

Monergism

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Preacher, Vanity of Vanities,
all is Vanity.”*

ECCLESIASTES 1:2

The Vanity of the World

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by Ezekiel Hopkins

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**TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL SIR
ROBERT VINER,**

KNIGHT AND BARONET

SIR:

WERE you one of that sort of men, who value themselves by the bag or the acre, it might possibly be thought rather an affront, than a Dedication, to prefix your name to this Treatise. For, since it is purposely intended to beat down the price of the world, and to expose its admired vanities to public contempt, those sordid spirits, who have no other worth to commend them but what is summed up in their yearly revenues, would interpret such an address, not so much a tender of respect and service, as a design to undo and beggar them.

But, Sir, to you, whom God hath doubly blest with a large estate and a larger heart, I doubt not but this piece will be very acceptable; if upon no other account, yet at least as the perusal of it may be helpful to you to strip off, and as it were to sequester all your worldly advantages, that you may the better take an estimate of yourself according to your native and genuine worth, both as a Man and as a Christian.

I am not so much a cynic, as to plead for affected poverty, and a disdainful rejecting the gifts of Divine Providence. Such a morose and sour pride, I judge worthy to be chastised, not only with the censure of vanity, but impiety. We need not shelter ourselves under any Monastic Vow; nor fly to deserts and solitudes, to hide us from the allurements of the world. This is to run away from that enemy, whom we ought to conquer. Certainly, religion allows us the possession of earthly comforts: only it regulates the use, and forbids the inordinate love of them. We may prize them as comforts, but not as treasures: and, while we employ a due part of our abundance in the works of a generous charity and true piety, we may well look upon what is left, as a salary that God gives us for being faithful Stewards of the rest. Thus to use the world for the interests of heaven, to make its enjoyments tributary to God's glory, it is to convert and proselyte it; and turn that into an Offering, which others make an Idol. By this, we give earth a translation; and, in a nobler sense than the new system of astronomy teacheth, advance it to be a star, and a celestial body. And, by this method, we change those

helps, that vice had to make itself prodigious and infamous, into the most serviceable instruments, that virtue can have to make itself conspicuous and exemplary: for wealth and honour, in a virtuous person, are like the well-setting of a jem; which, though it makes it not more precious, makes it more sparkling.

But, Sir, I forget myself; and, instead of writing a Letter, am writing a Treatise. I shall make no other apology for it, but that the book being designed against Vanity, I would not have the Dedication of it guilty of that common and notorious one, to be filled only with compliments: and I hope you will not think it any thing of that strain, when I shall assure you, that my prayers to God for you are, that you may still enjoy all advantages of doing good here on earth, and hereafter receive the reward of it in heaven.

Your most humble and

most obliged Servant,

EZEK. HOPKINS.

Oxon, Feb. 1, 1663.

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD

Vanity of Vanities, saith the Preacher, Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity. - ECCLESIASTES 1:2

THE Preacher here mentioned, is no less a person than Solomon: and this whole book is no other than his Recantation Sermon. The text he preached on, is the same that I have chosen; and it contains the true and severe judgment he passed upon all things under the sun. Certainly, he, who had riches as plentiful as the stones of the street*: and wisdom as large as the sand of the sea†: could want no advantages, either to try experiments, or draw conclusions from them. And yet, when he had employed both‡, in the critical search of true happiness and contentment, and had dissected and ransacked the whole world to find it, he returns disappointed of his hopes, and tired with his pursuit; and begins the sad narrative of his long wanderings and errors, with Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity.

The whole verse is loaden with emphases. And it is first observable, that he doth not glide into it, by any smooth connexion of sense or sentences; but, on a sudden breaks upon us, with a surprising abruptness, Vanity of Vanities: which shews a mind so full of matter, that it could not attend the circumstance of a prologue to usher it in.

Again; it is all expressed in the abstract. It sufficed not to censure all things to be vain, but they are vanity itself.

And this abstract hath another heaped upon it, vanity of vanities. Now this reflexion of the same word upon itself, is always used to signify the height and greatness of the thing expressed, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, denotes the highest King and the most absolute Lord. So, here, vanity of vanities intimates to us the most exceeding superlative vanity imaginable.

Again; this is not only once pronounced, but doubled and repeated: partly, the more to confirm this truth to our belief, and thus Pharaoh's dream was doubled*; and, partly, the more to imprint it upon our consideration. Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

But, though this be expressed in most general and comprehensive terms, yet it must not be taken in the utmost latitude, as if there were nothing at all of solid and real good extant. It is enough, if we understand the words in a sense restrained to the subject matter whereof he here treats. For the Wise Man himself exempts the Fear and Service of God[†], from that Vanity under which he had concluded all other things. God and religion have in them a solid and substantial good: the one, as our utmost end and happiness; the other, as the best proportioned means to attain it.

When, therefore, he pronounceth all to be Vanity, it must be meant of all worldly and earthly things; for he speaks only of these.

And, if we enquire what these worldly things are, that have this censure of vanity so vehemently passed upon them, Saint John hath drawn up a full and true inventory of all the goods that are to be found in this great house of the universe: 1 John 2:16. All that is in the world, is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The lusts of the flesh, are the pleasures of the world; which are all of them suited to gratify the sensual and fleshly part of man. The lusts of the eye, are riches; so called, because their greatest serviceableness is only to make a glittering and dazzling shew. Which sense Solomon approves: Eccl. 5:11. What good is there to the owners thereof, save the beholding them with their eyes? The pride of life is honour and dignity; that flatulent and airy notion, that puffs up men's pride and vain-glory, and makes them look upon their inferiors as though they were not their fellow-creatures. This is all that the world can shew, Pleasures, Riches, Honours; and this is that all, concerning which the wise man pronounceth that it is Vanity.

For these things, though they make a fair and gaudy shew, yet it is all but shew and appearance. As bubbles, blown into the air, will represent great variety of orient and glittering colours: not, as some suppose, that there are any such really there; but only they appear so to us, through a false reflexion of light cast upon them: so truly this world, this earth on which we live, is nothing else but a great bubble

blown up by the breath of God in the midst of the air where it now hangs. It sparkles with ten thousand glories: not that they are so in themselves; but only they seem so to us through the false light, by which we look upon them. If we come to grasp it, like a thin film, it breaks, and leaves nothing but wind and disappointment in our hands: as histories report of the fruits that grow near the Dead Sea, where once Sodom and Gomorrah stood, they appear very fair and beautiful to the eye, but, if they be crushed, turn straight to smoke and ashes*.

The subject which I have propounded to discourse of, is this Vanity of the World, and of all things here below: that, being hereof convinced, we may desist our vain pursuit of vain objects; and may set our affections on those things which are above, which are the alone valuable, because the only permanent and stable good.

Whence is it that we are become so degenerate, that we, who have immortal and heaven-born souls, should stake them down to these perishing enjoyments? Whence is it, that we, who should soar aloft unto God, and were to that end fitted with the fleet wings of meditation and affections, to cut through the heavens in an instant, and to appear there before the throne of the great God, that we should lie here groveling in the thick clay and muck of this world, as if the serpent's curse were become ours, to creep upon our bellies, and to lick up the dust of the earth[†]? Do we not shamefully degrade ourselves, when we stoop to admire what is so vastly below us, and barter away our precious souls, souls more worth than ten thousand worlds, only to gain some small part of one? Certainly, the God of this World hath blinded men's eyes, and cast a strange mist before them, that they cannot discern, what is most evident and obvious; even the instability and vanity of all sublunary enjoyments.

That I may therefore contribute somewhat to scatter this mist, I shall endeavour to represent to you the native and genuine vanity that is in all earthly things, free from that deceitful varnish, which the Devil usually puts upon them; and so to deform and wound that great

sorcerer, that his charms may have no more power to prevail over you.

I. Now, that we may rightly proceed in this, I shall PREMISE these two or three things.

I. The is Nothing in the World

Vain in Respect of Its Natural Being.

Whatsoever God hath made, is, in its kind, good. And so the Great Creator pronounced of them, when he took a survey of all the works of his hands. Gen. 1:31. God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good. There is a most harmonious order and beauty in all the creation, and every part of it. And therefore Solomon must not be here so interpreted, as if he disparaged the works of God, in pronouncing them all Vanity. Certainly he doth not libel his Creator; nor upbraid him, as though he had filled the world only with vain toys and trifles.

If we regard the wonderful artifice and wisdom, that shines forth in the frame of nature, we cannot have so unworthy a thought, either of the world itself, or of God who made it.

View the Sun, next unto God, the great father of lights*: view the numerous assembly of the Stars: observe their influences, their courses and measures: is it a vain or impertinent thing, to spread forth the heavens, and to beat out a path for every one of these to walk in! The Air, that thin and subtle vail, that God hath spread over the face of nature: the Earth, that God hath poised in the midst of the air: and the whole Universe, in the midst of a vast and boundless nothing: the great Sea, whose proud waves God binds in with a girdle of sand; and checks its rage by a body almost as unsettled and rolling as itself: the various kinds of Creatures, that God governs by a wonderful economy: the great family of brute Beasts, which God

brings up and educates without disorder: but especially Man, the lord and chief of the world, that knot that God hath tied between heaven and earth, that sacred band of time with eternity.

