be it unto me according to thy Word; through the Merits and Intercession of my All-sufficient Savior, Jesus Christ, the Faithful and True Witness, in whom all thy Promises are Yea, and Amen.

XXX.

Thanksgiving to God for his Innumerable Benefits and Mercies, particularly in the Year Past

With some Direction and Advice concerning it.

How precious and delightful are the Thoughts of thy Benefits? O Lord, how great is the sum of them? Should I count them, they are more in number than the Stars. Shall I not observe and consider them? Maintain a grateful sense of them, and publicly acknowledge them on all occasions? That I may Bless the Lord at all Times, and his Praise be continually in my mouth. More especially should I conclude and begin the Year, with solemn Praises to my Great Benefactor and Preserver. I ought to begin and close every Day with it, thereby to make the outgoings of the Morning and the Evening to

rejoice in God. Every Year, every Day, every Hour, every Moment offers me an occasion to praise Him: because he is every minute gracious: and hath been so ever since he gave me my Being.

Almost one half of my Time hath been spent in Sleep, when I remember not God, nor myself; yet doth He, who never slumbers or sleeps, remember me in Mercy, and watch over me for good. Yea, though in the other half, by Day, I have forgotten him in a worse sense, by casting off his Fear, and not remembering that his Holy Eye is upon me, yet hath he not forgotten to be Gracious. Therefore I will praise the name of God with a Song, and will magnify him with Thanksgiving, and never forget his benefits. With which Sacrifice he is better pleased than with an Ox or Bullock, that hath horns and hoofs.

He hath prolonged my Life this last Year, when so many others, of his more useful Servants, have been removed by Death: and given me farther Time and Space to Repent, when multitudes have been surprised in their Impenitence. Yea, it was He, who formed me in the Womb, and brought me safely into the World, by whose Providence I have hitherto been supplied: in Him I live, and move, and continually exist; To his undeserved Goodness I am beholding for all the Good of any kind, which I ever enjoyed: To his Bounty I am indebted for all that I now have; and must depend upon it, for whatever I can hereafter expect.

Through Infancy and Childhood he was pleased to preserve me; favoring me with many advantages in my Birth and Education; providing for me a Competent Livelihood; disposing the Circumstances of my Condition, Relations, Places of Abode, &c. more advantageously than he hath done for Thousands: affording me many Helps, for the Improvement of my mind, and the increase of

Knowledge: and preventing my Necessities, and even my Desires, with numberless Blessings, which I never so much as asked for. He hath caused several of my Relations to yield me Comfort, when they might have been sore Afflictions. He hath raised up Strangers to befriend me, and show me kindness. How many favors have I received from God, by the Instrumentality of other Men? To whom God gave the Will, and the Power, the Opportunity, and the Inclination?

How often hath he delivered my Soul from Death, mine Eyes from Tears, and my Feet from falling, by seasonable Preservations? So that I do yet walk before him in the Land of the Living. He hath rescued me from the brink of many a Precipice, which, through Ignorance or Inadvertency, I did not apprehend or Fear. When I knew not which way to turn, he hath made my Path plain. Under sinking Disappointments he hath commanded Succor; and been a present Help in the time of Trouble. In Great Perplexities, his Eye hath been my Guide, and his own Arm hath brought Salvation: it may be by the Ministry of his Holy Angels, obeying his order, and giving unusual Intimations of very great, and otherwise unsuspected Dangers: or sending Relief and Deliverance, by such small, unlikely, and unexpected Means, as carried the name of God visibly engraven on them. Innumerable Calamities he saves me from, which others groan under: and as many Blessings am I favored with, whereof they are destitute. He Spreads my Table, and fills my Cup, and gives me All Things richly to enjoy, when many Excellent Persons, of whom the World is not worthy, are fed with the Bread of Affliction, and the Water of Affliction. Others have only Necessaries, or but few Conveniences, in Comparison with the Plentiful Provisions God hath made, for my Cheerful Obedience to Him. And shall I not Praise Him for the precious Things of Heaven, the blessings of the Earth, the dew, and the deep? And more especially for the Goodwill of Him who

dwelt in the Bush, to sanctify and sweeten all: Whereby Common Mercies become the pledge and fore-runner of better Things; as the fruit of his Special Kindness, the witness of his Truth, and the seed of Peace and Joy, and Righteousness, and Praise; by reason of his Blessing on all that I possess, which otherwise would prove a Snare, and a Temptation, and be intermixt with a Curse.

