

Monergism

THE VANITY OF THIS MORTAL LIFE



J O H N H O W E

Monergism

THE VANITY OF THIS MORTAL LIFE



JOHN HOWE

The Vanity of this Mortal Life

by John Howe

From The Works of John Howe in 3 Volumes

Reprinted in 1848 by William Tegg and Co., London

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[TO THE DESERVEDLY HONOURED JOHN UPTON](#)

[THE VANITY OF MAN AS MORTAL](#)

TO THE DESERVEDLY HONOURED

JOHN UPTON, ESQ., OF LUPTON,

WITH THE MANY SURVIVING BRANCHES FORMERLY SPRUNG
OUT OF THAT RELIGIOUS FAMILY, AND THE WORTHY
CONSORTS OF ANY OF THEM

SINCE it is the lot of the following pages to be exposed to public view, there is somewhat of justice in it, to yourselves or me, that the world do also know wherein divers of you have contributed thereto; that if anything redound hence to public advantage, it may be understood to be owing in part to you; or, if it shall be reckoned a

useless trouble, in this way to represent things, so obvious to common notice, and whereof so much is already said, all the blame of the publication be not imputed (as it doth not belong) to me only. But I must here crave your excuse, that, on this account, I give you a narrative of what (for the most part) you already know, and may possibly not delight to remember; both because it is now become convenient that others should know it too, and not necessary to be put into a distinct preface; and because to yourselves the review of those less pleasing passages may be attended with a fruit which may be some recompence for their want of pleasure.

Therefore give the reader leave to take notice, and let it not be grievous to you that I remind you, that after this your near relation,* (whose death gave the occasion of the ensuing meditations) had from his youth lived between twenty and thirty years of his age in Spain, your joint importunity had at length obtained from him a promise of returning; whereof when you were in somewhat a near expectation, a sudden disease in so few days landed him in another world, that the first notice you had of his death or sickness, was by the arrival of that vessel (clad in mourning attire) which, according to his own desire in his sickness, brought over the deserted body to its native place of Lupton; that thence it might find a grave, where it first received a soul; and obtain a mansion in the earth, where first it became one to a reasonable spirit. A little before this time, the desire of an interview among yourselves (which the distance of your habitations permitted not to be frequent) had induced divers of you to appoint a meeting at some middle place, whereby the trouble of a long journey might be conveniently shared among you. But, before that agreed resolution could have its accomplishment, this sad and most unexpected event intervening, altered the place, the occasion, and design of your meeting; but effected the thing itself, and brought together no less than twenty, the brothers and sisters of the deceased, or their consorts, besides his many nephews and nieces and other relations, to the mournful solemnity of the interment. Within the time of our being together upon this sad account, this passage of the Psalmist here insisted on came into discourse among us; being introduced by

an occasion, which (though then, it may be, unknown to the most of you) was somewhat rare, and not unworthy observation; viz. that one of yourselves having been some time before surprised with an unusual sadness, joined with an expectation of ill tidings, upon no known cause, had so urgent an inculcation of those words, as not to be able to forbear the revolving them much of the former part of that day, in the latter part whereof the first notice was brought to that place of this so near a relation's decease.

Certain months after, some of you, with whom I was then conversant in London, importuned me to have somewhat from me in writing upon that subject. Whereto I at length agreed, with a cautionary request, that it might not come into many hands, but might remain (as the occasion was) among yourselves. Nor will I deny it to have been some inducement to me to apply my thoughts to that theme, that it had been so suggested as was said. For such presages and abodings, as that above-mentioned, may reasonably be thought to owe themselves to some more steady and universal principle than casualty, or the party's own imagination; by whose more noble recommendation (that such a gloomy premonition might carry with it not what should only afflict, but also instruct and teach) this subject did seem offered to our meditation. Accordingly, therefore, after my return to the place of my abode, I hastily drew up the substance of the following discourse; which, a year ago, I transmitted into their hands who desired it from me, without reserving to myself any copy. Hereby it became difficult to me, presently to comply (besides divers considerations I might have against the thing itself) with that joint request of some of you (in a letter, which my removal into another kingdom occasioned to come long after to my hands) that I would consent these papers might be made public. For, as I have reason to be conscious to myself of disadvantages enough to discourage any undertaking of that kind; so I am more especially sensible, that so cursory and superficial a management of a subject so important (though its private occasion and design at first might render it excusable to those few friends for whom it was meant) cannot but be liable to the hard censure (not to say contempt) of

many whom discourses of this kind should more designedly serve. And, therefore, though my willingness to be serviceable in keeping alive the apprehension and expectation of another state, my value of your judgments who conceive what is here done may be useful thereto, and my peculiar respects to yourselves, the members and appendants of a family to which (besides some relation) I have many obligations and endearments—do prevail with me not wholly to deny; yet, pardon me that I have suspended my consent to this publication, till I should have a copy transmitted to me from some of you, for my necessary review of so hasty a production; that I might not offer to the view of the world, what, after I had penned it, had scarce passed my own. And now, after so long an expectation, those papers are but this last week come to my hands. I here return them with little or no alteration; save, that what did more directly concern the occasion, towards the close, is transferred hither; but with the addition of almost all the directive part of the use; which I submit together to your pleasure and disposal.

And I shall now take the liberty to add, my design in consenting to this request of yours (and I hope the same of you in making it) is not to erect a monument to the memory of the deceased, (which how little doth it signify!) nor to spread the fame of your family, (though the visible blessing of God upon it, in the fruitfulness, piety, and mutual love, wherein it hath flourished for some generations, do challenge observation, both as to those branches of it which grow in their own more natural soil, and those, as I have now occasion to take further notice, that I find to have been transplanted into another country;) but that such, into whose hands this little treatise shall fall, may be induced to consider the true end of their beings; to examine and discuss the matter more thoroughly with themselves, what it may or can be supposed such a sort of creatures was made and placed on this earth for: that when they shall have reasoned themselves into a settled apprehension of the worthy and important ends they are capable of attaining, and are visibly designed to, they may be seized with a noble disdain of living beneath themselves and the bounty of their Creator.

It is obvious to common observation, how flagrant and intense a zeal men are often wont to express for their personal reputation, the honour of their families, yea, or for the glory of their nation: but how few are acted by that more laudable and enlarged zeal for the dignity of mankind! How few are they that resent the common and vile depression of their own species; or that, while in things of lightest consideration they strive with emulous endeavour, that they and their relatives may excel other men, do reckon it a reproach if, in matters of the greatest consequence, they and all men should not excel beasts! How few that are not contented to confine their utmost designs and expectations within the same narrow limits, through a mean and inglorious self-despiciency confessing in themselves (to the truth's and their own wrong) an incapacity of greater things; and with most injurious falsehood, proclaiming the same of all mankind besides!

If he that, amidst the hazards of a dubious war, betrays the interest and honour of his country, be justly infamous, and thought worthy severest punishment; I see not why a debauched sensualist, that lives as if he were created only to indulge his appetite; that so vilifies the notion of man, as if he were made but to eat, and drink, and sport, to please only his sense and fancy; that, in this time and state of conflict between the powers of this present world and those of the world to come, quits his party, bids open defiance to humanity, abjures the noble principles and ends, forsakes the laws and society of all that are worthy to be esteemed men, abandons the common and rational hope of mankind concerning a future immortality, and herds himself among brute creatures;—I say, I see not why such a one should not be scorned and abhorred as a traitor to the whole race and nation of reasonable creatures, as a fugitive from the tents, and deserter of the common interest, of men; and that, both for the vileness of his practice, and the danger of his example.

And who, that hath open eyes, beholds not the dreadful instances and increase of this defection; when it hath prevailed to that degree already, that in civilized, yea in Christian, countries, (as they yet

affect to be called) the practice is become fashionable and in credit, which can square with no other principle than the disbelief of a future state, as if it were but a mere poetic, or (at best) a political fiction? And, as if so impudent infidelity would pretend not to a connivance only, but a sanction, it is reckoned an odd and uncouth thing for a man to live as if he thought otherwise; and a great presumption to seem to dissent from the profane infidel crew. As if the matter were already formally determined in the behalf of irreligion, and the doctrine of the life to come had been clearly condemned in open council as a detestable heresy. For what tenet was ever more exploded and hooted at, than that practice is which alone agrees with this? Or what series or course of repeated villanies can ever be more ignominious than (in vulgar estimate) a course of life so transacted, as doth become the expectation of a blessed immortality? And what! after so much written and spoken by persons of all times and religions for the immortality of the human soul, and so common an acknowledgment thereof by pagans, Mahomedans, Jews, and Christians, is man now at last condemned and doomed to a perpetual death, as it were, by the consent and suffrage even of men; and that too without trial or hearing; and not by the reason of men, but their lusts only?—as if (with a loud and violent cry) they would assassinate and stifle this belief and hope, but not judge it. And shall the matter be thus given up as hopeless; and the victory be yielded to prosperous wickedness, and a too successful conspiracy of vile miscreants against both their Maker and their own stock and race?

One would think whosoever have remaining in them any conscience of obligation and duty to the common Parent and Author of our beings, any remembrance of our divine original, any breathings of our ancient hope, any sense of human honour, any resentments of so vile an indignity to the nature of man, any spark of a just and generous indignation for so opprobrious a contumely to their own kind and order in the creation; should oppose themselves with an heroic vigour to this treacherous and unnatural combination. And let us (my worthy friends) be provoked, in our several capacities, to do

our parts herein; and, at least, so to live and converse in this world, that the course and tenor of our lives may import an open asserting of our hopes in another; and may let men see we are not ashamed to own the belief of a life to come. Let us by a patient continuance in well-doing (how low designs soever others content themselves to pursue) seek honour, glory, and immortality to ourselves; and by our avowed, warrantable ambition in this pursuit, justify our great and bountiful Creator, who hath made us not in vain, but for so high and great things; and glorify our blessed Redeemer, who amidst the gloomy and disconsolate darkness of this wretched world, when it was overspread with the shadow of death, hath brought life and immortality to light in the gospel. Let us labour both to feel and express the power of that religion which hath the inchoation of the (participated) divine life for its principle, and the perfection and eternal perpetuation thereof for its scope and end.

Nor let the time that hath since elapsed be found to have worn out with you the useful impressions which this monitory surprising instance of our morality did at first make. But give me leave to inculcate from it what was said to you when the occasion was fresh and new: that we labour more deeply to apprehend God's dominion over his creatures; and that he made us principally for himself, and for ends that are to be compassed in the future state; and not for the temporary satisfaction and pleasure of one another in this world. Otherwise providence had never been guilty of such a solecism, to take out one from a family long famous for so exemplary mutual love, and dispose him into so remote a part, not permitting to most of his nearest relations the enjoyment of him for almost thirty years (and therein all the flower) of his age; and at last, when we were expecting the man, send you home the breathless frame wherein he lived. Yet it was not contemptible that you had that, and that dying (as Joseph) in a strange land, he gave, also, commandment concerning his bones; that though in his life he was (mostly) separated from his brethren, he might in death be gathered to his fathers. It was some evidence (though you wanted not better) that, amidst the traffic of Spain, he more esteemed the religion of

England, and therefore would rather his dust should associate with theirs with whom also he would rather his spirit should. But whatever it did evidence, it occasioned so much, that you had that so general meeting with one another, which otherwise probably you would not have had, nor are likely again to have, (so hath providence scattered you) in this world; and that it proved a more serious meeting than otherwise it might: for however it might blamelessly have been designed to have met together at a cheerful table, God saw it fitter to order the meeting at a mournful grave; and to make the house that received you (the native place to many of you) the house of mourning rather than of feasting. The one would have had more quick relishes of a present pleasure, but the other was likely to yield the more lasting sense of an after profit. Nor was it an ill errand to come together (though from afar for divers of you) to learn to die: as you might, by being so sensibly put in mind of it, though you did not see that very part acted itself. And accept this endeavour to further you in your preparations for that change, as some testimony of the remembrance I retain of your most obliging respects and love, and of my still continuing

Your affectionate and respectful kinsman,

And servant in our common Lord,

J. HOWE.

Antrim, April 12, 1671.

THE VANITY OF MAN AS MORTAL

Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?

What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah - PSALM 89:47, 48

WE are not concerned to be particular and curious in the inquiry, touching the special reference or occasion of the foregoing complaints, from the 37th verse. It is enough to take notice, for our present purpose, that besides the evil which had already befallen the plaintiff, a further danger nearly threatened him, that carried death in the face of it, and suggested somewhat frightful apprehensions of his mortal state; which drew from him this quick and sensible petition in reference to his own private concern, "Remember how short my time is;" and did presently direct his eye with a sudden glance from the view of his own, to reflect on the common condition of man, whereof he expresses his resentment, first, in a hasty expostulation with God, "Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?"—then, secondly, in a pathetic discourse with himself, representing the reason of that rough charge, "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver," &c. q. d. When I add to the consideration of my short time, that of dying mankind, and behold a dark and deadly shade universally overspreading the world, the whole species of human creatures vanishing, quitting the stage round about me, and disappearing almost as soon as they show themselves: have I not a fair and plausible ground for that (seemingly rude) challenge? Why is there so unaccountable a phenomenon, such a creature made to no purpose; the noblest part of this inferior creation brought forth into being without any imaginable design? I know not how to untie the knot, upon this only view of the case, or avoid the absurdity. It is hard sure to design the supposal, (or what it may yet seem hard to suppose,) "that all men were made in vain."

It appears, the expostulation was somewhat passionate, and did proceed upon the sudden view of this disconsolate case, very abstractly considered, and by itself only; and that he did not in that instant look beyond it to a better and more comfortable scene of things. An eye bleared with present sorrow, sees not so far, nor comprehends so much at one view, as it would at another time; or as it doth, presently, when the tear is wiped out, and its own beams have cleared it up. We see he did quickly look further, and had got a

more lightsome prospect, when in the next words we find him contemplating God's sworn loving-kindness unto David, (v. 49:) the truth and stability whereof he at the same time expressly acknowledges, while only the form of his speech doth but seem to import a doubt—"Where are they?" But yet—they were sworn in truth; upon which argument he had much enlarged in the former part of the psalm; and it still lay deep in his soul, though he were now a little diverted from the present consideration of it: which, since it turns the scales with him, it will be needful to inquire into the weight and import of it. Nor have we any reason to think that David was either so little a prophet or a saint, as in his own thoughts to refer those magnificent things (the instances of that loving-kindness confirmed by oath, which he recites from the 19th verse of the psalm to the 38th, as spoken from the mouth of God, and declared to him by vision) to the dignity of his own person, and the grandeur and perpetuity of his kingdom; as if it were ultimately meant of himself, that God would "make him his first-born, higher than the kings of the earth," (v. 27,) when there were divers greater kings, and (in comparison of, the little spot over which he reigned) a vastly spreading monarchy that still overtopped him all his time, (as the same and successive monarchies did his successors;) or that it was intended of the secular glory and stability of his throne and family, that God would "make them to endure for ever, and be as the days of heaven; that they should be as the sun before him, and be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven," v. 29, 37.