If we consider the frame and composure of all these things in themselves, or their usefulness and subserviency unto us, we shall be so far from branding them with vanity, that, unless our contemplations lead us from natural things to the great God who formed them, we might rather fear lest their beauty and excellency should inveigle us, as it did the heathen, to look no farther for a Deity, but worship them as gods.

2. There is Nothing Vain

In Respect of God the Creator.

He makes his ends out of all; for they all glorify him according to their several ranks and orders; and to rational and considerate men, are most evident demonstrations of his infinite being, wisdom, and power. In which sense the Apostle tells us; Rom. 1:20. The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*.

God hath composed two books, by the diligent study of which we may attain to the knowledge of himself; the Book of the Creatures, and the Book of the Scriptures.

The Book of the Creatures is written in those great letters of heaven and earth, the air and sea; and, by these, we may spell out somewhat of God. He made them for our instruction, as well as for our service. The least and vilest of them read us lectures of his glorious attributes; nor is it any absurdity to say, that, as they are all the works of his Hand, so they are all the words of his Mouth.

Indeed, this knowledge that the creatures give us of the Creator, cannot suffice to make us happy, though it may be sufficient to make us inexcusable † . We could never have collected from them those mysterious discoveries of God, which the scriptures exhibit, and which are so necessary to our eternal bliss: for what signature is there stamped upon any of the creatures of a Trinity in Unity; of the eternal generation, or temporal incarnation of the Son of God? What creature could have informed us of our first fall, and guilt contracted by it? Or where can we find the copy of the Covenant of Works or of Grace, printed upon any of the creatures? All the great sages of the world, though they were nature's secretaries, and ransacked its abstrusest secrets, yet all their learning and knowledge could never discover that sacred mystery of a Crucified Saviour. These are truths, which nature and reason are so far from finding out, that they can scarce receive them when discovered*: and, therefore, God hath manifested them to us by the light and revelation of the Holy Scriptures.

But yet so much of God as belongs to those two great titles of Creator and Governor of the World, our reason may collect from created and visible things; running up their consequences, till they are all resolved into the first cause and origin of all.

All the Vanity, that is in Worldly Things

Is only in Respect of the Sin and Folly of Man

3. Therefore, ALL THE VANITY, THAT IS IN WORLDLY THINGS, IS ONLY IN RESPECT OF THE SIN AND FOLLY OF MAN. For those things are said to be vain, which neither do nor can perform what we expect from them.

Our great expectation is happiness; and our great folly is, that we think to obtain it by the enjoyments of this world. This makes men pursue pleasures, hoard up riches, court honours and preferments, because they look with an overweening conceit on these things, as such as can make them truly happy. Whereas to seek for happiness among these worldly things, is but to seek the living among the dead: yea, it is but to search for happiness among those things, which are the very root and occasion of all our misery. They are all of them leaky and broken cisterns, and cannot hold this living water. This is it which makes them charged with vanity[†], because, in our perverted fancy, we look upon them as stable, permanent, and satisfactory; fix them as our journey's end, which ought only to be used by us in our passage; and expect much more from them, than they can yield: and so, indeed, the vanity is not so much theirs, as ours.

There are some things, as St. Austin* and the Schools[†] from him do well distinguish, which must be only enjoyed, other things that must be only used. To enjoy, is, to cleave to an object by love, for its own sake[‡]: and this belongs only to God. What we use, we refer to the obtaining of what we desire to enjoy[§]: and this belongs to the Creatures. So that we ought to use the Creatures, that we may arrive at the Creator||. We may serve ourselves of them, but we must alone enjoy him.

Now that, which makes the whole world become vanity, is when we break this order of use and fruition; when we set up any particular created good as our end and happiness, which ought only to be used as a means to attain it. All things in the world are in themselves good; but, when we propound them as the greatest and highest good that we expect satisfaction from, this turns them all into vanity; and so every thing, besides God, becomes nothing.

And thus we have a brief account whence proceeds this Vanity of the World: not from the nature of things; but from those vain hopes and expectations we build upon them, for that happiness which they cannot afford.

A Display of the Vanity of the World

II. It remains, therefore, to display before you this vanity of the world, in some more remarkable particulars. Whereof take these following instances.

Vanity Depends Merely Upon Opinion and Fancy.

1. The Vanity of the World appears in this, THAT ALL ITS GLORY AND SPLENDOUR DEPENDS MERELY UPON OPINION AND FANCY.

It is not so much what things are, as what we account them, that makes them good or evil; and what can be vainer, than that, which borrows its worth from so vain and fickle a thing as our estimation? And, therefore, we find the things of the world rated diversely, according to the esteem that men have of them*. What were gold and silver, had not men's fancy stamped upon them an excellency far beyond their natural usefulness? This great idol of the world was of no value among those barbarous nations, where abundance made it vile. They preferred glass and beads before it; and made that their treasure, which we make our scorn. They despise our riches, and we theirs: and true reason will tell us, that both the one and the other are in themselves alike despicable; and it is only fancy, that puts such an immodest and extravagant price upon them, far above their natural worth. Should the whole world conspire together to depose gold and silver from that sovereignty they have usurped over us, they might for ever lie hid in the bowels of the earth, ere their true usefulness would entice any to the pains and hazard of digging them out into the light.

Indeed, the whole use of what we so much dote upon, is merely fantastical: and, to make ourselves needy, we have invented an

artificial kind of riches; which are no more necessary to the service of sober nature, than jewels and bracelets were to that plane-tree which Xerxes so ridiculously adorned[†]. And, although we eagerly pursue these things, and count ourselves poor and indigent without them: yet possibly right reason will dictate, that they are no more needful to us, than to brute or senseless creatures; and that it would be altogether as ridiculous for a man to be decked with them, as for a beast or plant, were it but as uncommon. These precious trifles, when they are hung about us, make no more either to the warmth or defence of the body, than, if they were hung upon a tree, they could make its leaves more verdant, or its shade more refreshing.[‡] Doth any man lie the softer, because his bed-posts are gilt? Doth his meat and drink relish the better, because served up in gold? Is his house more convenient, because better carved or painted? Or are his cloaths more fit, because more fashionable than another's? And, if they are not necessary to these natural uses, all that is left them is but fancy and opinion.

Indeed, mankind cozen themselves by compact; and, by setting a value upon things that are rare, have made many think themselves poor: whereas God and nature made all equally wealthy, had they not artificially impoverished themselves. It is nothing but conceit, that makes the difference between the richest and the meanest, if both enjoy necessaries: for what are all their superfluous riches, but a load, that men's covetousness lays upon them? They are but like Roman Slaves, that were wont to carry heavy burdens of bread upon their backs, whereof others eat as large a share as they*. Whatsoever is more than barely to satisfy the cravings of nature, is of no other use but only to look upon[†]. Thy lands, thy houses, and fair estate, are but pictures of things. The poorest, that sees them, enjoys as much of them as thyself: yea, and if men could be contented with reason, all, that they behold with their eyes, is as much theirs, as it is the owner's.

And, indeed, if we strip all these admired nothings to their naked principles, we shall find them as base and sordid, as the meanest of

those things which we spurn and despise: only, art or nature put new shapes upon them; and fancy, a price upon those shapes. †What are gold and silver, but diversified earth, hard and shining clay? The very place where they are bred, the entrails of the earth, upbraids us for accounting them precious. The best and richest perfumes, what are they, but the clammy sweat of trees, or the mucous froth of beasts? The softest silks are but the excrement of a vile worm. The most racy and generous wines are nothing else but puddle-water strained through a vine. Our choicest delicacies are but dirt, cooked and served up to us in various forms. The very same things which we contemn under one shape, we admire in another; and, with this, fancy and custom have conspired together to cheat us.

Think, O Worldling! when thou castest thy greedy eyes upon thy riches, think, "Here are bags, that only fancy hath filled with treasure, which else were filled with dirt. Here are trifles, that only fancy hath called jewels, which else were no better than common pebbles. And shall I lay the foundation of my content and happiness upon a fancy; a thing more light and wavering than the very air?"

Nay, consider, that a distempered fancy can easily alter a man's condition, and put what shape it pleaseth upon it. If a black and sullen melancholy seizeth the spirits, it will make him complain of poverty, in the midst of his abundance; of pain and sickness, in the midst of his health and strength. It is true, these are but the effects of a distorted fancy; but, though his sickness and poverty be not real, yet the torment of them is. It is all one, as to our disquiet, whether we be indeed unhappy, or only imagine ourselves so*.

Again: If the fancy be more merrily perverted, straight they are nothing less than kings or emperors, in their own conceit. A straw is as majestic as a sceptre. They will speak of their rags as magnificently, as if they were robes; and look upon all that come near them, as their subjects or servants. They make every stone a gem, every cottage a palace. All they see is their own; and all their own is most excellent. Now, what think you: are these things vain, or

no? I doubt not but you will conclude them most extremely vain; and yet they serve their turns as well, and bring them in as much solace and contentment, as if they were really what they imagine them. Thus Thrasyllus noted down all the ships, that arrived at the port of Athens⁺; thinking them and their merchandize to be all his own: and, when cured of that pleasant madness, confessed, that he never in his whole life enjoyed so much content, as in that conceited wealth those ships brought him*. And indeed for my part, I know not whether these things are more vain in the fancy, or in the reality. Such is the exceeding Vanity of all things in the World, that, were it not for the eternal concernments of the soul, which cannot be so well regarded under a suspension or distraction of reason, I should make no difficulty to account and prove them the happiest men on earth.