And besides the ordinary and Continued Bounty of every Day, in the midst of how many Difficulties and Dangers have I felt the dear obligations of his Preserving Mercy? Abroad and at home; in Foreign Countries, as well as my own; in the midst of Enemies, and among Friends; in all Places, and at all Times.

He hath prolonged my Health, or made my Bed in Sickness. He hath often granted the Desires of my Heart whenever it was for his Glory; and contradicted my Wishes, and disappointed my Endeavors, in other Instances, when it was more to my Advantage. From how many Mischiefs hath he saved me, by such Things as I deprecated, and would have hindered? How many Evils hath he turned for Good? He hath heard my Cry in the day of Adversity, and set my feet in a large Place. He hath Chastened me for my Profit: His Rod and his Staff have comforted me: He hath spoken comfortably to me in the Wilderness. Affliction hath been useful and necessary Physic; made an Instrument of Virtue, and so a token of his Love. Therefore I will sing of the Mercy of the Lord forever, and with the voice of Thanksgiving will I make known his Faithfulness.

He hath all along conducted me by his Wisdom, guided me by his Providence, and the Angel of his Presence hath directed my Path, and ordered all my Goings. He hath been a Cloud to me by Day, and a Pillar of Fire by Night: he hath helped me in my Straits, and supplied my Wants, and comforted me in all my Sadness's: His

powerful and gracious Presence hath been my constant Guard: and his Sovereign never-failing Goodness hath compassed me about with Mercy on every side. For which, O most Merciful Father, my Soul, and all that is within me, desires to speak thy Praise.

The advantageous Circumstances of many divine Favors do raise their value, and deserve to be particularly observed and acknowledged. How suitably, how seasonably, how wisely hath he conferred his Benefits? With what Tenderness and Kindness? With what Freedom and Readiness? Of his own bounty and good will, without any Necessity, or Obligation on his Part; without any Desert, and Sometimes without so much as a Prayer on mine. And what is more, notwithstanding my Ingratitude and Forgetfulness of Him, and great Provocations, heightened by the abuse of so much Mercy: demanding nothing after all, in requital of so much Kindness, but my Acceptance of his Love, and grateful sense of his Goodness, and the sweetest and most reasonable Expressions of it, by Thankful Obedience.

More especially, would I bless the Lord, for Enlightening my mind in the Great Mysteries of Religion: disposing in wonderful Wisdom the several means and methods, whereby he brought me to the Knowledge of the Truth, by Parents, Ministers, Friends, Acquaintance, Books, Afflictions, &c. Beginning with me in Childhood, awakening and cultivating the inbred Notions of God, and natural Religion, of Good and Evil, Rewards and Punishments, by the careful Instructions of Parents, or others concerned in my Education: giving me the advantage of Good Examples, Counsels, and Encouragements, to know and do well; with more assistance, and less hindrances, and diversions, than to many Others. Particularly, for the Excellent Privilege and inestimable Blessing of his Holy Word and Sacraments; the liberty of the Christian Religion,

in the Purity of it, in most of those Places, where God has been pleased to cast my Lot. Causing me to lay down in green Pastures, and leading me beside the still Waters: Instructing me in the Revelation of his Will and Grace by Jesus Christ: acquainting me with the sublime Principles and Articles, Precepts and Rules, Promises and Hopes of the Gospel, in order to Eternal Life.