That God himself meant it not so, experience and the event of things hath shown; and that these predictions cannot otherwise have had their accomplishment, than in the succession of the spiritual and everlasting kingdom of the Messiah (whom God raised up out of his loins to sit on his throne, Acts 2:30) unto his temporal kingdom. Wherein it is therefore ended by perfection rather than corruption: these prophecies being then made good, not in the kind which they literally imported, but in another (far more noble) kind. In which sense God's covenant with him must be understood, which he insists on so much in this psalm, (v. 28–34,) even unto that degree, as to

challenge God upon it, as if in the present course of his providence he were now about to make it void, (v. 39;) though he sufficiently expresses his confidence both before and after, that this could never be. But it is plain it hath been made void long enough ago, in the subversion of David's kingdom, and in that we see his throne and family have not been established for ever, have not endured as the days of heaven; if those words had no other than their obvious and literal meaning. And if any, to clear the truth of God, would allege the wickedness of his posterity, first making a breach and disobliging him, this is prevented by what we find inserted in reference to this very case: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, &c., then will I visit their iniquity with the rod, &c. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of my lips," v. 30–34. All which is solemnly sealed up with this, "Once have I sworn in my holiness, that I will not lie unto David," v. 35. So that they that will make a scruple to accuse the holy God of falsehood, in that which with so much solemnity he hath promised and sworn, must not make any to admit his further intendment in these words. And that he had a further (even a mystical and spiritual) intendment in this covenant with David, is yet more fully evident from that of the prophet Isaiah: "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," &c. "Incline your ear and come unto me. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander," &c. Isa. 55:1–5. What means this universal invitation to all thirsty persons, with the subjoined encouragement of making with them an everlasting covenant, (the same which we have here, no doubt, as to the principal parts, and which we find him mentioning also, 2 Sam. 23:5, with characters exactly corresponding to these of the prophet,) even the sure mercies of David? The meaning sure could not be, that they should be all secular kings and princes, and their posterity after them for ever; which we see is the verbal sound and tenor of this covenant.

And now, since it is evident God intended a mystery in this covenant, we may be as well assured he intended no deceit, and that he designed not a delusion to David by the vision in which he gave it. Can we think he went about to gratify him with a solemn fiction, and draw him into a false and fanciful faith; or so to hide his meaning from him, as to tempt him into the belief of what he never meant? And to what purpose was this so special revelation by vision, if it were not to be understood truly, at least, if not yet perfectly and fully? It is left us, therefore, to collect, that David was not wholly uninstructed how to refer all this to the kingdom of the Messiah. And he hath given sufficient testimony in that part of sacred writ, whereof God used him as a penman, that he was of another temper than to place the sum and chief of his expectations and consolations in his own and his posterity's worldly greatness. And to put us out of doubt, our Saviour, (who well knew his spirit) expressly enough tells us, that he in spirit called him Lord, (Matt. 22:43,) when he said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, till I make thy enemies thy footstool," (Ps. 110:1;) a plain discovery how he understood God's revelation touching the future concernments of his kingdom, (and the covenant relating thereto,) viz. as a figure and type of Christ's, who must reign till all his enemies be subdued. Nor was he in that ignorance about the nature and design of Christ's kingdom, but that he understood its reference to another world, and state of things, even beyond all the successions of time, and the mortal race of men; so as to have his eye fixed upon the happy eternity which a joyful resurrection must introduce, and whereof Christ's resurrection should be the great and most assuring pledge. And of this we need no fuller an evidence than the express words of the apostle St. Peter, (Acts 2:25, &c.) who after he had cited those lofty triumphant strains of David, (Ps. 16:8–11,) "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope; for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, (or in the state of darkness,) neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore; "all which, he tells us, (v. 25,)

was spoken concerning Christ;—he more expressly subjoins, (v. 30,) that "David being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ," (v. 31;) it appears he spake not at random, but as knowing and seeing before what he spake, that his soul was not left in hell, &c. nor can we think he thus rejoices in another's resurrection, forgetting his own.

And yet we have a further evidence from the apostle Paul, who affirms, that "the promise made to the fathers, God had fulfilled to their children, in that he had raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption; he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David," (Acts 13:32–34:) which it is now apparent, must be understood of eternal mercies; such as Christ's resurrection and triumph over the grave doth insure to us. He therefore looked upon what was spoken concerning his kingdom here, as spoken ultimately of Christ's, the kingdom whereby he governs and conducts his faithful subjects through all the troubles of life and terrors of death (through both whereof he himself as their king and leader hath shown the way) unto eternal blessedness; and upon the covenant made with him as the covenant of God in Christ, concerning that blessedness and the requisites thereto. And (to say no more in this argument) how otherwise can we conceive he should have that fulness of consolation in this covenant when he lay a-dying, as we find him expressing, (2 Sam. 23:5, for these were some of the last words of David, as we see verse 1,) "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire." What so great joy and solace could a dying man take in a covenant made with him, when he had done with this world, and was to expect no more in it, if he took it not to concern a future blessedness in another world? Was it only for the hoped prosperity of his house and family when he was gone? This (which is the only thing we can fasten on) he plainly secludes in the

next words,—“although he make it not to grow.” Therefore it was his reflection upon those loving-kindnesses mentioned in the former part of the psalm, contained in God's covenant, and confirmed by his oath, but understood according to the sense and import already declared, that caused this sudden turn in David's spirit;* and made him that lately spake as out of a Golgotha, as if he had nothing but death in his eye and thoughts, to speak now in so different a strain, and (after some additional pleadings, in which his faith further recovers itself) to conclude this psalm with solemn praise; “Blessed be the Lord for evermore; Amen and Amen.”

We see, then, the contemplation of his own and all men's mortality, abstractly and alone considered, clothed his soul with black, wrapped it up in gloomy darkness, makes the whole kind of human creatures seem to him an obscure shadow, an empty vanity: but his recalling into his thoughts a succeeding state of immortal life clears up the day, makes him and all things appear in another hue, gives a fair account why such a creature as man was made; and therein makes the whole frame of things in this inferior world look with a comely and well-composed aspect, as the product of a wise and rational design. Whence, therefore, we have this ground of discourse fairly before us in the words themselves:—that the short time of man on earth, limited by a certain, unavoidable death, if we consider it abstractly by itself, without respect to a future state, carries that appearance and aspect with it, as if God had made all men in vain.—That is said to be vain, according to the importance of the word $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ here used, which is either false, a fiction, an appearance only, a shadow, or evanid thing; or which is useless, unprofitable, and to no valuable purpose. The life of man, in the case now supposed, may be truly styled vain, either way. And we shall say somewhat to each; but to the former more briefly.

1. It were vain, i. e. little other than a show, a mere shadow, a semblance of being. We must, indeed, in the present case, even abstract him from himself, and consider him only as a mortal, dying thing; and, as to that of him which is so, what a contemptible nothing

is he! There is an appearance of somewhat; but search a little, and inquire into it, and it vanishes into a mere nothing, is found a lie, a piece of falsehood, as if he did but feign a being, and were not. And so we may suppose the Psalmist speaking, upon the view of his own and the common case of man, how fast all were hastening out of life, and laying down the being which they rather seemed to have assumed and borrowed, than to possess and own; "Lord, why hast thou made man such a fictitious thing, given him such a mock-being? Why hast thou brought forth into the light of this world such a sort of creatures, that rather seem to be, than are; that have so little of solid and substantial being, and so little deserve to be taken for realities; that only serve to cheat one another into an opinion of their true existence, and presently vanish and confess their falsehood? What hovering shadows, what uncertain entities are they! In a moment they are and are not. I know not when to say I have seen a man. It seems as if there were some such things before my eyes; I persuade myself that I see them move and walk to and fro, that I talk and converse with them; but instantly my own sense is ready to give my sense the lie. They are on the sudden dwindled away, and force me almost to acknowledge a delusion. I am but mocked with a show; and what seemed a reality, proves an imposture. Their pretence to being, is but fiction and falsehood, a cozenage of over-credulous, unwary sense. They only personate what they are thought to be, and quickly put off their very selves as a disguise." This is agreeable to the language of Scripture elsewhere, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie," &c. Ps. 62:9. In two respects may the present state of man seem to approach near to nothingness, and so admit this rhetorication of the Psalmist, as if he were in this sense a vain thing, a figment, or a lie, viz. in respect of the—minuteness, and—instability of this, his material and perishable being.

First. The minuteness, the small portion or degree of being which this mortal part of man hath in it. It is truly said of all created things, Their non-esse is more than their esse, they have more no-being than being. It is only some limited portion that they have, but there is an

infinitude of being which they have not. And so coming infinitely nearer to nothingness than fulness of being, they may well enough wear the name of nothing. Wherefore the first and fountain-being justly appropriates to himself the name, "I am;" yea, tells us, he is, and there is none besides him; therein leaving no other name than that of nothing unto creatures. And how much more may this be said of the material and mortal part, this outside of man, whatever of him is obnoxious to death and the grave! which alone (abstractly looked on) is the subject of the Psalmist's present consideration and discourse. By how much anything hath more of matter, it hath the less of actual essence; matter being rather a capacity of being, than being itself; or a dark umbrage or shadow of it, actually nothing but εἶδωλον, ψεῦδος (as are the expressions of a noble philosopher) a mere semblance, or a lie. Plotin. En. 2. i. 6. And it is the language not of philosophers only, but of the Holy Ghost concerning all the nations of men, "They are as nothing, less than nothing, and vanity." Isaiah 40:17. What a scarcity, then, and penury of being, must we suppose in each individual; especially if we look alone upon the outer part, or rather the umbrage or shadow of the man!

Secondly. The instability and fluidness of it. The visible and corporeal being of man hath nothing steady or consistent in it. Consider his exterior frame and composition, he is no time all himself at once. There is a continual defluence and access of parts; so that some account each climacteric of his age changes his whole fabric. Whence it would follow, that besides his statique individuating principle (from which we are now to abstract) nothing of him remains; he is another thing; the former man is vanished and gone; while he is, he hastens away, and within a little is not. In respect to the duration, as well as the degree of his being, he is next to nothing. "He opens his eye, and is not," (Job 27:19;) gone in the twinkling of an eye. There is nothing in him stable enough to admit a fixed look. So it is with the whole scene of things in this material world. As was the true maxim of an ancient, (Heracl.) "All things flow, nothing stays; after the manner of a river:" the same thing which the apostle's words more elegantly express; "The fashion of

this world passeth away," (1 Cor. 7:31;) the scheme, the show, the pageantry of it. He speaks of it but as an appearance, as if he knew not whether to call it something or nothing, it was so near to vanishing into nothing. And therefore he there requires that the affections, which mutual nearness in relation challenges, be as if they were not: that we rejoice in reference to one another, (even most nearly related, as the occasion and scope of his discourse teach us to understand him) but as if we rejoiced not; and weep, as if we wept not; which implies the objects merit no more, and are themselves as if they were not. Whence, therefore, a continued course of intense passion were very incongruous towards so discontinuing things. And the whole state of man being but a show, the pomp and glittering of the greatest men make the most splendid and conspicuous part of it; yet all this we find is not otherwise reckoned of, than an image, a dream, a vision of the night; "every man at his best state is altogether vanity, walketh in a vain show, disquieteth himself in vain," &c. Of all without exception it is pronounced, "Man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passeth away:" as Ecclesiastes often, of all sublunary things, "Vanity of vanities," &c. Job 20:7, 8, 9; Ps. 73:20; 39:5, 6.

II. But yet there is another notion of vain, as it signifies useless, unprofitable, or to no purpose. And in this sense also, if we consider the universal mortality of mankind, without respect to a future state, there was a specious ground for the expostulation, "Why hast thou made all men in vain?" Vanity in the former notion speaks the emptiness of a thing, absolutely and in itself considered; in this latter relatively, as it is referred to, and measured by an end. That is, in this sense, vain, which serves to no end; or to no worthy and valuable end, which amounts to the same. For inasmuch as all ends, except the last, are means also to a further end; if the end immediately aimed at be vain and worthless, that which is referred to it, as it is so referred, cannot but be also vain. Whereupon now let us make trial what end we could, in this case, think man made for. Which will best be done by taking some view—of his nature, and—of the ends for which, upon that supposition, we must suppose him made.

First. Of the former (neglecting the strictness of philosophical disquisition) no more is intended to be said than may comport with the design of a popular discourse. And it shall suffice, therefore, only to take notice of what is more obvious in the nature of man, and subservient to the present purpose. And yet we are here to look further than the mere surface and outside of man, which we only considered before, and to view his nature as it is in itself, and not as the supposition of its having nothing but what is mortal belonging to it, would make it: for as the exility (and almost nothingness) of man's being, considered according to that supposition, did best serve to express the vanity of it, in the former notion that hath been given of a vain thing; so the excellency, and solid substantiality of it, considered as it is in itself, will conduce most to the discovery of its vanity in this latter notion thereof; that is, if we first consider that, and then the supposition of such a creature's being only made to perish. And if what shall be said herein do, in the sequel, tend to destroy that above-mentioned disposition, (as it, being established, would destroy the prime glory of human nature) it can only be said magna est veritas, &c. In the meantime we may take a view, in the nature of man—

1. Of his intellective powers. Hereby he frames notions of things, even of such things as are above the sphere of sense; of moral good and evil, right and wrong, what is virtuous and what is vicious; of abstract and universal natures; yea, and of a first being and cause, and of the wisdom, power, goodness, and other perfections, which must primarily agree to him. Hereby he affirms and denies one thing of another, as he observes them to agree and disagree, and discerns the truth and falsehood of what is spoken or denied. He doth hereby infer one thing from another, and argue himself into firm and unwavering assent to many things, not only above the discovery of sense, but directly contrary to their sensible appearances.