If then there be so great a power in fancy, how vain must all those things be, which you pursue with eagerness and impatience! since a vain fancy, without them, can give you as much satisfaction, as if you enjoyed them all: and a vain fancy can, on the other hand, in the greatest abundance of them, make your lives as wearisome and vexatious, as if you enjoyed nothing.

That is the First Demonstration.

The Deceitfulness and Treachery of Vanity

2. The Vanity of the World appears in its deceitfulness and treachery. It is not only vanity, but a lying vanity; and betrays both our hopes and our souls.

(1.) It betrays our Hopes, and leaves us nothing but disappointment, when it promiseth satisfaction and happiness. What strange confidences do we build upon the false flatteries of the world! In our prosperity we sing a Requiem to ourselves; and are ready to say, our mountain is so strong, that it shall never be moved: Psal. 30:6, 7 but,

within a while, God hath shaken it, like that of Sinai; and wrapped it about with clouds and thick darkness.

(2.) It betrays the Soul to guilt and eternal condemnation: for, usually, the world entangles it in strong, though secret and insensible snares; and insinuates into the heart that love of itself, which is inconsistent with the love of God.

The world is the Devil's factor, and drives on the designs of hell. The Apostle hath told us, 1 Tim. 6:9. They, that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

And, because of the subserviency of worldly enjoyments to men's lusts, it is almost as impossible a thing to moderate our affections towards them, or to bound our appetites and desires, as it is to assuage the thirst of a dropsy by drinking, or to keep that fire from increasing into which we are still casting new fuel. And, therefore, our Saviour hath pronounced it as hard for a rich man to enter into heaven, as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle*. As Judas gave a sign to the officers that came with him to apprehend Jesus, Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he, hold him fast†: the same sign doth the world give the Devil: "Whomsoever I shall caress and favour, whomsoever I shall heap honour and riches on, whomsoever I shall embrace and kiss, the same is he, hold him fast." Such a darling of the world is too often fast bound in the silken bands of voluptuousness, and consigned over to be fast bound in chains of massy darkness.

3. As all things in the World are lying Vanities, so are they all VEXATIOUS. They are infamous, to a proverb: "uncertain comforts, but most certain crosses." And, therefore, the Wise Man concludes them all to be, not only Vanity, but Vexation of Spirit.

There is a Fourfold Vexatiousness in all worldly things.

(1.) There is a great deal of turmoil and trouble in getting them. Nothing can be acquired without it. The sweat of Adam's brows hath streamed down along upon ours; and the curse, together with it, that in sorrow we should eat of that which toil and labour hath provided for us †. Men rise early, and go to bed late, and eat the bread of carefulness; and such is either their curse or their folly, that they make their lives uncomfortable, only to get the comforts of life.

(2.) Whether they get them, or no, yet still they are disappointed in their hopes. If they cannot compass their designs, then they are tormented; because they fall short of what they laboured for: if they do compass them, yet still they are tormented; because what they laboured for, falls short of what they expected from it §.

The truth is, the world is much better in shew than substance: and those very things we admire before we enjoy them, yet afterward we find much less in them than we expected. As he, that sees a falling star shoot through the air and draw after it a long train of light, runs to the place, and, thinking to get some bright and glittering thing, catches up nothing but a filthy jelly; such is the disappointment we find in our pursuit after the enjoyments of this world: they make a glorious shew at a distance; but, when we come near them, we find our hopes deluded, and nothing upon the place but a vile slime.

(3.) They are all vexation while we enjoy them. Be it what it will, that we possess of the world, it is but by fits at most, that we take any great pleasure in it: and then, what between cares and designs to secure the continuance of it, and fears of losing it, the comfort of enjoying it is wholly swallowed up. For strong affections, begetting strong fears, do always lessen the delight of present enjoyments*. This is the unhappiness of all things in the world, that, if we set any price and value upon them, we lose much of the sweetness of them, by fearing to lose them.

(4.) They are all vexatious, as in their enjoyment, so especially in their loss. Whatever we set our hearts upon, we may assure

ourselves, and experience will teach it us, that the pleasure of possessing it will not near countervail the bitterness of losing it: and, as if God had on purpose so ordained it to take off our hearts from the world, the better we esteem any thing, the more vanity and vexation shall we find in it; for the more will our care and perplexity in keeping it, and the more our grief and torment in losing it, be encreased.

That is a Third Demonstration.

A Little Cross Will Embitter Great Comforts

4. The Vanity of the World appears in this, THAT A LITTLE CROSS WILL EMBITTER GREAT COMFORTS.

One dead flie is enough to corrupt a whole box of the world's most fragrant ointment. How much will only the aching of a tooth, a fit of the stone or gout, deaden and dishearten us, to all the joys and pleasures of life! Certainly, the world must needs be vain, that cannot bear out the brunt of a little pain or sickness. The least cross accident is enough to discompose all our delights. And, indeed, there are so many ingredients required to make up worldly felicity, riches, health, friends, honour, good name, and the like*; that, if any of these be wanting, the whole composition is spoiled, and we shall take advantage against ourselves to conclude we are miserable. For, such is the peevishness of our nature, that, if we have not all we would, we take no content in any thing we have.

And, besides, we are apt to slide off from the smoother part of our lives, as flies from glass, and to stick only on the rougher passages[†]. For, neither is sense capable to be so much or so long affected with the impressions of pleasure, as of pain; since never could there yet be any delights invented as piercing, as there are many torments: nor yet is our busy remembrance so officious, in calling back the pleasant

passages of our days to our review, as those that have been more gloomy and dolorous. And though it be our sin to look more upon the crosses we find, than the comforts we enjoy; yet here we may likewise see how vain a thing it is for us to expect happiness and contentment from the world, whose crosses as they are more, so they are more considerable than its comforts.

The Longer We Enjoy Vanity, the More Insipid it Grows

5. Consider, THE LONGER WE ENJOY ANY WORLDLY THING, THE MORE FLAT AND INSIPID DOETH IT GROW. We are soon at the bottom, and find nothing but dregs there. In all the pleasures of life, either our spirits sink and fall under the continuance of them, as not able to bear a constant tension and emotion; or the delight consists merely in the novelty and variety of the objects, which when we are made more familiar with, are but dull, because ordinary: and so they either tire our appetites, or deceive our hopes. And, therefore, the most artificial voluptuaries have always allowed themselves an intermission in their pleasures, to recruit nature and sharpen their sensual desires: without which, they would but cloy surfeit; and, instead of pleasures, prove only a waste and oppression to the spirits. Epicurus himself*, the great Master and Servant of Pleasure, who made it the highest good and chiefest happiness of man, set himself certain days of abstinence in course, wherein he would but niggardly satisfy his stomach; well knowing, that the pleasure of gluttony could never be so much enhanced, as by an interval of hunger.

For what is a furnished table, to him, whose constant meals overtake one another, but only the heaping of food upon crudities and indigestion? What the titles of honour, to a person born noble? They signify no more to him, than it doth to another man, when he hears himself called by his ordinary name. What is respect and honour, to

a man long accustomed to it? It brings him no great content when he hath it, but torments him when he fails of it. Give these things, to those, that are unacquainted with them, if you would have them valued. Bring a poor man to a table of delicates: invest an ignoble person with honours and dignities: give respect to a despised person; and, for the present, you bless them. But time and custom will wear off this content: and the tediousness[†] even of such a life as this will make them willing, at least for their divertisement and recreation, to retire to their homely cells and station[‡]. For, as it is with those that are accustomed to strong perfumes, they themselves cannot scent those odours, which to others that use them not are most sweet and fragrant; so it fares with us in the long continuance of worldly enjoyments: our senses are so stuffed and even suffocated with them, that we cannot perceive them; and, unless we purchase pleasures by alternate sorrow, they are but lost upon us.

Now, how vain must the world needs be, whose comforts are not valuable while we have them, but while we have them not! And how vain are those joys, for which we must pay down as much grief, as the joys themselves are worth! So that, upon ballancing the accompt, there remains nothing to us: and it had been altogether as good, to have enjoyed nothing.

All the Pleasure of the World is a Tedious Repetition of the Same Things

6. Again, consider, ALL THE PLEASURE OF THE WORLD, IS NOTHING ELSE BUT A TEDIOUS REPETITION OF THE SAME THINGS.

Our life consists in a round of actions*: and what can be duller, than still to be doing the same things over and over again?

Ask the most frolic gallant, whose only study it is how he may pass his time merrily and live happily: what account can he give of his pleasures, but that from his bed he riseth to his table, from his table to his sports, from them he tumbles into his bed again? This is the most genteel and fashionable life.

And are these the great joys, that a world so prized and so admired can afford? One half of his pleasant life he spends in sleep, a dull state, which we may rather reckon to death than life. The other half he spends in clogging his appetite, and tiring his body, and then to sleep again. What generous and noble designs are these! Fit for high spirits and high births: while the contemptible peasants are left to do the drudgery of the world, and to be the only serviceable men in it. Nay, rather what a pitiful circle is this, still to be doing the same things, and things which we have before searched and often found all that is in them! So that even a heathen could say[†], That not only a valiant or a miserable man might desire to die; but a nice and delicate man, as disdaining the irksome repetition of the same things.