I bless Thee, O Lord, and shall forever do so, that with any or all these Advantages and Helps thy Holy Spirit hath taught me to know the Truth as it is in Jesus, heartily to believe and obey it. That by thy Grace I have been convinced of Sin, and brought to Repentance; showing me the necessity of a Savior, to make my peace with Thee, the all-sufficiency of his Grace, the fullness of his Merit, the freeness of his Love, and his readiness to receive me to Mercy, inviting and calling me to it, and enabling me to accept his gracious Invitation, and obey his compassionate Call; making me willing, by a Powerful and Victorious Grace, drawing me with Cords of Love, and so effectually persuading me to consent to thy Covenant, and comply with thy Message, on the gracious terms of the Gospel. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through his abundant Mercy, hath begotten me again to a lively Hope; having humbled my proud Heart, and conquered the perverseness of my stubborn Will, and brought my Soul to an entire subjection to himself: who took pity on me when he saw me in my Blood, spread his Skirt over me, cast a Mantle upon my Nakedness, washed me from my Sins, and put his own Comeliness upon me, by Sanctification: who opened my eyes, when I was leaping blindfold into the Pit of Destruction: who healed my Soul, when I was sick unto Death: who rescued and recovered me from the Slavery of the Devil, when I was led Captive by him at his will. Shall not a ransomed, redeemed Slave, be thankful to his Deliverer? Shall not a miserable undone Sinner, who is received to Mercy, be thankful for a Pardon? Awake, O my Soul! And

utter a Song of Praise to him, who forgiveth all thine Iniquities, and healeth all thy Diseases; who redeemeth thy Life (thy Soul) from Destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness, and tender Mercies.

Hath he made thee Partaker of his own renewed Image and Likeness? Given thee his Son, his Grace, his Spirit? And taken such a wretched Creature into so near a relation to Himself; and promised to be thy God and Guide, thy Portion and thine Inheritance, thy Friend and thy Physician, thy Sun and thy Shield, and thine exceeding great Reward? And shall not my Soul speak aloud his Praise? Hath he been merciful to my unrighteousness, and blotted out my sins? Hath he gathered me with his Arm, and carried me in his Bosom? Hath he been my Savior and Redeemer, adopted me into his Family, and promised to make me Blessed in his Glory, with the holy Angels? The Curse being removed, and the Hand-writing against me canceled, the Price paid, the Breach made up, the Mouth of Justice stopped, and the condemning Sentence of the Law exchanged for a gracious Pardon, through the Sacrifice of my Blessed Lord Jesus? And shall I not praise his incomprehensible Love and Grace?

I likewise thank Thee, most holy Father, for saving me from Guilt and Ruin, when assaulted by powerful and dangerous Temptations; that by preventing Mercy, or restraining Grace, thou hast kept me from many scandalous and presumptuous Crimes. I thank Thee, for making the Sins of Others a Warning and a Caution to Me, an Argument to Humility, and a Motive to Watchfulness; for preserving my Judgment from many Errors and Delusions, by which others are seduced; for enabling me to improve any Opportunities of doing Good, and making me in anything useful to Others: yea, I thank thee for all thy Mercies to other Christians; for all the Gifts and Graces

and usefulness of any of thy Servants, wherein, as a Member of the same Body, I desire to rejoice; for any Support and Comfort to me, or any of them, under honorable Sufferings for thy Names sake.

I desire unfeignedly to bless Thee, for any Succor, Relief and Victory, with respect to the Snares and Buffetings of Satan, and the vilest of his Temptations. When he hath tempted me to Apostasy, and Infidelity in Speculation and Practice; to question the Truth of the Holy Scriptures, and the Life to come; to doubt of the foundations of the Christian Faith, or to despair of the Mercy of God, and give up the Reins to sensual Lusts; or to draw me from God, by the love of the World, and the praise of Men, by Evil Company, Intemperance, secret Wickedness, &c.

I Bless Thee with my whole Soul, for calling me back from any of my Wanderings, and by infinite Goodness recovering me after great Falls, enabling me to return when I had gone astray, and seek thy forfeited favor, that thou mayest heal my Backslidings; giving me, in order to it, a deep sense of my own Sin, and of thy Sovereign Grace; leading me to a Savior, whose Blood cleanseth from all sin, when my guilty defiled Soul so much needed its pardoning and cleansing Virtue; awakening me to make holy Vows, and calling upon me by thy Word, and Spirit, and Providence, to perform them.