2. His power of determining himself, of choosing and refusing, according as things are estimated, and do appear to him: where also it is evident how far the objects which this faculty is sometimes

exercised about, do transcend the reach of all sensible nature; as well as the peculiar nobleness and excellency is remarkable of the faculty itself. It hath often for its object things of the highest nature, purely spiritual and divine; virtue, religion, God himself: so as that these (the faculty being repaired only by sanctifying grace, not now first put into the nature of man) are chosen by some, and, where it is not so, refused (it is true) by the most; but not by a mere not-willing of them, (as mere brutal appetite also doth not-will them, which no way reaches the notion of a refusal,) but by rejecting them with a positive aversion and dislike, wherein there is great iniquity and sin; which could not be but in a nature capable of the opposite temper. And it is apparent this faculty hath the privilege of determining itself, so as to be exempt from the necessitating influence of any thing foreign to it: upon the supposal whereof, the management of all human affairs, all treaties between man and man to induce a consent to this or that, the whole frame of government, all legislation and distribution of public justice, do depend. For take away this supposition, and these will presently appear most absurd and unjust. With what solemnity are applications and addresses made to the will of man upon all occasions! How is it courted, and solicited, and sued unto! But how absurd were it so to treat the other creatures, that act by a necessity of nature in all they do; to make supplications to the wind, or propound articles to a brute! And how unjust, to determine and inflict severe penalties for unavoidable and necessitated actions and omissions! These things occur to our first notice, upon any (a more sudden and cursory) view of the nature of man. And what should hinder, but we may infer from these, that there is further in his nature—

3. A capacity of an immortal state, i. e. that his nature is such, that he may, if God so please, by the concurrent influence of his ordinary power and providence, without the help of a miracle, subsist in another state of life after this, even a state that shall not be liable to that impairment and decay that we find this subject to. More is not (as yet) contended for; and so much, methinks, none should make a difficulty to admit, from what is evidently found in him. For it may

well be supposed, that the admitting of this (at least) will seem much more easy to any free and unprejudiced reason, than to ascribe the operations, before instanced in, to alterable or perishable matter, or indeed to any matter at all: it being justly presumed, that none will ascribe to matter, as such, the powers of ratiocination or volition. For then every particle of matter must needs be rational and intelligent, (a high advance to what one would never have thought at all active.) And how unconceivable is it, that the minute particles of matter, in themselves, each of them destitute of any such powers, should by their mutual intercourse with one another, become furnished with them; that they should be able to understand, deliberate, resolve, and choose, being assembled and duly disposed in counsel together: but, apart, rest all in a deep and sluggish silence! Besides, if the particles of matter, howsoever modified and moved to the utmost subtilty or tenuity, and to the highest vigour, shall then become intelligent and rational, how is it that we observe not, as any matter is more subtil, and more swiftly find vigorously moved, it makes a discernibly nearer approach (proportionably) to the faculty and power of reasoning: and that nothing more of an aptitude or tendency towards intelligence and wisdom is to be perceived in an aspiring flame or a brisk wind, than in a clod or a stone? If to understand, to define, to distinguish, to syllogize, be nothing else but the agitation and collision of the minute parts of rarified matter among one another; methinks, some happy chemist or other, when he hath missed his designed mark, should have hit upon some such more noble product, and by one other prosperous sublimation have caused some temporary resemblance (at least) of these operations. Or, if the paths of nature, in these affairs of the mind, be more abstruse and quite out of the reach and road of artificial achievement, whence is it that nature herself (that is vainly enough supposed by some to have been so happy, as by some casual strokes to have fabricated the first of human creatures, that have since propagated themselves) is grown so effete and dull, as never since to hit upon any like effect in the like way; and that no records of any time or age give us the notice of some such creature sprung out of some epicurean womb of the earth, and elaborated by the only

immediate hand of nature, so disposing the parts of matter in its constitution, that it should be able to perform the operation belonging to the mind of man. But if we cannot, with any tolerable pretence or show of reason, attribute these operations to any mere matter, then there must be somewhat else in man to which they may agree, that is distinct from his corruptible part, and that is therefore capable, by the advantage of its own nature, of subsisting hereafter, (while God shall continue to it an influence agreeable to its nature, as he doth to other creatures.) And hence it seems a modest and sober deduction, that there is, in the nature of man, at least a capacity of an immortal state.

Secondly. Now, if we yet suppose there is actually no such state for man hereafter, it is our next business to view the ends for which, upon that supposition, he may be thought to have been made. Whence we shall soon see, there is not any of them whereof it may be said, This is what he was created for, as his adequate end. And here we have a double agent to be accommodated with a suitable end;—Man now made: and—God who made him.

1. Man himself. For it must be considered, that inasmuch as man is a creature capable of propounding to himself an end, and of acting knowingly and with design towards it, (and indeed incapable of acting otherwise as a man,) it would therefore not be reasonable to speak of him, in this discourse, as if he were merely passive, and to be acted only by another: but we must reckon him obliged, in subordination to his Maker, to intend and pursue (himself) the proper end for which he appointed and made him. And in reason we are to expect that what God hath appointed to be his proper end, should be such as is in itself most highly desirable, suitable to the utmost capacity of his nature, and attainable by his action; so carrying with it sufficient inducements, both of desire and hope, to a vigorous and rational prosecution of it. Thus we must, at least, conceive it to have been in the primitive institution of man's end, unto which the expostulation hath reference,—Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? And we can think of no ends which men either

do or ought to propound to themselves, but by the direction of one of these principles, sense, reason, or religion.

(1.) Sense is actually the great dictator to the most of men, and, de facto, determines them to the mark and scope which they pursue, and animates the whole pursuit. Not that sense is by itself capable of designing an end, but it too generally inclines and biases reason herein; so that reason hath no other hand in the business, than only as a slave to sense, to form the design and contrive the methods which may most conduce to it, for the gratification of sensual appetite and inclination at last. And the appetitions of sense (wherein it hath so much mastery and dominion) are but such as we find enumerated, (1 John 2:16,) "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life." Or (if we understand the apostle to use the name of lust objectively) the objects sufficiently connote the appetitions themselves. All which may fitly be referred to sense: either the outward senses, or the fancy or imagination, which as deservedly comes under the same common denomination.

Now, who can think the satisfying of these lusts the commensurate end of man? Who would not, upon the supposition of no higher, say with the Psalmist, "Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?" To what purpose was it for him to live in the world a few years, upon this account only, and so go down to the place of silence? What is there in the momentary satisfaction of this mortal flesh; in his pleasing view of a mass of treasure, (which he never brought with him into the world, but only heaped together, and so leaves not the world richer or poorer than he found it;) what is there in the applause and admiration of fools (as the greater part always are,) that we should think it worth the while for man to have lived for these things? If the question were put, Wherefore did God make man? who would not be ashamed so to answer it, He made him to eat, and drink, and take his pleasure, to gather up wealth for he knows not whom; to use his inventions, that each one may become a talk and wonder to the rest; and then when he hath fetched a few turns upon the theatre, and entertained the eyes of beholders with a

short scene of impertinences, descend and never be heard of more? What, that he should come into the world furnished with such powers and endowments for this! It were a like case, as if one should be clad in scarlet to go to plough, or curiously instructed in arts and sciences to tend hogs.

Or, (2.) If we rise higher, to the view of such ends as more refined reason may propose, within the compass only of this present state: we will suppose that it be either the acquisition of much knowledge, the furnishing his understanding with store of choice and well-digested notions, that he may please himself in being (or in having men think him) a learned wight. Death robs away all his gain. And what is the world the better? How little shall he enrich the clods, among which he must shortly lie down and have his abode! Or how little is the gain, when the labour and travail of so many years are all vanished and blown away with the last puff of his dying breath, and the fruit that remains is to have it said by those that survive", "There lies learned dust!" That any part of his acquisitions, in that kind, descends to others, little betters the case, when they that succeed are all hastening down also into the same ignoble dust. Besides that, the increase of sorrow: both because the objects of knowledge do but increase the more he knows, do multiply the more upon him so as to beget a despair of ever knowing so much as he shall know himself to be ignorant of, and a thousand doubts about things he hath more deeply considered, which his more confident (undiscovered) ignorance never dreamt of or suspected; and thence an unquietness, an irresolution of mind, which they that never drove at any such mark are (more contentedly) unacquainted with;—and also, because that by how much knowledge hath refined a man's soul, so much it is more sensible and perceptive of troublesome impressions from the disorderly state of things in the world; which they that converse only with earth and dirt have not spirits clarified and fine enough to receive. So that except a man's knowing more than others were to be referred to another state, the labour of attaining thereto, and other accessory disadvantages, would hardly ever be compensated by the fruit or pleasure of it. And unless a man would suppose himself made

for torment, he would be shrewdly tempted to think a quiet and drowsy ignorance a happier state.

Or if that a man's reason, with a peculiarity of temper, guide him to an active negotiating life, rather than that of contemplation; and determine him to the endeavour of serving mankind, or the community to which he belongs: by how much the worthier actions he performs, and by how much more he hath perfected and accomplished himself with parts and promptitude for such actions, the loss and vanity is but the greater thereby; since he, and those he affected to serve, are all going down to the silent grave. Of how little use are the politician, the statesman, the senator, the judge, or the eloquent man, if we lay aside the consideration of their subserviency to the keeping the world in a more composed and orderly state for the prosecution of the great designs of eternity, when ere long all their thoughts shall perish! What matter were it what became of the world, whether it be wise or foolish, rich or poor, quiet or unquiet, governed or ungoverned? Whoever should make their order and tranquillity their study, or that should intend their thoughts and endeavours to the finding out the exactest methods and rules of government and policy, should but do as they that should use a great deal of pains and art in the curious adorning and trimming up of a dying person; or as if some one, among many condemned persons, should be very solicitous to have them march with him in very exact order to the place of execution. If the world be not looked upon as an attiring room to dress one's self in, for an appearance on the eternal stage; but only as a great charnel-house, where they undress and put off themselves, to sleep in everlasting darkness; how can we think it worth a thought, or to be the subject of any rational design or care? Who would not rather bless himself in a more rational neglect and regardlessness of all human affairs; and account an unconcerned indifferency the highest wisdom? Yea,

(3.) If we suppose religion (which we need not, because it is mentioned in this order, conceive exclusive of reason, but rather perfective of it; for reason having first found out God, religion adores

him) to become with any the ruling principle, and to have the direction and government of the man, as to his way and end: how would even that languish with the best, were the consideration of a future state laid aside, which with so few, notwithstanding it, hath any efficacy at all to command and govern their lives! Religion terminates upon God; and upon him under a double notion; either as we design service and honour to him, or as from him we design satisfaction and blessedness to ourselves. Now if a man's thoughts and the intention of his mind be carried towards God under the former notion, how great an allay and abatement must it needs be to the vigour and zeal of his affection, who shall with the most sincere devotedness apply himself to serve his interest and glory, to reflect upon the universal mortality of himself and mankind, without any hope of compensation to it by a future immortality!

It is agreed on all hands, that the utmost contributions of creatures can add nothing to him; and that our glorifying him doth only consist, either in our acknowledging him glorious ourselves, or representing him so to others. But how little doth it signify, and how flat and low a thing would it seem, that I should only turn mine eye upwards, and think a few admiring thoughts of God this hour, while I apprehend myself liable to lose my very thinking power and whole being the next! Or if we could spread his just renown, and gain all the sons of men to a concurrence with us in the adoring of his sovereign excellencies, how would it damp and stifle such loyal and dutiful affection, to consider that the universal testimony so deservedly given him shall shortly cease for ever, and that infinitely blessed Being be ere long (again, as he was from eternity before) the only witness of his own glory! And if the propension of a man's soul be towards God under the latter notion also, in order to a satisfaction that shall thence accrue to himself, (which design, both in the pursuit and execution of it, is so conjunct with the former that it cannot be severed,) it cannot but be an unspeakable diminution and check to the highest delights in this kind, to think how soon they shall have an end; that the darkness and dust of the grave shall shortly obscure and extinguish the glory of this lightsome scene.

To think every time one enters that blessed presence, "For aught I know I shall approach it no more; this is possibly my last sight of that pleasant face, my last taste of those enravishing pleasures!"—What bitterness must this infuse into the most delicious sweetness our state could then admit! And by how much more free and large grace should be in its present communications, and by how much any soul should be more experienced in the life of God, and inured to divine delights, so much the more grievous and afflictive resentments it could not but have of the approaching end of all; and be the more powerfully tempted to say, Lord, why was I made in vain? How faint and languid would endeavours be after the knowledge of that God whom I may but only know, and die! How impotent and ineffectual would the attractions of this end be to man in this terrene state, to raise him above the world and rescue him from the power of sensible things; to engage him in the pursuit of that sanctity and purity which alone can qualify him for converse with God; to bear him out in a conflict against the (more natural) inclinations of sense; when if, with much labour and painful striving, much self-denial and severity to the flesh, any disposition should be attained to relish divine pleasures, it be considered all the while, that the end of all may be as soon lost as it is gained; and that possibly there may be no more than a moment's pleasure to recompense the pains and conflicts of many years! Although, in this case, the continual hope and expectation of some farther manifestation and fruition might much influence a person already holy, and a great lover of God, unto a stedfast adherence to him; yet how little would it do to make men such, that are yet unsuitable and disaffected to him; or even to recover such out of their lapses and drowsy fits, that are not altogether so!

And it is further to be considered, that since God hath given man a being capable of subsisting in another state, (as doth appear by what hath been already said;) and since he is therefore capable of enjoying a greater happiness than his present state can admit of; that capacity will draw upon him a most indispensable obligation to intend that happiness as his end. For admit that there be no future state for him, it is however impossible any man should know there is none; and

upon an impartial view of the whole case, he hath enough to render it (at least) far more likely to him that there is. And certainly he cannot but be obliged to pursue the highest good (even by the law of nature itself) which his nature is capable of, which probably he may attain, and which he is nowhere forbidden by his Creator to aspire unto. Whence, therefore, if we now circumscribe him within the limits of this present mortal state; or if, for argument's sake, we suppose eventually there is no other; we must not only confess that capacity to be given him in vain, but that he is obliged also to employ the principal endeavours of his life and all his powers in vain; (for certainly his principal endeavour ought to be laid out in order to his principal end;) that is, to pursue that good which he may attain, but never shall; and which is possible to him, but not upon any terms future. And if it be admitted, that the subject state of man must silence all objections against any such inconsistencies, and make him content to act in pure obedience to his Maker (whether he signify his will by the law of nature only, or by any positive precept,) though he shall not hereafter enjoy any permanent state of blessedness as the consequent reward; that virtue and goodness, a holy rectitude of inclinations and actions, are reward enough to themselves; that there is that justice and sweetness in religion, to oblige him to love and reverence and adore the divine Majesty this moment, though he were sure to perish for ever and be reduced to nothing the next:—I say, admitting all this; yet,—

2. Since the blessed God himself is to be considered as the principal Agent and Designer in this inquiry, "Why hast thou made all men in vain?" it is with modest and humble reverence to be considered, What end, worthy of that infinitely perfect Being, he may be supposed to have propounded to himself in forming such a creature, of so improveable a nature, and furnished with so noble faculties and powers, for so transient and temporary a state: and how well it will consist with the most obvious and unquestionable notions we can have of an absolutely perfect Being, and the attributes which he most peculiarly challenges and appropriates to himself, (so as not only to own, but to glory in them,) that he should give being not to some few

only, but to the whole species of human creatures, and therein communicate to them a nature capable of knowing, of loving, and enjoying himself in a blessed eternity, with a design to continue them only for some short space on earth, in a low imperfect state, wherein they shall be liable to sink still lower, to the vilest debasement of their natures; and yet not for their transgression herein, (for it is the mortality of man, not by sin, but by creation, or the design of the Creator only, that is now supposed,) but for his mere pleasure, to bereave them of being, and reduce them all again to nothing. It is to be considered, Whether thus to resolve and do can any way agree to God, according to our clearest and most assured conceptions of him, not from our reasoning only, but his discovery of himself. For otherwise we see the imputation falls where we should dread to let it rest, of having made man in vain.