The Need for Support and Comfort

7. The Vanity of the World appears in this, THAT IT CAN STAND US IN NO STEAD, THEN WHEN WE HAVE THE GREATEST NEED OF SUPPORT AND COMFORT.

There be two seasons especially, in which the soul wants relief and comfort: and they are, in Trouble of Conscience, and at the Hour of Death. Now in each of these the world shews itself to be exceeding vain and useless.

(1.) The world appears to be vain, when we are under Trouble of Conscience.

What choice comforts the soul then stands in need of, those, who have felt the sting and terrors of it, can best tell. The torments they then feel, next to those of the damned, are the most intolerable, and the most unutterable. God sets them up as his mark; and shoots his arrows, dipped in flaming poison, into the very midst of their souls. He kindles a secret fire in them, that consumes their bones, dries up their marrow, and scorches their entrails; and, such is the spreading rage of it, that oftentimes it smoaks out at their mouths in despairing outcries.

The spirit of a man, saith Solomon, Prov. 18:14, will bear his infirmity: i. e. the natural cheerfulness and vivacity of a man's spirit, will enable him to bear up under bodily pains: but a wounded spirit, who can bear? When our prop itself is broken, we must needs sink; and fall under the most gloomy apprehensions, that guilt and hell can create in a soul, already singed with those eternal flames into which with unspeakable horror it daily expects to be plunged. Oh! think what exact torture thou must needs endure, when God shall make deep wounds in thy spirit; and let fall great drops of his burning wrath, on that part of thy soul, that is infinitely more tender and sensible than the apple of thine eye. Imagine what sharp and intolerable pains those martyrs sustained, who, as the Apostle tells us, Heb. 11:37, were sawn asunder. Or, suppose that thou thyself wert now under the ragged teeth of a saw, drawn to and fro upon the tenderest parts of thy body; tearing thy flesh, thy nerves, and sinews; grating and jarring upon thy very bones: yet all the extremity of this, is nothing to what torments the conscience feels, when God causeth his sword to enter into it, to rive it up; when he makes deep and bloody wounds in it, and, instead of pouring in healing balm, with a heavy hand chafes them with fire and brimstone.

Now in such a time of anguish and distress as this, what is there that can relieve the afflicted soul? The worldling, that heaps up his ill-gotten treasures and wallows in thick clay, when God comes to ransack his conscience and to set before him the guilt of his sins, will then know, with terror and amazement, that there is a justice which

gold and silver cannot bribe. The voluptuous person will no longer relish any savouriness in his carnal delights, when once God writes bitter things against him: Job 13:26. What is mirth and music to him, that can now hear nothing but the screeches of his own conscience? What is a full cup to him, that can now taste nothing but the cup of fury and trembling? Little content will the noble take in his honourable titles, if all this while his conscience call him reprobate. A title of honour will no more abate the torments of conscience, than it doth mitigate Beelzebub's torments to be stiled Prince of the Devils. All the world's honey will not serve to allay the envenomed stings of conscience. That is a fiery serpent, a deaf adder, that will not be charmed by all the alluring pleasures of the world. These are vain and impertinent to one, whose thoughts are wholly possessed with the fear of wrath and hell, from which these cannot deliver him. When God makes a wound in the spirit, the whole world cannot make a plaister broad enough to cover it.

(2.) The world is a vain and useless thing at the Hour of Death,

Possibly, many of us may never conflict with the Terrors of Conscience, nor have that conviction of the World's Vanity: but yet we must all conflict with death, that King of Terrors.

Suppose, therefore, what must certainly once be, that we were now gasping our last, our tongues faltering, our eye-strings breaking, our limbs quivering, a dead cold and stiffness invading us; were our souls tossed to and fro upon our expiring breath, and, like wrecks at sea, sometimes cast up, and by and by sucked back again, what could stand us in stead, and make our passage happy at such a time as this?

Now the soul requires the strongest, the richest cordials. Prepare it one mingled of the best ingredients the whole world can afford; cast into the cup riches, honour, pleasure, the quintessence of all that is here desirable: yet, alas! what is all this world to a dying man, who is just leaving it?

Thy wicked companions, with whom thou hast laughed and sinned away thy freshest years, will in this thy last extremity forsake thee; or, if they do attend so sad a spectacle, alas, what miserable comforters will they be! They will then prove another bad conscience to thee; and bring to thy remembrance with horror the sins, which thou hast committed by their enticement, or they by thine. Thy mirth and jollity will then be turned into groans and howlings. All things will stare ruthfully upon thee; and, when thou callest upon them for help, confess their impotency to rescue thee from the gripe of death and from the doom of justice*.

Sickness is usually a busy time with conscience; and, when it is packing up for a remove into the other world, it will be sure to gather together all the sins of a man's life, and bind them as a heavy and insupportable burden upon his soul. Can thy sensual pleasures divert thee now? As they have served thee to pass away the tediousness of time, can they serve to pass away the infinite tediousness of eternity? Nay, how can it otherwise be, but that a mind, long soaked and softened by these, should be made the more capable of receiving deep impressions of grief, anguish, and despair?

Indeed, while we eagerly pursue any of these worldly enjoyments, we are but running after a shadow: and, as shadows vanish, and are swallowed up in the greater shade of night; so, when the night of death shall cast its thick shade about us, and wrap us up in deep and substantial darkness, all these vain shadows will then disappear and vanish quite out of sight.

Now could we have the same opinion of the world in the time of our health and prosperity, as we shall certainly have when we lie languishing and drawing on to eternity, we should be able then with a generous scorn to live above it and despise it. Shall we prize those comforts, which will be none to us, when we have the greatest need of comfort? shall we glue our affections to that, which either is so faithless that it will not, or so weak that it cannot help us?

So vain a thing is it, that it cannot resist the disgrace, that sleep or only winking doth. Shut but your eyes, and what becomes of all the pomp and lustre, the beauty and splendour, that we so much admire in the world? It all vanisheth into darkness and nothing. Sleep snatcheth us from it; and, for the time, we have no more enjoyment of it than if we were dead. Every night we die in our beds; and yet every day are so immersed in the pleasures and businesses of the world, as if we were never to die indeed.

Since, therefore, we have higher and nobler objects to fix our affections on, let us not lavish them out upon these worldly vanities, which can at no time prove real comforts unto us; and then least of all, when we have most need of comfort.

That is a Seventh Demonstration.

All things in the World are Vain

Because they are Unsuitable

8. Again. All things in the World are vain, BECAUSE THEY ARE UNSUITABLE.

True, indeed, they are suited to the necessities of the body, and serve to feed and clothe that; but he is a beast, or worse, that reckons himself provided for, when only his bodily wants are supplied. Have we not all of us precious and immortal Souls, capable and desirous of happiness? Do not these crave to be satisfied? Do they not deserve to be heard? Shall our vile bodies, which are but dust and worms'-meat, engross all our care how to please and pamper them, and shall the necessities of our never-dying souls be neglected? What have you laid up in store for these? Alas! that, which most men busy themselves about, is to heap up temporal riches, to join house to house, and land to land, that they might dwell alone upon the earth: Isaiah 5:8.

But know, thou dost but give thy soul husks and swine's-meat, when thou settest the whole world before it. And, therefore, our Saviour justly brands the rich man in the Gospel for a fool, that, when he had stuffed up his barns with corn, said to his soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: Luke 12:19 a fool indeed! to measure the soul's goods by the barn, or by the bushel.

The very same is the folly of most men, who think they are in all respects well provided for, if they can but scrape together a great estate; whereas the soul can no more live upon these things, than the body can upon a thought or notion.

There is a three-fold unsuitableness, between worldly things and the soul.

(1.) The soul is Spiritual: these are drossy and material. Of all things belonging to a man, his breath is the most subtle, invisible, and spiritual. But now the soul is called the Breath of God*; and therefore must needs be spiritual in a high degree.

And what then hath a spiritual soul to do with clods of earth, or acres of land; with barns full of corn, or bags full of gold? These are too thick and gross to correspond with its refined nature.

But rather bring spiritual things to spiritual. God who is the Father of Spirits*, his love and favour, an interest in him, and communion with him, the consolations of the Holy Ghost, the actings of grace, and the hopes of glory; these spiritual and clarified essences, which a carnal eye cannot see, nor a carnal judgment value; these are most suitable to the soul, that is a spirit, and ought not to be unequally yoked to the dregs and dross of earthly enjoyments.

(2.) The soul is Immortal; but all worldly things are perishing, and wear out in the using. And, therefore, it was but small comfort, when the rich man sung his requiem, to say, Soul, take thy ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years. Thou fool! what is an estate for many years, to a soul whose duration is not measured by years, but by

eternity? What, when those years of plenty are expired? How destitute will thy soul be when it shall have out-lived all its good things! It may out-live them, even in this world. God may nip and blast all that thou settest thy heart on; and make all thy comforts fall off from thee, like so many withered leaves. However, if thou hast no other than what this miserable world can afford, thou shalt certainly out-live them in the world to come: and what wilt thou do, not in those years, but in that eternity of famine?

As it is with those, that are invited to feast in some noble family, the furniture is rich, the entertainment splendid and magnificent; but, when they depart, they cannot, of all that pomp and bravery, carry any thing away with them; so is it here: the world is God's great house, richly furnished, and we well entertained in it: we have all things liberally afforded us for our use; but nothing of all is ours. And, therefore, God hath set that grim porter, Death, at his gate; to see, that, as we brought nothing into it, so we carry nothing out of it.