I Bless Thee, who hast guided my feet into the way of peace, when by the terrors of an accusing Conscience, and the sense of unpardoned Sin, and the apprehensions of thy deserved Wrath, I was ready to despair: that though thou didst most justly hide thy Face at any time, it was but for a little while; but didst seasonably, and in Mercy return, to wipe off my Tears, restore the Joy of thy Salvation, and chase away the clouds and darkness on my Spirit, by the reviving presence of thy own. Thou who art the Author, wilt be the Finisher of

my Faith; and therefore, though thou hast visited mine Iniquities with a Fatherly Rod, yet thy loving-kindness thou hast not taken from me, or suffered thy faithfulness to fail, or thy Covenant of Peace to be removed; but hast refreshed me with hidden Manna, after great Perplexities, saying unto my Soul, I am God, even thy God; making me to hear thy Voice, which was sweet, and to taste thy Love, which is better than Wine; enabling me to say with thine Apostle Thomas, My Lord, and my God; and to have any Communion with thee since, in public or private Duties.

For all these innumerable Mercies I desire to praise Thee, which yet are but in order to greater, to Everlasting Kindness in Heaven. These are but the taste and Earnest of what thou wilt bestow hereafter. O how great is his Goodness, that he hath laid up for those that fear him? And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is even in Thee. I thank thee, who hast thus put it into my Heart, to render thee solemn Praise, and once more to renew my Covenant with Thee.

I will magnify the Lord, and my Spirit shall rejoice in God my Savior. Return unto thy rest, O my Soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with me. While I live I will praise thee, and sing Praises unto my God, while I have a Being. O come, and behold the Works of the Lord, what he hath done for my Soul! The Lord liveth. Blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my Salvation be exalted. Let my Heart be glad, and my Glory rejoice, for the Lord is not ashamed to be called my God. Thanks be to God, who hath caused me to triumph in Christ Jesus. Sing unto the Lord, O ye his Saints, and give thanks at the remembrance of his Holiness! I cried unto Thee, and thou hast healed, and saved me: I will give thanks to Thee forever. I will show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night. For the Lord is Good, his Mercy is Everlasting, and his Truth endures throughout all Generations. O enter into his Gates with

Thanksgiving, and his Courts with Praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his Name. Bless the Lord, all ye his Works, in all places of his Dominions: Bless the Lord, O my Soul.

Let me add for a Conclusion, That the particular Deliverances, Supports, and Consolations, which at any time God hath given in Cases of great Exigence, or in answer to importunate Prayer, ought never to be forgotten. Many experienced Christians have been wont to write down such remarkable Appearances of God for them, with the particular Circumstances that did recommend and enhance the Mercy, (whether Spiritual or Temporal) as an Encouragement to trust in God in future Difficulties; and have afterwards found the Comfort and Advantage of being able to have recourse to such Papers. This Practice I recommend as what hath been useful and consolatory to divers Christians, for many years afterwards; and to some others, of their more intimate Friends, to whom they might without vanity be imparted. What Experiences might be recorded of signal Returns to Prayer, and seasonable Manifestations of the Truth, and Goodness, and Wisdom of God, if all the Instances thereof were duly recollected and preserved! And how sweet and pleasant would the Work of Prayer and Praise then be! With what rejoicing and delight should we set about it, and live in it, if the constraining Goodness and Love of God, and a thankful sense of his unspeakable Mercies, did bring us to him, and indite and animate every word! What Support, and Comfort, and probable Hopes (at least) of the special Love of God, might we derive from the various passages of his Compassion and Kindness! And hereby we may be able more heartily to give him thanks for Pardon, Sanctification, and Adoption, which we commonly mention with too much doubt and fear.

It may likewise be advisable to examine and record the Workings of your own Spirit, under such Dispensations: what thoughts you then had of God? What Acts of Faith, Love, Thankfulness, you did then manifest? What Evidences of God's Favor, and what discovery of your own Sincerity, you have had at such times? When, and how and by what means you were cured of your uncomfortable Unbelief, and raised from your Despondency? What Promises you had recourse to for relief? What Considerations were most helpful to you? What frame of Spirit you kept up in Prayer, before and after? What Resolutions and Engagements you made to God, to love, and trust, and praise, and serve him, and give up all to his dispose for the future? And what consequent Obligation may be inferred from thence, to acquiesce in the Will of God, and resign ourselves entirely to Him, saying, This God is our God forever and ever, and He will be our Guide unto Death.

THE END.

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A New Year's Gift: Serious Reflections on Time and Eternity,
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