He is, in common account, said to act vainly, who acts beneath himself; so as to pursue an end altogether unworthy of him, or none at all. It is true, that some single acts may be done by great persons as a divertisement, without dishonourable reflection, that may seem much beneath them. And if any do stoop to very mean offices and employments to do good, to help the distressed and relieve the miserable, it is a glorious acquiescence; and the greater they are, the higher is the glory of their condescending goodness. Benignity of nature, and a propension to the most unexpected acts of a merciful self-depression, when the case may require it, are the most comely ornaments of princely greatness, and out-shine the glory of the richest diadem. But a wonted habitual course of mean actions in great persons, that speak a low design or no design at all, but either a humour to trifle, or a mischievous nature and disposition, would never fail to be thought inglorious and infamous; as may be seen in the instances of Sardanapalus' spinning, and Domitian's killing of flies.

When wisdom and goodness are in conjunction with power and greatness, they never persuade a descent, but upon such terms and for such purposes that a more glorious advancement shall ensue;

wisdom foreseeing that end, and goodness readily taking the way, which (though it were most undesigned, or not aimed at as an end) could not fail to effect it. Nor are any attributes of the Divine Being more conspicuous than these, more testified by himself, or more generally acknowledged by all men that have not denied his existence. Or if any have done that violence to their own minds, as to erase and blot out thence the belief of an existing Deity; yet, at least, while they deny it, they cannot but have this notion of what they deny, and grant that these are great perfections, and must agree to God, upon supposition that he do exist. If, therefore, he should do anything repugnant to these, or we should suppose him to do so, we should therein suppose him to act below a God, and so as were very unworthy of him. And though it becomes us to be very diffident of our own reasonings concerning the counsels and designs of that eternal Being; so as if we should find him to assert anything expressly of himself, which we know not how to reconcile with our own preconceived thoughts, therein to yield him the cause, and confess the debility of our understandings: yet, certainly, it were great rashness and void of all pretence, to suppose anything which neither he saith of himself, nor we know how consistently to think. Nor are we, in judging of his designs, to bring him down to our model, or measure him by man, whose designs do for the most part bespeak only his own indigency, and are levelled at his own advantage, and the bettering some way or other of his present condition. Whatsoever the great God doth towards his creatures, we must understand him to do, though with design, yet from an exuberant fulness of life and being, by which he is incapable of an accession to himself: and hence that he can in reference to himself have no other inducement to such action, besides the complacency which he takes in diffusing his free communications, (for he "exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, because he delighteth in these things," Jer. 9:24,) and the maintaining the just honour and reputation of his government over his creatures, who, as they are of him, and through him, must be all to him, that he may have glory for ever. Rom. 11:36.

Now, though it be most undoubtedly true that the sovereignty of his power and dominion over his creatures (of which he hath no need, and to whom he so freely gave being) is so absolute and unlimited, that if we consider that only, we must acknowledge he might create a man or an angel and annihilate him presently; yea, that he might, if he so pleased, raise up many thousand worlds of intelligent and innocent creatures into being in one moment, and throw them into nothing again the very next moment: yet how unwarrantably should we maim the notion of God, if we should conceive of him only according to one attribute, secluding the consideration of the rest! How misshapen an idea should we bear of him in our minds! And how would it deform the face of providence, and spoil the decorum of his administrations, if they should be the effects of one single attribute only, the others having no influence on the affairs of the world! If nothing but mercy should appear in his dispensations towards sinful man, so that every man might do what were good in his own eyes, without cause of fear to be called to account; if the most dissolute and profane were equally assured of his favour, with those who are most holy and strictly regular in all their conversation; what would be thought of God and religion? Or how should we savour the notion of an impure deity, taking pleasure to indulge the wickedness of men?—And if justice alone have the whole management of affairs, and every act of sin be followed with an act of sudden vengeance, and the whole world become a flaming theatre, and all men held in a hopeless expectation of fiery indignation and of judgment without mercy; what would become of that amiable representation and the consolatory thoughts we have of God, and of that love and duty which some souls do bear towards him?—Or if power should affect daily to show itself in unusual appearances and effects, in changing every hour the shapes of the terrestrial creatures, in perpetual, quick innovations of the courses of the celestial, with a thousand more kinds of prodigious events that might be the hourly effects of unlimited power: how were the order of the world disturbed, and how unlovely an idea would it beget, in every intelligent creature, of him that made and rules it! Yet is it from no defect of mercy, that all men are not equally favoured and blessed of

God; nor of justice, that a speedy vengeance is not taken of all; nor of power, that the world is not filled with astonishing wonders every day; but rather from their unexcessiveness, and that they make that blessed temperature where they reside, and are exercised in so exact proportion that nothing is ever done unworthy of him who is, at once, both perfectly merciful, and just, and powerful, and wise; and hath all perfections eminently comprehended and united in his own most simple Being. It were, therefore, besides the purpose to insist only what sovereign power, considered apart, might do; but we are to consider what may be congruous to him to do, who is infinitely wise and good, as well as powerful. And—

(1.) Let it be weighed, how it may square with the divine wisdom, to give being to a world of reasonable creatures, and, giving them only a short time of abode in being, to abandon them to a perpetual annihilation. Wisdom in any agent must needs suppose the intention of some valuable end of his action. And the divine wisdom, wherein it hath any end diverse from that which his pure goodness and benignity towards his creatures would incline him to, (which also we must conceive it most intent to promote and further,) cannot but have it chiefly in design—it being determined that his goodness should open itself and break forth into a creation, and that of reasonable creatures—so to manage his government over these, (which indeed are the only subjects of government, in the strict and proper notion of it,) as may most preserve his authority, and keep up his just interest in them, both by recommending him to their fear and love; to possess them with that due and necessary reverence of him that may restrain them from contemptuous sinning; and so endear his government to them, as to engage them to a placid and free obedience. But how little would it agree with this design of the divine wisdom, to have made man only for this temporary state! For,
—

How little would it tend to the begetting and settling that fear of God in the hearts of men, that were necessary to preserve his authority and government from a profane contempt; whereas daily experience

shows, that there is now no difference made between them that fear God and them that fear him not, unless wherein the former are worse dealt with and more exposed to sufferings and wrongs; that at least, it is often (yea for the most part) so, that to depart from iniquity is to make one's self a prey; that those who profess and evidence the most entire devotedness to God, and pay the greatest observance and duty to him, become a common scorn upon this very account, and are in continual danger to be eaten up as bread by those that call not upon God; while in the meantime the tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure, are not plagued as other men, nor in trouble as other men, and judgment is not here executed for wicked works in this world:—if also nothing is to be expected, either of good or evil, in another, who is likely to be induced, in this case, to fear God, or to be subject to him? And how unlike is this to the wisdom of the supreme Ruler, to expose his most rightful and sovereign authority to the fearless and insolent affronts of his own revolted creatures, without any design of future reparation to it; as if he had created them on purpose only to curse him and die! But he hath prevented the occasion of so reproachful a censure, and thought fit to fill his word, and the consciences of guilty sinners, with threats and dreadful presages of a future judgment and state of punishment: to which he is no less concerned, both in point of wisdom and veracity, (and I may add of legal justice) to make the event correspond, that he may neither be found to have omitted any due course for preventing or redress of so great an evil; and that, if the threatening do not effectually over-awe sinners, the execution may at least right himself; and that, in the meantime, he do not (that which would least of all become him, and which were most repugnant to his nature) make use of a solemn fiction to keep the world in order, and maintain his government by falsehood and deceit; that is, by threatening what he knows shall never be.

Nor were there (in the case all along supposed) a more probable provision made to conciliate and procure to the Divine Majesty, the love which it is requisite he should have from the children of men. And this cannot but be thought another apt method for his wisdom

to pitch upon, to render his government acceptable, and to engage men to that free and complacential subjection which is suitable to God. For how can that filial and dutiful affection ever be the genuine product or impress of such a representation of the case between God and them; that is, that they shall be most indispensably obliged to devote their whole being and all their powers entirely to his service and interest, exactly to observe his strictest laws, to keep under the severest restraint their most innate, reluctant inclinations; and in the meantime expect the administrations of providence to be such, towards them, that they shall find harder usage all their days than his most insolent and irreconcilable enemies; and at last lose their very beings, they know not how soon, and therewith (necessarily) all possibilities of any future recompence? Is this a likely way to procure love, and to captivate hearts into an affectionate and free obedience? Or what is it probable to produce, but a sour and sullen despondency, the extinction of all generous affection, and a temper more agreeable to a forced enthrallment to some malignant, insulting genius, than a willing subjection to the God of all grace and love? And every one will be ready to say, There is little of wisdom in that government, the administration whereof is neither apt to beget fear nor love in those that are subject to it; but either through the want of the one to be despised, or to be regretted through the want of the other. And this being the very case, upon supposition of no future state, it seems altogether unworthy of the divine wisdom that such a creature should ever have been made as man; upon which (supposition) no end is attainable (as the course of providence commonly runs in this world,) in comparison whereof it were not better and more honourable to his Maker, (whose interest it is the part of his wisdom to consult,) that he had never been:—and, therefore, as to God and the just and worthy designs of his glory, he would seem, upon this supposition, wholly made in vain. And—

(2.) How congruous and agreeable would this supposition prove to the goodness of God! As that other attribute of wisdom doth more especially respect his own interest, so doth this the interest of his creatures; that is, if it be understood, not in a metaphysical, but in a

moral sense; as it imports a propensity and steady bent of will unto benefaction, according to that of the Psalmist, "Thou art good, and doest good," Ps. 119:68. And this free and generous principle it is, which gives the first rise and beginning to all the designs any way respecting the well being and happiness of creatures; which, then, infinite wisdom forms and manages to their full issues and accomplishment, guiding (as it were) the hand of almighty power in the execution of them.

That there should be a creation, we may conceive to be the first dictate of this immense goodness, which afterwards diffuses itself through the whole, in communications agreeable to the nature of every creature. So that even this inferior and less noble part, "the earth, is full of the goodness of the Lord." Ps. 33:5. It creates first its own object, and then pours forth itself upon it with infinite delight, rewarding the expense with the pleasure of doing good. Now, if we should suppose such a creature as man made only for that short time and low state which we see to be allotted him in this world, it were neither difficult, nor enough, to reconcile the hypothesis with strict justice, which upon the ground of absolute dominion may do what it will with its own: but the ill accord it seems to have with so large and abounding goodness, renders it very unlike the dispensation of the blessed God; no enjoyment being in that case afforded to this sort of creatures, agreeable to their common nature and capacity, either in degree or continuance.

Not in degree: for who sees not, that the nature of man is capable of greater things than he here enjoys? And where that capacity is rescued from the corruption that narrows and debases it, how sensibly do holy souls resent and bewail their present state, as a state of imperfection! With how fervent and vehement desires and groans do they aspire and pant after a higher and more perfect! "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, (2 Cor. 5:4, that is not enough, to be delivered out of the miseries of life, by laying down this passive part—is not that which will terminate their desires,) but clothed upon, that mortality might

be swallowed up of life." Theirs are not brutal groans, the complaint of oppressed sensitive nature under a present evil; but rational and spiritual, the expressions of desire strongly carried to pursue an apprehended suitable good. The truest notion we can yet have of the primitive nature and capacity of man, is by beholding it in its gradual restitution. And is it agreeable to the goodness of God, to put such a nature into any, and withhold the suitable object? As if it were a pleasure to him to behold the work of his own hands spending itself in weary strugglings towards him, and vexed, all the while it continues in being, with the desire of what it shall never enjoy, and which he hath made it desire, and therein encouraged it to expect.

Nor in continuance: for I suppose it already evident that the nature of man is capable (in respect of his principal part) of perpetuity, and so of enjoying a felicity hereafter that shall be permanent and know no end: and it seems no way congruous to so large goodness, to stifle a capacity whereof it was itself the author, and destroy its own work. For if the being of man is intended for so short a continuance, either he may have the knowledge of this determination concerning him, or not. If he cannot have the knowledge of it, why should any one say what they cannot know; or put such a thing upon God, that is so vilely reflecting and dishonourable to him? If he may have the knowledge of it, then doth he seem a creature made for torment, while by an easy reflection upon himself he may discern he is not incapable of a perpetual state, and is yet brought forth into the light to be ere long extinguished and shut up in everlasting darkness. And who can think this a thing worthy of infinite and eternal goodness? Besides, (as hath been insisted before,) that this torture, proceeding from so sad an expectation, cannot but be most grievous and afflictive to the best. Whence the apostle tells us, that Christians, "if in this life only they had hope, were of all men most miserable," (1 Cor. 15:19;) so that it were more desirable never to have been. If any yet fall hereafter into a state to which they would prefer perpetual annihilation, inasmuch as it is wholly by their own default, it no way reflects upon divine goodness. But it would be a dishonourable reflection rather upon that Author and Fountain of all goodness, if he

should not express himself wise and just as well as good; as it would upon a man, especially a ruler over others, if that which we call good-nature were conjunct with stolidity, or an insensibleness of whatsoever affronts to his person and government. Upon the whole, therefore, it seems most repugnant to these great attributes of the divine Being, to have made man only for his present state; that to think so, were to conceive unworthily of him, as if he had acted much beneath himself, and done a vain thing in making such a creature, no end being attainable by it which we can suppose either his wisdom or goodness to aim at.

If any would imagine to themselves an expedient, by supposing an eternal succession of human generations, upon whom the wisdom and goodness of God might have a perpetual exercise, in the government and sustentation of them for their appointed times; this would be far from satisfying as to either, but would rather increase the difficulty; for there would be the same temptation upon all the individuals, to contemn or regret the government of their Maker. So that he should hereby even eternize his own reproach; and should always, in every succession, have still the same craving appetites returning, and expectations never to be satisfied, which were as repugnant to all he hath discovered to us of his nature, as any thing we can suppose. Though some persons of a light and desultory humour might imagine to themselves a pleasure in it, if they had the power to make such a rotation of things, rising and falling, coming and passing away, at their beck and command; and such as were of a sanguinary temper, might sport themselves in raising up and lopping off lives at pleasure with an arbitrary hand: yet sure they would never gain by it the esteem of being either wise or good; and would, it is like, in time grow weary of the sport. But to form to ourselves such ideas of the blessed God, were an injury not inferior to the very denial of his being.