What a sad parting-hour will it be to the soul, when it must go into another world, and leave all that it admired and loved, behind in this! How will it protract, and linger! How loth will it be to enter upon so great a journey, and carry nothing to defray the charges of it! Certainly, dying must needs be a terrible thing, to those, who have gotten nothing but what they can no longer keep, when their souls must be set on shore in a vast and black eternity, all naked and destitute, having nothing to relieve or support them.

(3.) The Necessities of the soul, are altogether of another kind, than those, which worldly things are able to supply: and therefore they are wholly unsuitable.

Natural things may well serve for natural wants: food will satisfy hunger, and raiment fence off the injuries of the weather, and riches will procure both: but the soul's necessities are spiritual, and these no natural thing can reach. It wants a price, to redeem it: nothing can do this, but the precious blood of Christ It wants pardon and

forgiveness: nothing can grant it, but the free and abundant mercy of God. It wants sanctification and holiness, comfort and assurance: nothing can effect these, but the Holy Ghost. Here, all worldly things fall short. The exigencies of the outward man they may supply; but the greatest abundance of them can never quiet a troubled conscience, nor appease an angry God, nor remove the condemning guilt of the least sin: no, the redemption of the soul is precious (more precious than to be purchased by these poor things) and it ceaseth for ever: Psal. 49:8.

Possibly, now, in the time of your peace and prosperity, you regard not these spiritual wants; but, when the days of sorrow and darkness shall come upon you, when God shall drop into your consciences a little of his wrath and displeasure, you may as well seek to cure a wound in your body, by applying a plaister to your garment, as seek to ease a wounded spirit by all the treasures, pleasures, and enjoyments of this world. Riches, saith the wise man, Prov. 11:4 profit not in the day of wrath: for, indeed, they cannot reach the soul, to bring any true solace to it.

Thus you see how unsuitable the world is to the soul: unsuitable to the Nature of it, for the soul is spiritual, but all earthly enjoyments are drossy and material; the soul is immortal, but these are all perishing: unsuitable also to the Necessities of the soul, which they can never reach nor supply.

The Inconstancy and Fickleness of Vanity

9. The Vanity of the World appears in its INCONSTANCY and FICKLENESS.

God's providence administers all things here below, in perpetual vicissitudes. His hand turns them about, like so many wheels: to which they are compared; Ezek. 1. The same part is now uppermost; and, anon, lowermost: now, lifted up in the air; and, by and by,

grated through the mire. This is the mutable condition of the world. And therefore, we find it compared to the moon; Rev. 12:1 where the Church is described to be clothed with the sun, and to have the moon, that is, the world, under her feet. And well may it bear the resemblance: for it is still waxing and waning; sometimes full of brightness, at other times scarce a small streak of light to be discerned.

There are none of us, but have had experience, in some kind or other, of the inconstancy of these sublunary enjoyments.

When the sun shines bright and warm, all the flowers of the field open and display their leaves, to receive him into their bosoms; but, when night comes, they fold together, and shut up all their glories: and, though they were like so many little suns shining here below, able, one would think, to force a day for themselves; yet, when the sun withdraws his beams, they droop, and hang the head, and stand neglected, dull and obscure things. So hath it fared with us: while God hath shone upon us with warm and cherishing influences, we opened, and spread, and flourished into a great pomp and glory; but he only hides his face, draws in his beams, and all our beautiful leaves shut up, or fall to the ground, and leave us a bare stalk, poor and contemptible.

Or, if there have been no such considerable mutations in what concerns us, yet the revolutions, that God hath of late years brought upon others, so beyond expectation or example, may well instruct us in the Vanity of the World; and make us no less condemn it, than admire that Infinite Wisdom that governs it.

It is said of the wheels, Ezek. 1:17 that they went upon their four sides: for, one wheel intersecting and crossing another, the whole must needs consist of four sides or semicircles; and moving upon these four sides, it must of necessity move very ruggedly, by jolts and jerks. So, truly, the Providences of God do sometimes move unevenly; as cross wheels would do, moving upon their sides. Great

and sudden changes are often brought to pass, without being ripened by sensible degrees: but happen by the surprisal of some unexpected Providence; and, as it were, by the sudden jerk of the wheel, shaking off those who sat on the top, and crushing them in its passage over.

'Tis true, these mutations which to us seem so confused and tumultuary, are all orderly and harmonious in the divine counsel and foreknowledge. There is not a Providence, that breaks its rank; nor a wheel, that moves out of its track: and there is a destined end for them all, the Glory of the Almighty Creator; to which, while every creature pursues its own inclinations, he sweetly and yet efficaciously sways them. They are all like arrows, shot at a mark by an unerring hand: some are shot point-blank, and some by compass; but none so carelessly as to miss it.

Though changes may surprise us, yet they do not surprise God: but, as it is a great pleasure to us, to see our designs and forecasts accomplished; so, Infinite Wisdom delights itself to look on, and see how all things start up into their place and order, as soon as called forth by his efficacious decree and foreknowledge. Among all the weighty and arduous cares of governing the world, it is, if I may so express it, the Recreation of Providence, to amuse mankind with some wonderful events: that, when we cannot find out the connection and dependence of Second Causes, we may humbly acquiesce in adoring the absolute sovereignty of the First; and, by observing the mutations of affairs here below, may be taught to repose ourselves in Him, who only is immutable. Thus God administers the various occurrences of the world, according to the counsel of his own will; and makes the inconstancy of it serve both for his delight and our admonition.

It is in vain, therefore, to expect happiness from what is so uncertain. All the comforts of it are but like fading flowers, that, while we are looking on them and smelling to them, die and wither in our hands.

Is it Pleasures we seek? These must vary: for where there is not an intermission, it is not pleasure, but a glut and surfeit. And hence it is, that they who are used to hardships, taste more sweetness in some ordinary pleasures; than those, who are accustomed to a voluptuous life, do in all their exquisite and invented delights.

Do you pursue Honour and Applause in the world? This hangs upon the wavering tongues of the multitude. To follow this, is but to pursue a puff of wind; and, of all winds in nature, the most fickle and changeable. The people's Hosanna and Crucify, are oft pronounced in the same breath. And, besides that it is no great matter that those should think or speak well of thee, who have but too much reason to think ill of themselves*; besides this, consider how soon public fame grows out of breath. Possibly an age or two may talk of thee; but this bruit is but like successive echoes, that render the voice still weaker and weaker, till at length it vanisheth into silence. Yea, couldst thou fill whole chronicles with thy story, yet time or moths will eat thee out: and the fresher remembrance of other men's actions will bury thine in oblivion†.

Is it Riches you desire? These, too, are uncertain: 1 Tim. 6:17. Charge, them, that they trust not in uncertain riches. Uncertain they are in getting; and uncertain in keeping, when got. All our treasures are like quicksilver, which strangely slips between our fingers, when we think we hold it fastest. Riches, saith the Wise Man, make themselves wings, and fly away as an eagle towards heaven: Prov. 23:5: and it were a most strange folly, to fall passionately in love with a bird upon his wing, who is free and unconfined as the air in which he flies, and will, not stoop to thy call or lure‡. How much better were it, since they will fly, for thyself to direct their flight towards heaven, by relieving the necessitous servants and members of Jesus Christ! Then will their flight be happy and glorious, when they carry on their wings the prayers and blessings of the poor, whose bowels thou hast refreshed. This is to lay up treasure in heaven; to remit thy monies to the other world, where they shall be truly paid thee, with abundant interest. This is to lay up a stock for hereafter, that thou

mayest have whereon to live splendidly and gloriously to all eternity. And, thus to lay out, is to lay up, to lay up uncertain riches in a safe repository: God's promises shall be thy security, and every star in heaven a seal set upon the treasury-door, which none can break or violate.

Thus you see how mutable and inconstant all worldly things are. So that we may truly apply that, which the Psalmist speaks of the earth in another sense, That God hath founded it upon the sea, and established it upon the floods: Psalm 24:2. Such is the waving and fluctuation of all things here below, that they are no more constant, than if they were merely built upon the ebbing and flowing of the tide.

Vanity is Altogether Unsatisfactory

10. The Vanity of the World appears in this, THAT IT IS ALTOGETHER UNSATISFACTORY.

That must needs be vain, which when we enjoy it in its greatest abundance, can give us no real nor solid content. Such an empty thing is the whole world. You may as soon grasp a bundle of dreams, or take up an armfull of your own shadow, as fill the vast and boundless desires of your souls with these earthly enjoyments.

And, therefore, the Psalmist, speaking of prosperous sinners, sets forth their state by the most thin and empty things imaginable: Psalm 73:20. As a dream, when one awakes; so, O Lord thou shalt despise their image. The images and representations, that a dream makes, seem very brisk and lively; but, when we reflect upon them with our waking thoughts, we find them confused and impertinent. Such is all the prosperity of this world: it is but as the image and fiction of a dream.

As a hungry man*, that dreams he is at a furnished table, and fills himself with all varieties of delicacies, how joyful and how pleased is he, how fully satisfied, if he were not to wake again! but some one jogs or calls him: he wakes, and finds himself hunger-starved; nothing fed, but his fancy. So is it with us in this world. While the soul lies under the coverlet of this body, it sleeps: and one thinks himself rich; another, great and noble; a third, learned and wise: but, alas! all this is only a dream: when either afflictions or death make a noise and call upon him, the sleepy soul awakes; and finds itself empty and hunger-starved, after all the imaginary store it enjoyed.

Now, the Unsatisfactoriness of the World, may be clearly evinced by these two things.

(1) In that the highest condition we can attain unto, cannot free us from cares and crosses. Yea indeed it is so far from freeing us, that it rather increaseth them. It doth but make us spread the wider, and stand the fairer mark for trouble.

And yet we are like children, that think the sky lies on yonder hill: thither they run, hoping to touch it there: when they come, they find it dislodged to another hill: after it they run, and pursue it from hill to hill; and, after all their pains and sweat, find themselves as far below it as at first. So it fares with us. We think happiness, and true content lies in some condition above us: thither we hasten, hoping we shall reach it there. When we arrive thither, we find the happiness we sought for is dislodged, and seems to us to rest in a condition above that; but, when we attain this too, still we are as far below happiness and satisfaction, as we were in our lowest estate.

When we change our outward condition, be it to never so great advantage, we do not lose, but only change our cares. If we are freed from the cares and crosses of a poor and private life, we fall into those of a pompous and envied greatness, which are both more numerous and more oppressive. The man, that lies most compacted and in least compass in the world, is like to scape best: whereas the

great ones, that take up much room, do only shew in how many places and concernments they are liable to be wounded*.

It is not, therefore, any thing in this world, that can give you satisfaction. All the enjoyments of it are to the soul, as wind to the stomach: they may gripe it; but they can never satisfy it. Indeed, so vain are they, that they scarce have any other proof of their reality, but the pain and torment they bring with them.

(2) The world appears to be unsatisfactory, in that, be our condition what it will, yet still we desire change. We can no more rest in a high estate, than in a low; but still we desire something further, and something better.

As sick men toss to and fro*, from side to side, thinking to find ease, by changing their posture; whereas it is not their outward posture, but their inward distemper, that is the cause of their restlessness: so do we endeavour to change and shift conditions in the world, and lie sometimes in one posture and sometimes in another, but yet are restless in all; for, wheresoever we tumble, we carry our disease with us, false opinions, and foolish hopes, and impotent desires, and fond designs, which make us complain of our present state, and wish the amendment of that, when nothing wants cure but ourselves.

The servant thinks he shall be a happy man, when he is made free. Is the free man happy? No: but he shall be, when he hath gotten such an estate. Is the rich man happy? No: but he shall be, when he is invested with such an honour and dignity. Well: is the honourable man happy? No: unless he be supreme. And those, who are supreme, cannot think themselves completely happy, unless they be universal monarchs. And those who were so, we find they could not rest there, but would needs be adored for gods. Oh, whither do the boundless desires of men hurry them†! Nothing in this world can put a stop to them.

It was a pertinent discourse of Cineas, dissuading Pyrrhus from undertaking a war against the Romans. "Sir," saith he, "When you have conquered them, what will you do next?" "Then Sicily is near at hand, and easy to master." "And what when you have subdued Sicily?" "Then we'll pass over to Africa, and take Carthage, which cannot long withstand us." "When these are conquered, what will be your next attempt?" "Then," saith Pyrrhus, "we'll fall in upon Greece and Macedon, and recover what we have lost there." "Well, when all are subdued, what fruit do you expect from all your victories?" "Then," saith he, "we'll sit down and enjoy ourselves." "Sir," replies Cineas, "may we not do it now? Have you not already a kingdom of your own? and he, that cannot enjoy himself with a kingdom, cannot with the whole world."

Such are the designs of men, and so we may answer them. Most are projecting how they may get such an estate; then how they may raise themselves to honour: and think that their advancement in both, will bring them satisfaction. Alas! this will not do. Their desires will still run before them: and they may as well sit down content where they are, as where they hope to be.

And the reason of this unsatisfactoriness in worldly things, is, because none of them are so good as the soul is. The soul, next to angels, is the very top and cream of the whole creation: other things are but dregs and lees compared to it. Now that, which is our happiness, must be better than ourselves; for it must perfect us. But these things being far worse and inferior, the soul, in cleaving to them, is secretly conscious that it abaseth and disparageth itself; and therefore cannot find true satisfaction.

Nothing can fill the soul, but that, which eminently contains in it all good. But now, as light is only divided and parcelled out among the stars, but is all united in the sun; so goodness is only parcelled out among the creatures: this creature hath one share, and that another: not any of them contains the whole sum of goodness: this is proper to God only, who is the Author and Original of them all; in whom all

excellencies and perfections are concentrated: and, therefore, in him alone can be found that rest and satisfaction, which the soul in vain seeks for, in any thing besides himself.

These are the Demonstrations of the World's Vanity; which, though they be many and various, yet I doubt not but every man's particular experience may furnish him with divers others.

Uses

III. But, whatever our Observations are, the USES we may make of them are these.

Admiring the Good Providence of God

1. It should teach us TO ADMIRE AND ADORE THE GOOD PROVIDENCE OF GOD TO HIS CHILDREN, IN SO ORDERING IT, THAT THE WORLD SHOULD BE THUS VAIN, AND DEAL SO ILL WITH THOSE WHO SERVE IT.

For, if it were not so infamous and deceitful as it is; if it did not frustrate and disappoint our hopes; and pay us with vexation, when it promiseth fruition and content: what thinkest thou, O Christian, would be the end of this? would any one think of God, or remember heaven and the life to come? St. Augustin somewhere speaks excellently, Turbat me mundus, et ego eum diligo; quid si non turbaret? "The world troubles and molests me, and yet I love it: what if it did not trouble me?" Certainly, we should fall into an utter forgetfulness of God, if we could find any true satisfaction here. We should never think of returning to the Fountain of Living Waters, if we could find enough in cisterns to quench the thirst of our souls.

And, therefore, God deals with us, as some great person would do with a disobedient son, that forsakes his house, and riots among his tenants: his father gives order; they should treat him ill, affront, and

chase him from them; and all, that he might reduce him. The same doth God. Man is his wild and debauched son. He flies from the commands of his father, and cannot endure to live under his strict and severe government. Whither goes he, but to the pleasures of the world; and revels and riots among the creatures? but God resolves to recover him; and, therefore, commands every creature to handle him roughly. "Burn him, Fire: toss him, Tempests; and shipwreck his estate: forsake him, Friends: Designs, fail him: Children, be rebellious to him, as he is to me: let his supports and dependances sink under him; his riches melt away, leave him poor, and despised, and destitute." These are all God's servants, and must obey his will. And to what end is all this; but that, seeing himself forsaken of all, he may at length, like the beggared prodigal, return again to his father?

Vanity is Gross Folly

2. If the Vanity of the World be such, and so great; if it be only an empty bubble, a swelling nothing, less solid than the dream of a shadow; if it be thus unsuitable, uncertain, and unsatisfactory, as I have demonstrated to you: **WHAT GROSS FOLLY THEN ARE MOST MEN GUILTY OF IN SETTING SO HIGH A PRICE UPON THAT, WHICH IS OF NO WORTH NOR SUBSTANCE?**

Though formerly we have been so much deceived as to take the world's paint and varnish for true beauty, and its glittering for substantial treasure; yet now, since the cheat is discovered, since you have seen this false pack opened and nothing but counterfeit wares obtruded upon you, your folly will be inexcusable, if, after experiments and admonitions, you should contribute any longer to your own cheat, and set a price upon things which you know to be vile and worthless.

The Wise Man, as you have heard, sums up their whole value, only in a great cypher and a great blot, Vanity and Vexation. At what price

would you rate Vanity, which is nothing? or Vexation, which is worse than nothing?

And, therefore, our Saviour, Mark 4:7 compares the things of this world to thorns: some fell among thorns: which thorns he interprets to be the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches: v. 19. Now, he were a madman, that, to assuage his hunger, would attempt to swallow a bush of thorns. No less is the madness and extreme folly of most men, who, to satisfy the eager appetite of a hungry and indigent soul, gape after the thorns of this world, and chew thistles; which, instead of yielding them either grapes or figs, will only serve to pierce them through with innumerable sorrows.

A man's wisdom or folly is commonly judged by the bargains he makes. If he lay out that, which is very precious, to purchase what is of no worth, this we justly account a foolish bargain. If, on the other hand, he purchase that, which is of great price, with something little worth, we account it a wise and thriving bargain. Now here we may see the gross folly of most men. Though they are wise enough, in bartering one part of the world for another; yet they shew themselves very fools, in purchasing any part of the world with that which is no part of it.

The Scripture hath told us, that all that is in the world, is honour, pleasure, or profit. While we only traffic with these for one another, we do not amiss. The world is a proper price for itself. And, doubtless, we may lawfully part with some worldly advantages to procure others. But, then, there are other things, which do not belong to the world, under this acception: our affections; our consciences; our precious and immortal souls. And these God hath given us to trade with for heaven and eternal glory. Now herein lies the folly of most men, that they purchase the vile things of this world, with such an inestimable price; and extravagantly outbid themselves, to procure trifles with that, which might procure them eternal happiness.

More particularly.

(1.) Is it not extreme folly, to lavish out precious affections, upon vile and vain objects?