His providence towards the inferior creatures hath no resemblance of any such thing; whom his bounty sustains agreeably to their natures, who have no foresight of their own cessation from being, to

keep them in a continual death by the expectation of it; and who serve to valuable and reasonable purposes while they are continued; for they are useful, partly to the sustentation of man, and partly to his instruction, in order to his higher ends. And though each individual of them do not actually so, it is sufficient that the several kinds of them are naturally apt thereto, which are propagated according to a settled course and law of nature, in their individuals: and if all immediately serve not man, yet they do it mediately, in serving those that more immediately do. Besides, that when such a work was to be done, as the furnishing out and accomplishing this lower world, it was meet all things should be in number, weight, and measure, and correspond in every part; as if one build a house for entertainment, though the more noble rooms only do come in view, yet all the rest are made answerably decent, on supposition that they may. It was becoming the august and great Lord of this world, that it have in it, not only what may sustain the indigent, but gratify the contemplative by fresh variety; who would be apt to grow remiss by conversing only with what were of every day's observation. Nor was that a low end, when such contemplation hath so direct a tendency to raise a considering mind to the sight, and love, and praise of the supreme Being, that hath stamped so lively signatures and prints of his own perfections upon all his works. If it be said, man might be in the same kind serviceable to the contemplation of angels, though he were himself never to know any other than this mortal state; it is true that he might so; but yet the incongruities were no way salved, of God's putting a capacity and expectation into his nature of a better state: of his dealing so hardly with them that he hath procured to love him: of his never vindicating their high contempt that spent their days in rebellion against him. Besides, that these were ill precedents, and no pleasant themes for the view of an angelical mind. And if they see a nature extinct, capable of their state, what might they suspect of their own? So that, which way soever we turn our thoughts, we still see that man's mortality and liableness to an unavoidable death, abstracted from the thoughts of another state, carry that constant aspect, as if all men were made in vain.

What remains, then, but that we conclude hence, we ought not too much, or too long, thus to abstract; nor too closely confine our eye to this dark and gloomy theme, death and the grave, or withhold it from looking further. For, far be it from us to think the wise and holy God hath given being to man (and consequently exercised a long continued series of providence through so many successive ages towards him) in vain. Nothing but a prospect of another state can solve the knot, and work through the present difficulty; can give us a true account of man, and what he was made for. Therefore, since it would be profane and impious, sad and uncomfortable, a blasphemy to our Maker, and a torture to ourselves, to speak it as our settled apprehension and judgment, that God hath made man to no purpose; we are obliged and concerned, both in justice to him and compassion to ourselves, so to represent the case, as that we may be able to remove so unworthy and black a thought to the greatest distance from us, both in itself and whatsoever practice would be consequent thereto: that is, to conclude, That certainly there must be another state after this; and accordingly steer our course.—The improvement, then, of the foregoing discourse will have a double aspect:—on our judgments, and practice.

1. On our judgments; to settle this great principle of truth in them, the certain futurity of another state after this life is over, unto which this present state is only preparatory and introductive. For whereas we can never give a rational account why such a creature as man was made, if we confine all our apprehensions concerning him to his present state on earth: let them once transcend those narrow limits, fly over into eternity, and behold him made for an everlasting state hereafter, and the difficulty now vanishes, the whole affair looks with a comely and befitting aspect.

For we may now represent the case thus to ourselves: that man was put into this terrestrial state and dwelling, by the wise and righteous designation of his great Creator and Lord, that his loyalty to him, amidst the temptations and enticements of sensible things, might be tried awhile; that, revolting from him, he is only left to feel here the

just smart of his causeless defection; that yet such farther methods are used for his recovery, as are most suitable to his so impaired state. An allayed light shines to him in the midst of darkness, that his feebler eye may receive a gradual illumination, and behold God in those more obscure discoveries which he now vouchsafes of himself, till by degrees he be won to take up good thoughts of him, and return into an acquaintance and friendship with him; which, once begun here, shall be hereafter perfected in eternal fruitions. The offence and wrong done to his Maker, he in a strange, unthought-of way makes compensation of to himself; and testifies his reconcilableness, and persuades a reconciliation, upon such terms, and by so endearing mediums, as might melt and mollify hearts of adamant; and shall effectually prevail with many to yield themselves the subjects and instances of his admired goodness for ever; while others lie only under the natural consequents and just resentments of their unremedied enmity and folly. So are the glorious issues of God's dispensation towards man, and the wise and merciful conduct of his equal government, worthily celebrated through the days of eternity with just acclamations and praises. We can fasten upon nothing exceptionable or unaccountable, yea, or that is not highly laudable and praiseworthy in this course of procedure. Therefore, though now we behold a dark cloud of mortality hanging over the whole human race; though we see the grave still devouring and still unsatisfied, and that all are successively drawn down into it; and we puzzle ourselves to assign a reason why such a creature was made a reasonable being, capable of an everlasting duration, to visit the world only and vanish, to converse a short space with objects and affairs so far beneath it, and retire we know not whither: if yet our eye follow him through the dark paths of the region of death, till at the next appearance we behold him clothed with immortality and fitted to an endless state, the wonder is over, and our amazement quickly ceases.

Wherefore let us thus bethink ourselves, and consider: Surely he that made this great universe, and disposed all the sorts, stations, and motions of creatures in it in so exquisite order and method, cannot

but be a most perfectly wise and intellectual agent, and therefore cannot be supposed to have done any thing to no purpose; much less when all the inferior creatures have ends visibly answering the exigency of their natures, to have made so excellent a creature as man (the nobler part of his lower creation) in vain; that he only should be without his proportionable end, and after a short continuance in being, return to nothing, without leaving it conjecturable what he was made for. This were so intolerable an incongruity, and so unlike the footsteps that every where else appear in the divine wisdom and goodness, that we cannot but inquire further into this matter, and conclude at last that he was made for some higher purposes than are within the reach of our sight, and hath his principal part yet to act upon another stage, within the veil, that shall never be taken down. The future immortality of man seems therefore so certainly grounded upon what is discovered and generally acknowledged touching the nature of God, and his most peculiar and essential perfections, that unless we were further put to prove the existence of a God, (which to them that are rational needs not, and to them that are not were in vain), there can no reasonable doubt remain concerning it.

2. Wherefore the further use we have to make of the matter proposed, is in reference to our practice: which it may fitly serve both to correct and reprove, and also to direct and guide.

(1.) It administers the ground of just rebuke: that since, if we terminate our thoughts and designs upon things only on this side the grave, it would seem we were wholly made in vain; we do yet so generally employ our cares and endeavours about such things, and even the vilest and most despicable of these; and so live not to our own dishonour only, but to the reproach of our Maker, as if he made us for no more worthy ends. And let us but impartially debate the matter with ourselves: can we, in sober reason, think we were made only for such ends as most men only pursue? Have we any pretence to think so? Or can it enter into our souls to believe it? Would not men be ashamed to profess such a belief; or to have it written in their

foreheads, these are the only ends they are capable of? Then might one read, Such a man born to put others in mind of his predecessor's name, and only lest such a family should want an heir: such a one to consume such an estate, and devour the provenue of so many farms and manors: such a one to fill so many bags and coffers, to sustain the riot of him that succeeds: some created to see and make sport; to run after hawks and dogs, or spend the time which their weariness redeems from converse with brutes, in making themselves such, by drinking away the little residue of wit and reason they have left; mixing, with this genteel exercise, their impure and scurrilous drolleries, that they may befriend one another with the kind occasion of proving themselves to be yet of human race, by this only demonstration remaining to them, that they can laugh; which medium, if the wisdom of the just were known, would be found so pregnant as to afford them a double conclusion, and be as effectual, oftentimes, to prove them fools as men. Others, one might read, born to trouble the world, to disquiet the neighbourhood, and be the common plague of all about them; at least, if they have any within their reach and power that are wiser and more sober than themselves, or that value not their souls at so cheap a rate as they; others made to blaspheme their Maker, to rend the sacred name of God, and make proof of their high valour, and the gallantry of their brave spirits, by bidding a defiance to heaven, and proclaiming their heroic contempt for the Deity and of all religion; as if they had persuaded themselves into an opinion, that because they have had so prosperous success in the high achievements of conquering their humanity, and baffling their own fear, and reason, and conscience, death also will yield them as easy a victory, or be afraid to encounter men of so redoubted courage: that the God of heaven, rather than offend them, will not stick to repeal his laws for their sakes, or never exact the observance of them from persons of their quality; that they shall never be called to judgment, or be complimented only there with great respect, as persons that bore much sway in their country, and could number so many hundreds or thousands a year; that at least, the infernal flames will never presume to touch so worthy personages; that devils will be awed by their greatness, and fear to

seize them, lest they should take it for an affront. No conceit can be imputed to these men absurd enough to overmatch the absurdity of their practice. They can themselves think nothing more gross and shameful than what they daily are not ashamed to act. For what absurdity can be compassed in a thought, greater than what appears in a course of life managed in perpetual hostility to all principles of reason and humanity? And either they must own all the impious folly of such thoughts, or confess, upon other accounts, an equal infatuation in their thinking faculty itself. For either they think their course justifiable, or they do not. If they do, how fatally are all things inverted in their depraved minds! Wisdom and folly, virtue and vice, good and evil, seem to them transformed into one another, and are no longer to be known by their own names. The common notions of all mankind are but blind fancies in comparison of their later and clearer illumination; and the ancient religious sentiments of all former ages, dreams and follies to their admired new light. Their wise and rare discoveries, that they and all things came by chance, that this world hath no Owner or Lord, (because they never had wit or patience to consider the nonsense of them; and though they never, any of them, had the luck to see one clod of earth, or grain of sand, start up into being, out of nothing; much less ground to think, that such a world should of itself do so,) are reason enough with them to mock at the eternal Being, and attempt to jeer religion out of the world, and all other men out of their reason and wits, as they have themselves. And sure this must be their only pretence, and their atheism the best reason upon which to justify their constant practice. For who can think (while he sees them not yet in chains) they should be so perfectly mad, as to acknowledge only such a deity (the author and ruler of all things) whose favour were worth nothing, or to be procured by affronts; to whom contempt were a sacrifice, and the violation of whatsoever is sacred the most effectual propitiation; or acknowledge him for a God, whom they hope to overpower, and to prosper in a war against him?

And if they acknowledge none at all, and this be the fundamental article of their creed, that there is indeed none; then can no man

charge them with any thought more grossly foolish than their own; nor can they devise to say any thing, by which more certainly to argue themselves bereft of the common understanding of men. For who that is not so, if he only take notice of his own being, may not as certainly conclude the existence of a God, as that two and two make four? Or what imagination can be too absurd to have place in that mind, that can imagine this creation to be a casualty? He would be thought beside himself that should say the same of the composition of a clock or a watch, though it were a thousand times more supposable. But if they do not justify themselves, to what purpose is it further to press them with absurdities, that persist in constant self-contradiction: or that have not so much left them of rational sensation, as to feel in their own minds the pressure of the very greatest absurdity? If they only presume they do well, because they have never asked themselves, the question, or spent any thoughts about it; this speaks as much a besotted mind as any of the rest, and is as unworthy of a reasonable creature. Why have they the power of thinking? Or who do in any case more generally incur the censure of imprudence and folly, than they who have only this plea for their actions, that they did not consider? Especially when the case is so plain, and the most sudden reflection would discover the iniquity and danger of their course? And one would think nothing should be more obvious, or more readily occur to the mind of a man, than to contemplate himself, and taking notice there is such a creature in the world, furnished with such abilities and powers, to consider, "What was I made for? What am I to pitch upon as my proper end?"—nor any thing appear more horrid to him, than to cross the very ends of his creation.

(2.) It may also be improved to the directing of our practice. For which purpose we may hence take this general rule, that it be such as becomes the expectation of a future state:—for what else is left us, since in our present state we behold nothing but vanity? We see thus stands our case, that we must measure ourselves by one of these apprehensions: either,—we are made in vain;—or, we are made for a future state. And can we endure to live according to the former, as if

we were impertinencies in the creation, and had no proper business in it? What ingenuous person would not blush to be always in the posture of a useless hang-by; to be still hanging on, where he hath nothing to do; that if he be asked, Sir, what is your business here? he hath nothing to say. Or how can we bear it, to live as if we came into the world by chance, or rather by mistake; as though our creation had been a misadventure, a thing that would not have been done had it been better thought on; and that our Maker had overshot himself, and been guilty of an oversight in giving us such a being? Who, that hath either just value for himself, or any reverence for his Maker, could endure either to undergo the reproach, or be guilty of the blasphemy which this would import? And who can acquit himself of the one or the other, that lives not in some measure agreeably to the expectation of somewhat beyond this present life? Let us therefore gird up the loins of our minds, and set our faces as persons designing for another world; so shaping our course, that all things may concur to signify to men the greatness of our expectations. We otherwise proclaim to the world, (to our own and our Creator's wrong) that we have reasonable souls given us to no purpose. We are therefore concerned and obliged both to aim at that worthy end, and to discover and make it visible that we do so.

Nor is a design for an immortal state so mean and inglorious, or so irrational and void of a solid ground, that we have any cause either to decline or conceal it; either not to retain, or to be ashamed of our hope. Nor is there any thing to be done in prosecution of it, so unworthy as to need a corner, or that requires it to be done as a work of darkness. Neither yet is it a vain-glorious ostentation, or the affectation of making show of an excellency above the vulgar pitch, that I persuade to: but a modest, sober avowing of our design and hope; neither making any near approach to a proud arrogance on the one hand, nor a mean pusillanimity on the other. Truly great and generous spirits know how to carry under secular honour with that prudent and graceful decorum, as shall signify a just owning of themselves, without insolence towards others. Real worth, though it do not vaunt, will show itself; and while it doth not glare, yet cannot

forbear to shine. We should endeavour the excellency of a spirit refined from earth and dross, and aspiring towards a state of immortality; (which) may express itself, and shine in its native lustre; with its own, not with borrowed beams; with a constant, even, natural, not with an unequal, artificial light; that all that will, may see by the steady tendency of our course, that we are aiming at the great things of another world: though we, all the while, are not so much solicitous to have our end and purpose known, as to obtain it.