Affections are the wings of the soul, without which the soul itself, were but a dull and unactive carcase. These God hath given it, that it might be able to take its flight to heaven, and lodge itself in his bosom. Now, how unworthy a thing is it, only to flutter to and fro upon the surface of the earth; to clog and clutter these wings with mire and dirt, which were at first made to take so high and so noble a flight!

The Apostle hath commanded us to set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth: Col. 3:2. And, indeed, there is great reason for it. For the two choice affections of the soul are Love and Joy. Now that is most worthy our love, that can return a joy most worthy of us. But the joy, that the world gives, is usually tumultuous, always checked with some secret annoy, and it ends with a dulness and damp upon the spirits: it is but like the empty crackling of thorns under a pot*, that for the present makes a great noise and blaze, but suddenly vanisheth all away into smoke. Whereas, a heavenly Christian feels sometimes a ponderous and weighty joy; a joy springing up in his soul, almost intolerable, and altogether unutterable; a joy, that melts him into ecstasy and rapture. How infinitely doth he then disdain, that any soul should be so wretchedly sottish, as to prefer the world before, or equalize it with God! He thinks the happiness he then enjoys so great, that, although he believes it is, yet he cannot conceive how it should be more or greater in heaven itself. Then the soul claps its wings: it would fain take its flight, and be gone: it breathes, it pants, it reaches after God, and falls into an agony of joy and desire inconceivably mixed together. Can the world give us any such over-powering joy as this? It may afford us corn and wine; the weak recruits of a frail life: but, when it hath emptied all its store and abundance into our bosoms, it is not worthy to be mentioned with the love and favour of God, which is

better than life itself: Psal. 63:3. And, therefore, the Psalmist makes it his prayer, Psal. 4:6, 7. Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine encreased.

The joy of the world resembles a torrent. As, upon a glut of rain, you shall have a torrent come rolling along with noise and violence, overflowing its banks, and bearing all before it; yet it is but muddy and impure water, and 'tis soon gone and dried up: such is all the joy this world can give: it makes a great noise, 'tis commonly immoderate, and swells beyond its due bounds; yet 'tis but a muddy and impure joy; it soon rolls away, and leaves nothing behind but a drought in the soul. Now, since the world's joy is but such a poor empty thing as this, it is most gross folly for us to lay out our best love upon that, which cannot repay us with the best joy.

(2.) If the world be thus vain, what folly is it, to lay out our most serious cares and contrivances upon it!

The cares of worldly men are most absurd and irrational. Ask them why they care; they will tell you it is, that they may live without care: and, yet, the more they get, the more do their cares swarm and increase about them. To what purpose do they thus disquiet themselves? They were as good make nets to catch the wind, as lay plots either to obtain or secure a world, which is so slippery and so full of disappointments, that neither they who have it, are sure of keeping it, nor they who have it not of getting it.

We may observe a kind of coyness in the world. Those, who court it most and pursue it closest, oftentimes miss of their designs, because they overact them. And, it is commonly seen, that those, who, as we use to say, have many irons in the fire, get nothing thereby, but only the burning of their own fingers.

'Tis true, there is a prudential and providential care, that is so far from being chargeable with folly, that it is necessary, and a great part

of our duty; not only as we are men, but as we are Christians*. And this prudential care is, when we do what lawfully we may to procure the comforts of life; and, then, with all quietness and indifferency, submit the success to God. This is a Care of Diligence.

But that, which is justly branded with folly, is a Care of Diffidence; which is alway accompanied with torment, fears, and distractions about the success and issue; and most unreasonably vexeth us, for what is not in our power to determine. Such a care as this usurps upon God. And, certainly, it is no less a fault to invade God's part, than to neglect our own; and a like folly.

The right temper a Christian should observe in procuring any worldly comfort, is, to interest his judgment in the choice of means, but to keep his affections disinterested and unconcerned in the event. But, when we are anxious how our designs will succeed, we make it a torment to us in getting, before we can make it a comfort to us in enjoying.

To what purpose, then, dost thou, O Worldling, rack thy brains with contrivances, how to fill thy bags with treasure, how to empty them out with advantage? When thou hast added heap to heap, of all thy store thou enjoyest no more, than what thou eatest, or drinkest, or wearest. And, of this too, thou enjoyest no more, than will just suffice to satisfy thy hunger, to quench thy thirst, and to fence off the injuries of the weather: all the rest turns either to diseases or burdens.

True reason will teach us to chuse our estates, as we would do our garments: not those, which are largest; but those, which are fittest for us*.

Vast and overflowing estates are but like huge enormous rudders, that rather serve to sink the ship, than steer it. Their abundance is useless, and their excess dangerous.

To what end, therefore, is all our care and carking, all our perplexing and solicitous thoughts; those parching and consuming distractions, which can hasten on nothing but our own natural decays: to what end are they, unless it be to contradict our Saviour, and shew that we have a power to make our black hairs white⁺?

When we lay subtle and intricate designs, to obtain the things of this world, we are but like spiders, that, with a great deal of art and labour, weave a curious cobweb, only to catch flies; and, possibly, spend more of their bowels in framing it, than the prey they catch can again repair: yea, and it may be too, before the prey be caught, both they and their web are swept down together and trod in the dust.

So, when we frame designs, to get any worldly advantage, it is but taking a great deal of pains to catch a fly: and, possibly, before it be caught, the rude hand of death wraps us about in our cobweb, and sweeps us down into the grave; and, in that very moment, we and all our well-laid projects perish together: Ps. 146:4.

(3) If the world be thus vain, what extreme and prodigious folly is it, to take as much pains to secure the poor and perishing concernments of it, as would suffice to secure heaven and eternal glory, were they laid out that way!

We labour for the bread that perisheth, and we perish with it in our very mouths. About this, are our hearts, our hands, our strength, our time employed: whereas the great things of eternity are so utterly neglected by us, as if they were none of our concernments to look after. Were we but as laborious in our Christian Calling, as we commonly are in our Worldly Callings, salvation would not lie upon our hands unwrought; God, and Christ, and all heaven were ours.

Who would doubt, when they see men so busy about impertinencies, and the trivial affairs of this world, but that they were much more anxious about their souls? Who would not conclude, that certainly

their great work is already done, that shall see them so earnest and solicitous about petty matters? But, alas! it may astonish men and angels, that rational creatures, who have immortal souls, souls whose endless duration must abide either in inconceivable misery or bliss, should trifle away that time and strength, which might secure their everlasting happiness, about those vain nothings, that have neither happiness in them nor continuance.

Certainly, the service of God is not more painful than the drudgery of the world: and, sure I am, it is far more cleanly. Thou shalt not in his service set thy hand to any foul office: whereas, the World employs thee basely to rake together thick clay, and load thyself with it; and the Devil, yet worse, to rake in the mire and filth of all manner of defilements, which now pollute the soul, and will hereafter damn it.

Both these are most grievous task-masters.

Some draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope: Isa. 5:18. They are so enslaved to the work of the Devil, that he puts them into his team, makes them draw and strain for their iniquities, and doth them a courtesy when their sins come easily. He makes them toil and sweat, in carrying faggots to their own fire; and blowing up those flames, which must for ever burn them.

Others, as the Prophet expresseth it, Hab. 2:13 labour in the fire, and weary themselves for very vanity. They take great pains in the World, and meet with great disappointments: for both are signified by labouring in the fire; where what they produce cannot be enjoyed, but is consumed between their hands.

Since, then, you must take so much pains, either for Sin or Vanity, why will you not be persuaded rather to lay it out upon that, which is substantially good and eternally so? God requires not more, but only other work from you. And the many things that Martha was careful about, religion and holiness reduceth to the one thing necessary;

which, though it contains many particular duties under it, yet by reason of its uniformity and subserviency to itself, is less distracting and cumbersome. The wheels of a watch move and click as fast, when it goes false, as when it goes true: and, if it be but set right at first, the same activity of the spring will so continue it, which before made its motion irregular. So it is here. The same activity and industry which you irregularly use in pursuit of the world, would procure heaven and glory for you, were it that way directed. Your cares, your contrivances, your endeavours, need be no more than now they are: only, what before you laid out upon the world, reserve now for heaven. And how infinitely reasonable is this! Certainly, they are most stupidly foolish, that will take up vanity at as dear a rate as happiness; and give as much for vexation, as for Endless Joy.

(4.) If the things of this world be so vain, what inexcusable folly is it, to part with the peace or the purity of our consciences for them!

And, yet, what more common? If men can get any thing of the world at the price of a sin, they think they have made a gainful bargain.

And, therefore, the Devil hath recourse to this, as his most prevailing temptation. When he set on our Saviour in the Wilderness, the last assault was, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me: Mat. 4:9. And when this battery could not make a breach, he raiseth his siege, as despairing of success.

And this is the usual temptation by which he assaults others. Judas comes with his quid dabitis? What will you give me Mat. 26:15 and sets Christ and his own conscience to sale, for the inconsiderable sum of thirty pieces. He demands no more than the common market price of a slave* (not amounting to above eight and thirty shillings†) for the Lord of Life and Glory; and thinks his bargain so good, that he gives himself to the Devil for vantage!

This is the very root of all that injustice, and rapine, and oppression, and violence, that is to be found among men. They all strive and tug,

who shall get most of this earth from one another; and lose heaven and their own consciences, in the scuffle.

This is it, that makes men so oft shift their sails, that they may run before every wind that blows. If times grow rough and tempestuous, and they must throw overboard, either their gain or their godliness; this persuades them to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, only that they may bear up in this world, though they sink hereafter.

Now, what deplorable folly is this! When thy conscience is disquieted with the tormenting review of past crimes, what will all thy ill-gotten wealth avail thee? Thou wilt then, with extreme horror, cast thine eyes upon all thy treasures of wickedness, when conscience shall tell thee, thou hast not only treasured up them, but wrath too against the day of wrath.

(5.) What desperate folly is it, to purchase a vain world, with the loss of our precious souls!

So our Saviour, Matt. 16:26. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Oh, think what great losers they must needs be, who lose their souls, to gain the world; and must at last lose the world too, together with their souls!

This is the only thing that damns men; that they prefer the pleasures, honours, profits, and pitiful nothings of this world, before their precious and immortal souls, which are more worth than ten thousand worlds. What is this, but a stupidity as gross as that of the old heathens, to make a vile worm our god, and sacrifice an ox to it; or a monster our god, and sacrifice a man to it?

Think how dreadful and grating will be the reflections of worldings in hell, to consider that there they must lie and burn to eternity, for their inordinate love to that world, of which they have nothing left them, besides the bitter remembrance, What will it then avail them,

that they have lived here in ease and delights; when all their mirth shall be turned into groans and howlings? What will all their treasures and riches avail them; when these shall be melted down about them, to increase their torment?

Believe it, it is sad to be left to the conviction of that day, when the Vanity of Earth shall appear in the Torments of Hell.

Be persuaded, therefore, as you have renounced it in all its pomps and vanities, when you gave up your names to Christianity, so to renounce it likewise in your lives: habitually, at all times, by sitting loose from it, and living above it; and actually, whensoever God calls for any of your temporal enjoyments, that is, when you cannot keep them without wounding your consciences and hazarding your souls.

If the World is Empty Why Pride Ourselves in It?

3. Another Use may be this. If the world be thus vain and empty, WHY THEN SHOULD WE PRIDE OURSELVES IN OR PRIZE OURSELVES BY ANY POOR ENJOYMENTS OF IT?

How foolish is it, to account thyself a better man than another, only because thy dung-hill is a little bigger than his! These things are not at all to be reckoned into the value and worth of a man. They are all without thee; and concern thee, no more than fine cloaths do the health or strength of the Body. It is wealth indeed that makes all the noise and bustle in the world, and challengeth all the respect and honour to itself; and the ignorant vulgar, whose eyes are dazzled with pomp and bravery, pay it with a stupid and astonished reverence. Yet know, that it is but thy silks and velvet, thy lands, or thy retinue and servants they venerate; not thee: and, if thou thinkest otherwise, thou art as justly ridiculous, as that ass in the apologue, that grew very gravely proud and took state, when the people fell prostrate before him; adoring, not him, but the idol he carried.

Those things, which belong to the perfection of a man, are all within him: knowledge, and wisdom, and temperance, a serene mind, and calm affections, an inflexible virtue, and a soul constant and true to itself in all occurrences. Give me such an one, that can stand firm and unshaken upon his own basis, when the whole world totters; that knows what is just and honest, and dares do it; that is master of his own passions, and scorns to be a slave to another's: such a one in his rags and poverty, is a far better man than those gay things, who owe all their parts and wisdom and virtue to their rentals, and whose tenants and stewards bring them in the yearly revenue of their reputation. But, then, suppose this excellent person endowed with divine grace, and the true fear and love of God, and this will exalt him above the highest and greatest of other men, as far as they themselves are above the vilest of beasts.

Solomon tells us, Prov. 10:20 that the heart of the wicked is little worth. It is of no price nor value. And shall his estate be, when his heart is not?

Indeed, nothing makes us rich as Men, but wisdom and virtue; nor as Christians, but piety and holiness. And, in these, which are the only true and substantial riches, the poorest Christian may vie stakes with all the world. Drop millions of gold, boundless revenues, ample territories, crowns, and scepters, and a poor contemptible Christian lays his one God against all these, and beggars them.

If the World is Vain, it Should

Fortify Us Against the Fear of Death

4. If the world and all the enjoyments of it be thus vain, this should FORTIFY US AGAINST THE FEAR OF DEATH*; which can deprive us of nothing, but what is both vain and vexatious.

Life is nothing else, but a huddle of business; a great swarm of employments, that have more stings in them, than honey. If we be great, we are but the larger hives for Cares: if honourable, we are but raised above others to be the more weather-beaten. A high degree in this world doth but shelter other men's cares under our wings; and adopt other men's troubles, as a wretched supplement to our own. If our estate be mean and low, as it exposeth us to contempt and injuries; so it engageth us to rescue ourselves from the pressures of poverty, by our own sweat and industry. Those few things, that are necessary to a comfortable subsistence in the world, will yet cost us care and labour, an aching heart, and a weary hand: and this turns our bread into stones, and our fish into scorpions. If we have too much business in the world, our callings become a burden or temptation to us: and if we have none, we become a burden to ourselves and to others. God hath written vanity and vexation upon every condition: and, if his providence create not troubles for us, yet our own folly will. Thus hath man made himself a slave and drudge to the world, over which God hath made him lord.

Why then should Death be so terrible, which comes only to ease us of our burden, to stroke the sweat from our brows, and to give us a profound rest from all our labours in the bed of the grave? There, as Job saith, the weary be at rest: Job. 3:17: and all cares and troubles vanish, as soon as our heads touch that pillow. There is no work, nor device, in the grave, whither we are going; but a deep repose, a secure retirement, where none of the vexations of this life shall ever find us.

And, as it frees us from all the Cares, so from all the Sorrows of this world. What is our life, but a bubble? Our sighs are the air, and our tears the water, that makes it. The first possession that we take of this world, is by crying: and there is nothing in it, that we hold by a surer tenure than our griefs. Tears are the inheritance of our eyes: either our sins call for them, or our sufferings; and nothing can dry them up, but the dust of the grave. Sometimes, we lose a friend, or near relation: the tribute we owe their memory must be paid down in

tears. Sometimes, their ungodly practices torment us, when, by their lewdness and debaucheries, they are lost both to their own interests and our hopes. Sometimes, compassion of other men's sufferings affects us with a tender sorrow; and, as if we had not grief enough spring up out of our own bowels, we call in foreign succours to augment the score. And, many times, tedious and lingering sicknesses waste us; grinding pains rack and torture us, which were far the more intolerable, but that they hasten on that death, that puts an end and period to all a Christian's miseries. We are not concerned in the grave, at the loss of some friends, nor the evil courses of others; what calamities befall the world, or those whom we loved dearest in it. There it troubles us not, though preferment go by the merit of flattery and baseness; while the generous and gallant soul, starves through the mere rigour of his virtue. It concerns us nothing, what stinking breath blasts our good name; or what unworthy foot treads upon our grave. Here, a little pain molests us; but there whole limbs rot, and fall off, and crumble into dust, without at all disturbing that quiet rest, that buries all the cares and sorrows of this life in silence and oblivion.

Where then is the dreadfulness of Death, which only frees us from the Troubles and Crosses of a wretched life? It is unreasonable to complain of that change, which delivers us from a world, of which we are still complaining: and it is childish to quarrel at that hand, which undresses us, and strips off our uneasy garments, only to lay us to sleep.

If the World is Vain We Should Learn to Contend with our Present Condition

5. If the world be so vain and empty, we may LEARN TO BE WELL CONTENTED WITH OUR PRESENT STATE AND CONDITION,

WHATSOEVER IT BE.

It hath been fully demonstrated, that there can be no compleat satisfaction in any estate. And why, then, should we desire change? The great ground of discontent, is, not our Wants, but our Desires. There is scarce any condition in the world so low, but may satisfy our Wants: and there is no condition so high, as can satisfy our Desires*. If we live according to the law of nature and reason, we shall never be poor; but, if we live according to fond opinion and fancy, we shall never be rich. That, which we have, be it never so little, is full as satisfactory, as that, which we hope for, be it never so great: for Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, is passed upon all that is in the world, whether it be more or less.

And, therefore, O Christian, thou mayest well bear a narrow stint in the things of this world. If God reduce thee to a morsel of bread and a cup of water, it is enough: this will suffice to bear thy charges to heaven; or, if this too should fail, thy journey will only be the shorter. Possibly God keeps thee short in vanities, that he might bestow upon thee that which is a solid and substantial good.

The Psalmist tells us, Psalm 68:9 that God daily loads us with his benefits. Though some may have more than others, yet every one hath his load, as much as he can carry. Every vessel cannot bear up with a like sail; and, therefore, God, to keep us from oversetting, puts on so much as will safest bring us to heaven, our desired port.

Let us, therefore, cast these cares and burdens upon him who hath promised to sustain us*, and turn the stream of our desires heavenward, where alone we can find permanent and satisfactory good.

Walk humbly with God†. Keep yourselves always in an awful fear of his dread majesty. Be constant in the exercise of grace, and the performance of duty. These are the only things exempted from vanity and vexation: in these alone can the soul find true rest and

contentment. And therefore Solomon, after he had pierced and searched through all the world; and pronounced riches, strength, beauty, wisdom, learning, and all to be vanity and vexation of spirit; he rests himself, in the close, and tells us, Chapter 12:13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man. It is his whole duty, and his only happiness in this life.

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