And verily, since the vile sons of the earth, the men of sense, that aim at no other end than to gratify their brutal appetite with such pleasure as is only to be compassed within a short life's time in this world, and who live to the reproach of their Maker, and of mankind, do not go about to hide the infamy of their low design, or conceal the degenerate baseness of their mean spirits; but while they make their belly their god, and only mind earthly things, do also glory in their shame:—how much were it beneath the state and spirit of the sons of God, that are worthily designing for a glorious immortality, to be ashamed of their glory, or think of stealing a passage to heaven in the dark! No; let them know, it is not only too mean a thing for them to involve themselves in the common spirit of the sensual world, but even to seem to do so; and that this is so foul and ignominious a thing, as whereof they are concerned, not to be free from the guilt only, but the suspicion. Those worthy souls that in former and darker days were engaged in seeking the heavenly country, thought it became them to confess themselves pilgrims and strangers on the earth, (Heb. 11;) and therein to declare plainly, that they were seeking that better country. Which confession and plain declaration we need not understand to be merely verbal, but practical and real also; such as might be understood to be the language of their lives, and of a constant, uniform course of actions, agreeable to such a design.

Let us therefore bethink ourselves, what temper of mind and manner of life may be most conformable to this design, and best become persons pretending to it: whereupon we should soon find our own

thoughts instructing us, that such things as these would be most becoming and fit in reference thereto; and which we may therefore take as so many particular directions how to govern our spirits, and behave ourselves answerably to so great an expectation.

First. That we endeavour for a calm indifferency and dispassionate temper of mind towards the various objects and affairs that belong to this present life. There are very narrow limits already set, by the nature of the things themselves, to all the real objective value that such things have in them; and it is the part of wisdom and justice to set the proportionable bounds to all the thoughts, cares, and passions, we will suffer to stir in our minds in reference to them. Nothing is a more evident acknowledged character of a fool, than upon every slight occasion to be in a transport. To be much taken with empty things, betokens an empty spirit. It is a part of manly fortitude to have a soul so fenced against foreign impressions, as little to be moved with things that have little in them; to keep our passions under a strict and steady command, that they be easily retractable and taught to obey; not to move till severe reason have audited the matter, and pronounced the occasion just and valuable, in which case the same manly temper will not refuse to admit a proportionable stamp and impress from the occurring object. For it is equally a prevarication from true manhood, to be moved with everything and with nothing: the former would speak a man's spirit a feather, the latter a stone. A total apathy and insensibleness of external occurrents hath been the aim of some, but never the attainment of the highest pretenders. And if it had, yet ought it not to have been their boast; as upon sober thoughts it cannot be reckoned a perfection. But it should be endeavoured, that the passions, which are not to be rooted up, (because they are of nature's planting), be yet so discreetly checked and depressed, that they grow not to that enormous tallness, as to overtop a man's intellectual power, and cast a dark shadow over his soul. A rational authority must be maintained, a continency and dominion of one's self, that there be not an impotent profusion, and we be never so affected with anything, but that the object may still be able to warrant and justify

the affection, both for the nature and degree of it. Which rule, if we strictly observe and apply it to the present case, we shall rarely meet with any temporal concern that ought to move us much; both for the littleness of such things themselves, and that we have so unspeakably greater things in our view and design.

In conformity therefore to our so great expectation, we ought more particularly to watch and repress our inclinations, appetites, and affections towards each several sort and kind of objects, which time and this present state hath within the confines of it. As, how contemptuously should we look upon that empty vanity of being rich! How coldly and carelessly should we pursue, how unconcernedly should we lose, any thing that might entitle us to that name! The pursuit of so despicable a trifle with violent and peremptory desire, so as hereby to suffer a diversion from our design for another world, is to make our eternal hope less than nothing, (for to any man's calm and sober thoughts, this will be found as little:) and so will amount to a total quitting of all our pretensions to a better, future state; that is, when so we indulge this odd, irrational, this wildly fanciful, and purely humoursome appetite, (of which no man can give any tolerable account,) that it becomes ravenous; when it devours a man's time, his thoughts, the strength and vigour of his spirit, swallows up his nobler designs, and makes an idle doting about he knows not what, or why, his main business. Especially when conscience itself becomes a sacrifice to this impure, unhallowed idol; and the question is wholly waived, "Is this thing just and honest?" and nothing is considered, but that it is commodious and gainful. Yet, (if herein we will take upon us to pass a judgment upon other men,) it will be no way ingenuous or just, that in smaller and disputable matters, we make our own apprehensions a measure and standard to them. They are commonly aptest to do so, who have least studied the matter, and have nothing but their ignorant confidence to entitle them to the dictator's chair; where, however, having placed themselves, they liberally bestow their censures and reproaches on all that think it not fit to throw away their own eyes, and see with their bad ones; and conclude them to have no conscience, who go not

according to theirs: and that they cannot but have some base design, who in anything presume to swerve from their judgment, especially if the advantage, in any temporal respect, happen to lie on that side from which they dissent.

Nothing can indeed so comport with the spirit and design of one who believes himself made for another world, as a brave and generous disdain of stooping to the lure of present emolument, so as thereby to be drawn into any the least thing which he judges not defensible by the severest rules of reason and religion; which were to quit a serene heaven for mire and dirt. There is nothing in this world of that value, or worthy to be bought so dear, as with the loss and forfeiture of the rest and repose of a mind, quiet, benign, peaceful, and well pleased with itself. It is enough, if one find himself, by difficulties which he cannot master, constrained to dissent from persons above exception wise and pious, placidly, and without unbecoming confidence, to go on in the way which his present judgment allows; carrying with him a modest sense of human infirmity, and how possible it is the error may lie on his own part: having yet to relieve him against that supposition, the clearness of his own spirit, the conscience of his innocency of any ill disposition or design, of his instructibleness and preparedness to admit a conviction if he err: and be he never so fully persuaded about the thing in difference, yet to consider the smallness of it, and how little cause he hath of glorying, if he know in this matter more than others, who possibly know ten times more than he, in far greater and more important matters. But, in matters clearly determined by common agreed principles, to prevaricate out of an indulgence to mere appetite, to give up one's self to practices apparently immoral and flagitious, only to comply with, and lest he should not satisfy sensual desires, is the character of one who hath abandoned the common hope of all good men; and who, that he may have his lot with beasts in this world, dreads not to have it with devils in the other. And it is, upon the same ground, equally unbecoming them that pretend to this hope, to be visibly concerned and discomposed for losses and disappointments they may meet with in this kind, when unexpected

events withstand their having much of this world, or deprive them of what they have. It becomes them that reckon their good things are to come hereafter, to show by their equal deportment and cheerful aspect in any such case, that they apprehend not themselves touched in their most considerable interests. Yea, though they suffer not losses only, but injuries; and besides that they are damnified, (as much as such things can signify) they find themselves wronged; and though further trouble and danger threaten them in the same kind; they should evidence how much it is above the power either of chance or malice, not only to make them miserable, but even to disturb or make them sad: that they are not happy by a casualty: and that their happiness is not in the command of them who cannot command their own: that it only depends on the inward constitution and frame of their own spirits, attempered to the blessed objects of the invisible world; whereby they have the assurance of enjoying them fully hereafter, and the present grateful relishes thereof in the meantime; and hence, that they can be happy without the world's kindness, and in despite of its unkindness: that they have somewhat within them, by which they are enabled to rejoice in tribulation; being troubled on every side, yet not to be distressed: to "take joyfully the spoiling of goods, knowing within themselves they have in heaven a better and enduring substance;" nor to suffer or discover any perturbation or disquiet: not to have their souls ruffled, or put into disorder: nor let any cloud sit on their brow, though dark and dismal ones seem to hang over their heads.

And the same absurdity it would be to indulge to themselves an unbounded liberty of sensual pleasures. For that looks like a despair of futurity; as if a day were a mighty gain for eating and drinking, because to-morrow we must die. An abstemious shyness here is comely; a tasting only the delights, whereof others suffer themselves to be ingulphed; a prudent reservedness and restraint, so as that what shall cause with others an unbeseeming transport and diffusion of themselves, be entertained, not with a cynical morosity, but a pleasant composure and well-ordered complacence; keeping a due and even distance between levity and sourness. Yet there is a natural

retiredness in some men's tempers; and in others an aversion to pleasures, proceeding only of a rational estimate of their emptiness and vanity in themselves, which may, however, much fall short of what the present case requires; the exigency whereof is no way satisfied, but where such a moderation is the product of a comparative judgment between the delights of the present and those of the future state:—when one so enjoys any thing in this world, as to be under the power of nothing, because of the more prevailing influence he is under from the power of the world to come; when his faith is the parent of his sobriety, and his denial of worldly lusts flows from the expectation of the blessed hope; when, because he more highly prizes, and lest he forfeit eternal pleasures, he so behaves himself towards all temporary ones, as neither to abuse those that are lawful, nor to be abused by the unlawful; not to exceed in the one, nor to touch with the other.

Thus also ought we to look upon secular honours and dignity; neither to make them the matter of our admiration, affectation, or envy. We are not to behold them with a libidinous eye, or let our hearts thirst after them; not to value ourselves the more for them, if they be our lot, nor let our eye be dazzled with admiration, or distorted with envy, when we behold them the ornaments of others. We are not to express that contempt of them, which may make a breach on civility, or disturb the order and policy of the communities whereto we belong. Though this be none of our own country, and we are still to reckon ourselves but as pilgrims and strangers while we are here; yet it becomes not strangers to be insolent or rude in their behaviour, where they sojourn; how much soever greater value they may justly have of their own country. We should pay to secular greatness a due respect, without idolatry, and neither despise nor adore it; considering, at once, the requisiteness of such a thing in the present state, and the excelling glory of the other: as though in prudence and good manners we would abstain from provoking affronts towards an American sachem, or sagamore, if we did travel or converse in their country; yet we could have no great veneration for them, having beheld the royal pomp and grandeur of our own prince:—especially

he who were himself a courtier and favourite to his much more glorious sovereign, whom he is shortly to attend at home, could have no great temptation to sue for offices and honours, or bear a very profound intrinsic homage, to so mean and unexpressive an image of regality.

It can surely no way become one who seeks and expects the honour and glory which is conjunct with immortality, (Rom. 2:7,) to be fond of the airy titles that poor mortals are wont to please themselves with; or to make one among the obsequious, servile company of them whose business it is to court a vanishing shadow, and tempt a dignified trifle into the belief it is a deity; to sneak and cringe for a smile from a supercilious brow, and place his heaven in the disdainful favours of him who, it may be, places his own as much in thy homage; so that it befalls into the supplicant's power to be his creator, whose creature he affects to be. What eye would not soon spy out the grossness of this absurdity? And what ingenuity would not blush to be guilty of it? Let then the joyful expectants of a blessed immortality pass by the busy throng of this fanciful exchange; and behold it with as little concern, as a grave statesman would the sports and ludicrous actions of little children; and with as little inclination of mind, as he would have to leave his business and go play with them; bestowing there, only the transient glance of a careless or a compassionate eye, and still reserving their intent, steady views for the glorious hope set before them. And with a proportionable unconcernedness should they look on, and behold the various alterations of political affairs; no further minding either the constitution or administration of government, than as the interest of the universal Ruler, the weal and safety of their prince or country, are concerned in them. But how many, under the specious pretence of a public spirit, make it their whole business to inspect and pry into these affairs, even with a most meanly private and interested one; watching over the public beyond the bounds of their own calling, and with no other design than to catch at an opportunity of serving their own turns! How many that stand perpetually at a gaze, in a suspenseful expectation how things will go; either joying or hoping to

behold any favourable prognostics to the party whereto they have thought fit to addict themselves; glad or desirous to see it engross power, and grasp the sum of things; not from any sense of duties towards God's vicegerents, not from love of justice or study of public advantage, but that the happier lot may befall or remain to themselves! These men are absorbed, and swallowed up of the spirit of this world, contempered only to this sublunary region, concorporate with the earth, so as to partake in all its pangs, and paroxysms, and tremulous motions. By the beating of their pulse you may know the state of things in this lower world, as if they were of the same piece, and had but one soul with it. Let them see times and a state of things on earth suitable to their genius, and you put a new life and soul into them. Reduce them to a despair here, and (so little communion have they with the affairs of that other country,) the most specious inviting representation that can be made to them of the world to come hinders not, but their hearts languish and die, and become as stones within them.

But that lofty soul that bears about with it the living apprehensions of its being made for an everlasting state, so earnestly intends it, that it shall ever be a descent and vouchsafement with it, if it allow itself to take notice what busy mortals are doing in their (as they reckon them) grand negotiations here below; and if there be a suspicion of an aptness, or inclination to intermeddle in them to their prejudice to whom that part belongs, can heartily say to it, (as the philosopher to the jealous tyrant,) "We of this academy are not at leisure to mind so mean things; we have somewhat else to do than to talk of you." He hath still the image before his eye, of this world vanishing and passing away; of the other, with the everlasting affairs and concernments of it, even now ready to take place and fill up all the stage:—and can represent to himself the vision (not from a melancholic fancy or crazed brain, but a rational faith, and a sober, well-instructed mind,) of the world dissolving, monarchies and kingdoms breaking up, thrones tumbling, crowns and sceptres lying as neglected things. He hath a telescope through which he can behold the glorious appearance of the Supreme Judge; the solemn

state of his majestic person; the splendid pomp of his magnificent and vastly numerous retinue; the obsequious throng of glorious celestial creatures, doing homage to their eternal King; the swift flight of his royal guards, sent forth into the four winds to gather the elect, and covering the face of the heavens with their spreading wings; the universal silent attention of all to that loud sounding trumpet, that shakes the pillars of the world, pierces the inward caverns of the earth, and resounds from every part of the encircling heavens; the many myriads of joyful expectants arising, changing, putting on glory, taking wing, and contending upwards, to join themselves to the triumphant heavenly host; the judgment set; the books opened; the frightful amazed looks of surprised wretches; the equal administration of the final judgment; the adjudication of all to their eternal states; the heavens rolled up as a scroll; the earth and all things therein consumed and burnt up!

And now, what spirit is there any more left in him towards the trivial affairs of a vanishing world? How indifferent a thing is it with him who bears himself highest in a state of things whereof he foresees the certain hastening end; though he will not neglect the duty of his own place; is heartily concerned to have the knowledge and fear of God more generally obtained in this apostate world; and is ready to contribute his utmost regular endeavours for the preservation of common peace and order in subserviency hereto! Yet, abstractedly from these considerations, and such as have been before mentioned, he is no more concerned who is uppermost, than one would, passing by a swarm of flies, which hath the longest wings, or which excels the rest in sprightliness or briskness of motion. And for himself, he can insert this amongst his most serious thanksgivings, that while the care is incumbent on others, of watching over the public peace and safety, he may sit still and converse with God, and his own more sedate thoughts. How secure is he in this, that infinite wisdom governs the world; that all things shall be disposed the best way, to the best and most valuable ends; that an afflicted state shall never befall unto good men, but when it is fittest and most conducive it should do so; that the prosperity carnal appetite covets, is never

denied them, but when it would be pernicious! How calm is he in the midst of external troubles! How placid and serene a spirit inhabits his peaceful breast! When all things are shaken round about him, he is not shaken. He bears all sorts of troubles, but creates none to others, nor is disturbed by any himself. But they that delight to see this world rolling or fixed as may most serve their private purposes, and have a perpetual quarrel with it while it looks not kindly upon them, their life is bound up in it; and their pretences to another are but the languid, faint notions of what they never heartily believe nor desire. Upon the whole matter; nothing is more agreeable to this great expectation, than a steady restraint and moderation of our passions towards things without us; that is, all the several sorts of external objects and affairs, that so variously invite and tempt our observation and regard in this our present state.

Secondly. I next add: a further congruity, if we pretend to this expectation, is, that we be not over-much taken up in minding the body. For this looks like a design (or that inconsistent wish) to have our present state perpetuated; and that the thoughts are remote from us of a change for a better. As if, notwithstanding all that the divine goodness hath promised concerning the future inheritance of the free and heaven-born seed, this did still lie nearest to our hearts, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!" and that the belief did miserably languish with us, of any better portion than what our eyes do already behold; together with the apprehension of a spiritual being in us, to be ripened into a complete and actual capacity of enjoying what is better. It is true, that all the exorbitant workings of those meaner and ignoble passions, that are moved by objects and occasions without and foreign to us, have the body for their first and last, their spring and source, their centre and end. But thence it becomes the more proper and requisite, that we draw nearer this their seat and centre, and strike at the root; and in killing that inordinate love and solicitude for the body, mortify them all at once. We are, indeed, so far to comply with the pleasure of our Maker, as not to despise the mean abode which he hath assigned us for awhile in the body: but withal, to take heed lest we so cross and resist it, as to make caring

for the body our whole business; which he hath only enjoined us in subserviency to an unspeakably greater and more important business. Its health and welfare ought upon very valuable accounts to be carefully preserved by all prudent means: but to indulge its slothful desires, and comply with its licentious wild cravings, is far beneath us, a base unmaning of ourselves; and would signify, as if so absurd a conceit had passed with us into a settled judgment, that a reasonable immortal spirit was created only to tend and serve a brute. It is monstrous to behold, with how common consent multitudes that professedly agree in the belief of the immortal nature of their souls, do yet agree to debase and enslave them to the meanest servility to their mortal bodies; so as these are permitted to give laws to them, to prescribe them rules of living, and what their daily employment shall be. For observe the designs they drive, and what is the tendency of their actions and affairs; (whence the judgment is to be made concerning their inward thoughts, deliberations, and resolves,) and is not the body the measure and mark of them all? What import or signification is there, in this course, of a design for futurity? And (which increases the folly of it to a wonder) they can make a shift to go on thus from year to year, and take no notice of the absurdity! They agree to justify each one himself, and one another. The commonness of the course takes away all sense of the horrid madness of it. And because each doth as the rest do, they seem to imagine they all do well, and that there is nothing exceptionable in the case; and go on, as the silly sheep, *Non quâ eundum est, sed quâ itur*: "not the way they ought, but which they see others go before them."—Sen.

But, if any place could be found for calm and sober thoughts, what would be reckoned a greater impertinency, than to be at so great pains for maintaining a bodily life without considering what that life shall serve for; to employ our utmost care to live, but to live for we know not what? It becomes us to be patient of the body, not fond; to treat and use our bodies as things shortly to be put off and laid aside; to care for them, not for their own, but the works' sake we have to do in them; and leave it to them to indulge and pamper the body, who

expect never to live out of it:—not to concern ourselves, that the circumstances of our bodily state be such as will gratify our appetites, but answer the ends for which our Maker thought fit we should live awhile in the body; reckoning with ourselves, we are lodged in these mean receptacles (though somewhat commodiously, yet) but for a little while, and for great purposes, and more minding our journey and home, than our entertainment in our inn; contentedly bearing the want of bodily accommodations that are not easily to be compassed, and the pressure of unavoidable bodily infirmities; not much pitying ourselves because of them; nor deeply regretting it, if wants and pains pinch our flesh; nay, though we see the outward man perishing, so we can but find the inward renewing day by day.

Thirdly. That we set ourselves with the whole intention of our souls, to mind the concernments of the future state, the invisible things of the other world; and direct the main stream of our thoughts, desires, hopes, and joys, thitherward. For how highly justifiable and becoming is it, that we principally mind the state and things we are made for! We should therefore make these familiar to ourselves, and use our spirits to these more noble and pleasant themes: recounting often, how unworthy it is of them to grovel in the dust, or choose the objects of their converse by such measures only as are taken from sense. It is an iniquity which, though God may be so gracious to us as to forgive, should we not easily forgive to ourselves, that we have so often chosen to converse with empty trifles, while so great things have invited our thoughts in vain. Their remoteness from sense hath little of excuse in it, and unworthy a reasonable creature. Methinks they should be ashamed to allege it, who consider themselves furnished with an intellectual power, that doth in many other instances, control the judgment of sense, and impeach it of falsehood. Would we not blush to profess it for a principle, that there is nothing real that exceeds the sphere of our sense? We would reckon it a part of modesty not to ascribe too much to our own understandings, or presume too far upon our intellectual ability, against the judgment of sage and knowing persons. How is it, then, that we think it not immodest to oppose the apprehensions of our

dull and incapacious sense, to the common faith and reason of all good and wise men that are or have been in the world, as well as our own? If we have not seen what the state of things is in the other world, are we not told? And have we not enough to assure us, that it is He hath told us, whose nature cannot suffer him to impose upon us, or represent things otherwise than they are? Who else can be the author of so common a persuasion? If any man had been the first inventor of the opinion,—that there is another state of things to succeed to this, would he not have assumed it to himself, that he was so? Would he not have owned it, and gloried in it? Or would not some or other of his proselyted disciples have preserved his name and memory, and transmitted them to posterity? Could so vast a sect be without a head or master, known and celebrated among men? Less plausible opinions find some owners; why is it not said who was the first broacher of this? And if he can find no other parent for it, but he who was the Parent of our beings, how grateful should such a discovery be to us, both for his sake and its own! Upon his account, we should surely think it worthy to be believed; and upon its own, to be considered and seriously thought on, with greatest delight and sense of pleasure.

Many things that we reckon considerable upon much lower accounts, we so believe, as to let them engage our hearts, and influence our practice, upon much lower evidence. How entirely are men's spirits taken up many times about meaner matters, whereof they have only a (much more uncertain and fallible) report from one another! What pretence can we have, less to regard the testimony of Him that made us, discovering to us things so great, so important, so rational in themselves, even though they had not been so expressly revealed? Let us therefore drive the matter to a clear and short issue, and come to a resolution with ourselves; have we reason to believe such things, or no? If we can so far impose upon ourselves, as to think we have not; or be tempted into so abject, so unrequired, and so unwarrantable a self-denial, so base an esteem of our own beings, as to account the things of this earth and present world have enough in them to answer any ends we can suppose ourselves made for; let us

no longer mock the world, by pretending to believe what we believe not. But if this be our settled judgment, and we will avow and own it, that we believe these things; let us no longer expose and make ourselves ridiculous, by counteracting our own professed belief in matters of such moment, pretending to believe, and disregarding them at the same time. It is absurd and foolish, to believe such things and not mind them much, or not let our souls and our practice be commanded and governed by them; not to have our desires, and cares, and hopes, and joys, influenced thereby to the uttermost. How rational is it here, to be deeply solicitous that by the unsuitableness of our own spirits we defeat not our own expectations! How pleasant and delectable (that danger being provided against,) to sit down and compare our present with our expected state; what we are, with what we hope to be ere long! To think of exchanging shortly, infirmity, pollution, darkness, deformity, trouble, complaint; for power, purity, light, beauty, rest and praise;—how pleasant, if our spirits be fitted to that state! The endeavour whereof is a further congruity in the present case, namely,—

Fourthly. That we make it our principal business to intend our spirits, to adorn and cultivate our inward man. What can more become us, if we reckon we have somewhat about us made for immortality, than to bestow our chief care upon that immortal part? Therefore, to neglect our spirits, confessedly capable of so high an estate, to let them languish under wasting distempers, or lie as the sluggard's field, overgrown with thorns and briars, is as vile a slur as we can put upon ourselves and our own profession. We should therefore make this the matter of our earnest study, what would be the proper improvements and ornaments of our spirits, and will most fitly qualify them for the state we are going into; and of our daily observation, how such things thrive and grow in us. Especially, we should not be satisfied, till we find in ourselves a refinedness from this earth, a thorough purgation from all undue degrees of sensual inclination and affection, the consumption of our dross by a sacred fire from heaven, a spirit of judgment and of burning; an aptitude to spiritual exercises and enjoyments, high complacency in

God, fervent love, a worshipping posture of soul, formed to the veneration of the eternal wisdom, goodness, power, holiness; profound humility and abnegation of ourselves; a praiseful frame of spirit, much used to gratulations and thanksgivings; a large and universal love, imitating as much as is possible the divine; a proneness to do good to all; a steady composure and serene temper of spirit, the repose and rest of a contented mind, not boisterous, nor apt unto disquiet, or to create storms to ourselves or the world, every way suitable to the blissful regions, where nothing but perfect purity, entire devotedness to God, love, goodness, benignity, well-pleasedness, order, and peace, shall have place for ever.

This we ought to be constantly intent upon as the business of our lives, our daily work, to get our spirits so attempered and fitted to heaven, that if we be asked, "What design we drive? What are we doing?" we may be able to make this true answer, "We are dressing ourselves for eternity." And since nothing is required hereto, that is simply impossible, nothing but what is agreeable to our natures, and would be a perfection to them; how worthy and commendable an ambition were it, to be always aspiring, not to rest or take up beneath the highest pitch of attainable excellency in these kinds; reckoning every degree thereof a due to our natures, and that they have not what belongs to them, while any thing of real intrinsic moral goodness is yet wanting; and not only due, but necessary, and what we shall have need of in reference to the state we are shortly to enter upon; that except such things be in us, and abound, we cannot have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom! And should we, pretending to such an expectation, omit such endeavours of preparing ourselves, it were a like thing as if an unbred peasant should go about to thrust himself, with an expectation of high honours and preferments, into the prince's court; or as if a distracted man should expect to be employed in the greatest and most intricate affairs of state; or an uninstructed idiot take upon him to profess and teach philosophy.

Therefore let us consider: Are we conscious of no unfitness for that blessed state; to dwell in the presence of the holy God, to be associated with the heavenly assembly of pure intellectual spirits, to consort and join with them in their celebrations and triumphant songs? Can we espy no such thing in ourselves, as an earthly mind, aversation to God, as pride, disdain, wrath, or envy, admiration of ourselves, aptness to seek our own things, with the neglect of others, or the like? And do not our hearts then misgive, and tell us we are unready, not yet prepared to approach the divine presence, or to enter into the habitation of his holiness and glory? And what then have we to do, but set ourselves to our preparatory work; to set our watches, make our observations, take strict notice of all the deflexions and obliquities of our spirits, settle our methods, and hasten a redress? Do not we know this is the time and state of preparation? And since we know it, how would the folly torture us, by reflection, of having betrayed ourselves to a surprisal! None are ever wont to enter upon any new state without some foregoing preparation. Every more remarkable turn or change in our lives is commonly (if at all foreknown) introduced by many serious forethoughts. If a man be to change his dwelling, employment, condition, common discretion will put him upon thinking how to comport with the place, business, converse, and way of living he is next to betake himself to. And his thoughts will be the more intense, by how much more momentous the change. If he be to leave his country, with no probability of returning; if he be designed to a station, the circumstances whereof carry any thing of awfulness in them; if to public business; if on court attendances; with what solemnity and address are such things undertaken! How loath and ashamed would one be, to go into such a condition, being totally unapt, not at all knowing how to behave himself in it! But what so great change as this can the nature of man admit, that a soul, long shut up in flesh, is now to go forth from its earthly mansion, and return no more; expecting to be received into the glorious presence of the eternal King, and go act its part among the perfected spirits that attend his throne? How solicitous endeavour of a very thorough preparation doth this case call for! But how ill doth the common

course of men agree to this, who never have such matters in their thoughts, who so much neglect not their very hogs as they do their spirits!

Fifthly. That we have much conversation with God. He is the only full and permanent good; therefore the endeavour of becoming very inward with him, doth best agree with the expectation of a state perfectly good and happy. To expect this, and converse only with shadows and vanishing things, is to expect to be happy without a happiness; or that our happiness should betide us as a casual thing, or be forced upon us at last whether we will or no. But since our happiness in God is on his part not necessary, but vouchsafed and gratuitous, depending on mere good pleasure; is it our best way of ingratiating ourselves with him, to neglect him, and live as without him in the world; to keep ourselves strangers to him all our days, with a purpose only of flying to him at last, when all things else that were wont to please us are vanished and gone? And if we could suppose his wisdom and justice to admit his forgiving so provoking contempt of him, and receiving an exiled soul forced out of its earthly abode, that, to the last moment of it, would never look after him, or have to do with him; yet can it be supposed, that its own habitual aversion to him could allow it to be happy in him, especially being increased and confirmed by its consciousness and sense of guilt? How can these but make it banish itself, and in a sullen enmity and despair perpetually flee the divine presence? What can in this case be more natural to it, than to give up itself to eternal solitary wanderings, as a fugitive from God; to affect to be ever enwrapt in its own darkness, and hidden from his sight; and be an everlasting tormentor to itself? Can we be happy in him whom we do not love; or love whom we will not know, or be acquainted with?

What sure ground of hope can we imagine to ourselves, that our reconciliation and acquaintance with God shall ever be brought about, if it be not done while we are here in the body? Will we be so vain, as to cherish a hope that not only affronts the visible import of God's revelation, but the very reason of things, and the natural

tendency of our own spirits? Nor, indeed, (if we would consider better) can we possibly hope for what we desire not, or whereto our hearts are in an habitual disaffection; otherwise than (in the present case) negatively, and that our infidelity permits us not to fear the contrary. Yea, and the lively hope of a blessedness in God, as it includes desire, would certainly infer that purity (the image of his own) that could never fail to incline our hearts to him, and which would habituate us to a course of walking with him in inward communion. And this were comely and agreeable to our pretences, if, while we profess ourselves made for another state, we retire ourselves from the fading things that put a vanity into this, and single out, by our own choice, the stable good which we expect ever to enjoy. How befitting is it to pass by all things with neglect, and betake ourselves hither with this sense; "Lord, I have viewed the world over, in which thou hast set me; I have tried how this and that thing will fit my spirit and the design of my creation, and can find nothing in which to rest, for nothing here doth itself rest; but such things as please me for awhile, in some degree, vanish and flee as shadows from before me. Lo, I come to thee, the eternal Being, the Spring of life, the Centre of rest, the Stay of the creation, the Fulness of all things! I join myself to thee; with thee I will lead my life and spend my days, with whom I aim to dwell for ever, expecting when my little time is over to be taken up ere long into thy eternity!"

Sixthly. And since we, who live under the gospel, have heard of the Redeemer, of the dignity of his person, of his high office and power, of his merciful design and great achievements for the restoring of lapsed and lost souls; it is most agreeable to our apprehensions of the vanity of this present state, and our expectations for the future, that we commit ourselves to him: that with entire trust and love, devotedness and subjection, we give ourselves up to his happy conduct, to be led by him to God, and instated into that eternal blessedness which we look for. His "kingdom is not of this world;" as we profess not to be. We cannot be innocently ignorant that its constitution and frame, its laws and ordinances, its aspect and tendency in itself, and the whole course of its administration, are

directed to that other state. "He hath overcome death and him that had the power of it; hath brought life and immortality to light,—is the first begotten from the dead, and the first fruits of them that slept;" hath opened heaven to us, and is himself ascended and entered as our victorious triumphant Captain and Forerunner. He is adorned with highest power, and hath set up a universal kingdom, extended to the utmost bounds of this apostate world, and the vaster regions of innocent and constantly loyal spirits. His proclamations are issued out, his ensigns displayed to invite and call in whosoever are weary of the sin and vanity of this wretched world, of their alienation from the life of God, of living in the midst of death, to join themselves to him, the Prince and Lord of life, and be led by him to the immortal state. If the present state of things appear dismal to us; if we reckon it a woful spectacle to behold sin and death reigning, wickedness and mortality acting their combined parts, to waste the world and lay it desolate; if we would deliver ourselves and escape from the common ruin, are seriously designing for heaven, and that world in which death hath no place, nor any shadow of death; let us betake ourselves to him, enrol our names, put ourselves under his banners and discipline, strictly observing the laws and following the guidance of that our invisible Lord, who will be "Author of eternal salvation to them that obey him, and save to the utmost all that come to God through him." How dear should he be to us! How cheerfully should we trust him, how dutifully serve him, how faithfully adhere to him, both for his own sake, and that of the design he hath in hand for us; and the pleasant savour of heaven and immortality which breathes in both! But if we neglect him, and disown our relation to him; or if we let days and years go over our heads, wherein we drowsily slumber; roll ourselves in the dust of the earth; and while we call ourselves Christians, forget the reason and importance of our own name, and think not of our being under his call and conduct to the eternal kingdom and glory: this is perversely to reject what we say (only) we seek; to disclaim and renounce our pretences to immortality; to blast and damn our own great hopes.

Seventhly and lastly. It is congruous to our expectation of so great things after death, that we live in a cheerful, pleasant expectation of it. For what must necessarily intervene, though not grateful in itself, should be reckoned so for the sake of that which is. This only can upon the best terms reconcile us to the grave, that our greatest hopes lie beyond it, and are not hazarded by it, but accomplished. Although, indeed, nothing were to be expected hereafter, yet so little suitable entertainment doth this world afford to a reasonable spirit, that the mere weariness of beholding a scene of vanity and folly, might well make a recess acceptable. For is it so grateful a thing to observe the confused scramble and hurry of the world; how almost every one makes it his business to catch from another what is worth nothing; with what toil, and art, and violence men pursue, what when they embrace they find a shadow; to see deluded mortals, each one intent upon his own particular design, and most commonly interfering with another's; some imposed upon by others' over-reaching wit, and all by their own folly; some lamenting their losses, others their short and unsatisfying acquisitions; many pleasing themselves with being mocked, and contentedly hugging the empty cloud, till death comes and ends the story, and ceases the busy agitation?—that is, with so many particular persons, not with the world; a new succession still springing up, that continue the interlude, and still act over the same parts, *ad tædium usque!*

What serious person who is not in love with impertinency and foolery, would much regret it, to close his eyes, to have the curtains drawn, and bid good-night to the world, without ever wishing to see the morning of such another day! And even they that have the world most in their power, and can command what they please for the gratifying of their appetites, without the contradiction and control of others, what can they enjoy more to-morrow than they did yesterday; or the next year than this? Is it so much worth the while to live, to see a few more persons bow the knee; to extend power a little further; to make another essay what pleasure sense can taste in some or other hitherto unexperimented rarity;—what more peculiar gusto this or that thing will afford; and try the other dish;—or to renew the same

relishes over again? He whose creative fancy could make him golden mountains in a dream, create him a prince of nations, give him to enjoy the most delicious pleasures of the world in idea, might, with some plausible show of reason, be deemed the happier man, than he that hath and is all this indeed: for his toil is less, and his victories unbloody, his pleasures not so impure. However, one would think, that to such whose utmost attainments end only in the pleasure of their sense, and have but this epiphonema, "Now let us sit down, eat, drink, and be merry," a little time might suffice for business of no more weight; and that no man, after he hath once seen the course of the world, and tasted of its best delicacies, should greatly wish for a renewal or long-continued repetition of so fulsome vanities.

But the most find not the world so kind, and are not so much exercised in the innovating of pleasures as miseries, (changes being their only remedies, as the moralist speaks;) or in bearing (more sadly) the same every day's burden; and drawing out the series of their calamities in the same kind through the whole course of their time. And surely, these things considered, there wants not what might persuade a sceptic, or even a perfect infidel, as to another world, not so much to be in love with this. For upon the whole, let but the case be thus put: Is it not as good to do nothing, as to be busy to no purpose? And again: Is it not as good to be nothing, as to be, and do nothing? Sober reason would judge, at least, there were but little odds. But now; if such considerations as have been mentioned would suffice to state the matter in æquilibrium, to make the scales even; ought the rational, sober belief of a blessed immortality to do nothing to turn the balance? Ought the love of God to do nothing? The desire and hope of a state perfectly good and happy, quiet and peaceful; of living in the region of undefiled, innocent love and pleasure; in the communion of holy and blessed spirits, (all highly pleased, not in their own only, but one another's happiness; and all concentrating in the admiration and praise of their common Parent and Lord;) ought all this nothing to alter the case with us; or signify nothing to the inclining our minds to the so unspeakably better part? Methinks, since we acknowledge such an order of intelligent (and

already happy) creatures, we should even blush to think they should be spectators of our daily course, and (too plainly discovered) inclinations; so disform and unagreeable to all the laws and dictates of reasonable nature! What censures, may we think, do they pass upon our follies! Are those things great in their eyes, that are so in ours? In lesser matters (as some interpret that passage) indecencies are to be avoided, because of those blessed spirits. 1 Cor. 11:10. May we not then be ashamed, that they should discern our terrene dispositions; and see us come so unwillingly into their comfort, and happy state? Although our present depressing circumstances will not suffer us to be in all things, as yet, conformable to their high condition, we should however carry it as candidates thereto; studying to approve ourselves, waiting and longing to be transumed and taken up into it.

And since we have so high and great an expectation, and it is understood and known that the very perfection and end of our beings is no otherwise attainable than by putting off our sordid flesh, and laying aside this earthly appurtenance; that yet there should be so fixed and prevailing an aversion to it, is a most unaccountable thing, and one of the greatest problems in nature. I say, prevailing: for admit, what is like to be alleged, that an addictedness to the body is by natural inclination; ought not the laws of a superior to prevail over those of the inferior nature? and is not the love of God a higher natural law than that of the body; to whom here our service is little, yea, our disservice much; and from whose most desirable commerce we suffer so uncomfortable a disclusion by the sad circumstances of our bodily state? Are we more nearly allied to a piece of clay, than to the Father of our spirits? And again, is not every thing nearest to itself; and obliged to place love there, rather than on any inferior thing (at least) how nearly soever united; since there can be no pretence of any such nearer union, than of a thing with itself? And are not our souls and our bodies (though united, yet) distinct things? Why then should not our souls, that are capable of understanding their own interest, mind that first; intend most their own perfection and improvement, and begin their charity at home? It is not strange,

that what is weaker and more ignoble, should affect union with what is above it, and a spring of life to it: but when it is found burdensome, nothing forbids but that the superior being may be well content, upon fair and allowable terms, to be rid of the burden. Therefore, though flesh and blood may reluctate and shrink at it, when we think of laying it down; yet it becomes immortal spirits to consider their own affairs, and be (more principally) intent upon what will be their own advantage. If so mean a creature as a sorry flea, finding it can draw a suitable aliment from our bodies, affect to dwell there, and is loath to leave us; it were a ludicrous pity to be therefore content to endure its troublesome vellications, because we fear the poor animal should be put to its shifts, and not be otherwise able to find a subsistence. It is true, that the great Creator and Lord of the universe hath not permitted us the liberty of so throwing off our bodies when we will, which otherwise are in dignity far more beneath our spirits than so despicable a creature is beneath them. And to his disposal that hath ordered this conjunction for a time (whether we look upon it as an effect of his simple pleasure, or of his displeasure) we must yield an awful and a patient submission, till this part of his providence towards us have run its course and attained its ends. And then, how welcome should the hour of our discharge and freedom be, from so troublesome an associate! which upon no other account, than that of duty towards the Author of our beings, one would more endure, than to have the most noisome, offensive vermin always preying upon his flesh. At least, (though the consideration of our own advantage had no place with us in this matter,) the same sense of duty towards our great Creator, which should make us patient of an abode in the body while he will have it so, should also form our spirits to a willing departure when it shall be his pleasure to release us thence. But, that neither a regard to his pleasure, nor our own blessedness, should prevail against our love to the body, is the unaccountable thing I speak of. And to plead only, in the case, the corruption of our natures, that sets us at odds with God and ourselves, is to justify the thing by what is itself most unjustifiable; or rather (as some that have affected to be styled philosophers have been wont to expedite difficulties, by resolving the

matter into the usual course of nature) to resolve the thing into itself, and say, it is so, because it is so, or is wont to be; and indeed, plainly to confess there is no account to be given of it: this being the very thing about which we expostulate, that reasonable nature should so prevaricate; the commonness whereof doth not take away the wonder, but rather render it more dreadful and astonishing.

The truth is, the incongruity in the present case is only to be solved by redress; by earnest strivings with God, and our own souls, till we find ourselves recovered into a right mind; into the constitution and composure whereof a generous fortitude hath a necessary ingrediency; that usually upon lower motives refuses no change of climate, and will carry a man into unknown countries, and through greatest hazards, in the pursuit of honourable enterprises of a much inferior kind. It is reckoned a brave and manly thing, to be in the temper of one's mind a citizen of the world, (meaning it of this lower one;) but why not rather of the universe? And it is accounted mean and base, that one should be so confined by his fear or sloth to that spot of ground where he was born, as not upon just inducement to look abroad, and go for warrantable and worthy purposes (yea, if it were only honest self-advantage) as far as the utmost ends of the earth: but dare we not venture a little farther? These are too narrow bounds for a truly great spirit. Any thing that is tinctured with earth, or savours of mortality, we should reckon too mean for us; and not regret it, that heaven and immortality are not to be attained but by dying: so should the love of our own souls, and the desire of a perpetual state of life, triumph over the fear of death. But it may be alleged by some, that it is only a solicitous love to their souls, that makes them dread this change. They know it will not fare with all alike hereafter, and know not what their own lot shall be. And is this indeed our case? Then, what have we been doing all this while? And how are we concerned to lose no more time! But too often a terrene spirit lurks under this pretence; and men allege their want of assurance of heaven, when the love of this earth, which they cannot endure to think of leaving, holds their hearts.

And, (a little to discuss this matter,) what would we have to assure us? Do we expect a vision, or a voice? Or are we not to try ourselves; and search for such characters in our own souls, as may distinguish and note us out for heaven? Among these, what can be more clear and certain than this, that we have our hearts much set upon it? They that have their "conversations in heaven, may from thence expect the Saviour, who shall change their vile bodies (the bodies of their humiliation, or low, abject state,) and make them like his own glorious body." Phil. 3:20, 21. "God, who will render to every man according to his works, will give them that by patient continuance in well-doing seek honour and glory and immortality, eternal life." Rom. 2:6, 7. They that "set their affections (or minds) on the things above, not those on the earth; when Christ shall appear, who is their life, shall appear with him in glory." Col. 3:2–4. Mistake not the notion of heaven, or the blessedness of the other world; render it not to yourselves a composition of sensual enjoyments; understand it (principally) to consist in perfect holiness and communion with God, (as his own word represents it, and as reason hath taught even some pagans to reckon of it;) and you cannot judge of your own right by a surer and plainer rule, than that eternal blessedness shall be theirs, whose hearts are truly bent and directed towards it. Admit we then this principle; and now let us reason with ourselves from it: we have a discovery made to us of a future state of blessedness in God, not as desirable only in itself, but as attainable and possible to be enjoyed, (the Redeemer having opened the way to it by his blood, and given us, at once, both the prospect and the offer of it,) so that it is before us as the object of a reasonable desire. Now, either our hearts are so taken with this discovery, that we above all things desire this state, or not. If they be, we desire it more than our earthly stations and enjoyments, are willing to leave the world and the body to enjoy it; and so did falsely accuse ourselves of a prevailing aversion to this change. If they be not, the thing is true, that we are upon no terms willing to die: but the cause is falsely, or partially assigned. It is not so much because we are unassured of heaven, but (as was above suspected) because we love this world better, and our hearts centre in it as our most desirable good.

Therefore we see how unreasonably this is often said, we are unwilling to change states, because we are unassured. The truth is, they are unassured, because they are unwilling; and what then ensues? They are unwilling, because they are unwilling. And so they may endlessly dispute themselves round, from unwillingness to unwillingness. But is there no way to get out of this unhappy circle? In order to it, let the case be more fully understood: either this double unwillingness must be referred to the same thing, or to diverse: if to the same thing, it is not sense; they say what signifies nothing; for being to assign a cause of their unwillingness to quit the body, to say because they are unwilling, (viz. of that,) is to assign no cause, for nothing can be the cause of itself: but if they refer to diverse things, and say, they are unwilling to go out of the body, because they are unwilling to forsake earth for heaven; the case is then plain, but sad; and not alterable, but with the alteration of the temper of their spirits. Wherefore let us all apply ourselves (since with none this is so fully done, that no more is needful) to the serious endeavour of getting our souls purged from the dross of this world, and enamoured of the purity and blessedness of heaven, so the cause and effect will vanish together; we shall find that suitableness and inclination in our spirits to that blessedness as may yield us the ground of a comfortable persuasion that it belongs to us; and then not be unwilling, though many deaths stood in our way, to break through to attain it.

MONERGISM BOOKS

The Vanity of this Mortal Life, by John Howe, Copyright © 2022

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored

in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions April 2022. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068