

IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE
GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD.

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE KING CHARLES II.

FEBRUARY 10. 1678.

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LATE PROVOST OF EATON.

PSALM xcvi. 1.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice;—



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S E R M O N.

ECCLES IX. 2.

There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked

THE argument of the Epicureans, against Providence, agrees well with their doctrine concerning the beginning of the world, and is every whit foolish and unreasonable.

They tell us, that such an attendance upon the works of nature and the actions of men, as Providence implies, is too mean for God's infinite greatness, and too troublesome for his complete happiness; that his enjoyments and satisfactions would be interrupted with cares; that he must be wearied with the endless continuance, and distracted with the infinite variety of the things that men are too inconsiderable, for him to regard what they do; that he is so far from being concerned, or being either pleased or angry with them, that he is so much as a spectator of their actions: worshipping, blaspheming him, doing right or wrong to one another is all alike; nothing can move him to take notice, nor help to interpose, or meddle to do them either good or harm. This kind of reasoning was justly despised for the weakness in it, and justly suspected to be rather a crafty insinuation of Atheism, and a pursuit of a design against religion, than a way of good and sensible arguing, even in their own opinion.

How could men, that discourse clearly and consistently in many other matters, fall into such a gross mistake as to conclude concerning the nature of God, who is infinitely perfect, from the defects and imperfections of a man?

Because we cannot attend long, nor to many things at once, but are tired with thinking, and perplexed

doubts, wavering and uncertain to resolve, erring in the choice of our end, and when that is well chosen, easily bewildered and lost in our way: therefore, infinite Knowledge, and almighty Power, must be liable to the same conveniences with our ignorance and weakness.

Plainly to repeat such an argument, is enough for the answer to it

The more usual objection against Providence is more difficult, which . . . that have treated upon that subject have thought worthy of a very serious consideration.

If God govern the world, how come things to pass, so unlikely to be suffered by infallible wisdom and justice.

What rule is it by which he distributes good and evil things?

How must we defend his goodness, when the righteous are in adversity, and the wicked prosper?

Why do not things befall men according to their works, but oftentimes there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous! Eccles. viii. 14. "How come all things alike unto all, one event to the righteous and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not? as is the good, so is the sin; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath."

It is no wonder that these should be hard questions to them who knew nothing certainly of rewards and punishments after death.

But it would seem strange, that they who were better instructed by revelation, should be at a stand sometimes, and doubtful what to resolve; if every day's experience did not teach us how apt even wise men are toarken to the suggestions of passion against reason, and break out into hasty expressions, contrary to their usual persuasion

Job complains, "Wherefore do the wicked live, because old, yea, are mighty in power? their houses are secure from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them," Job. xxix 7, 9.

David saith of himself, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not

in trouble, as other men; neither are they plagued like other men,' Psalm lxxiii 3. 5.

He was ready to conclude, that he had been a good man to no purpose, ' Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For the day long, I have been plagued, and chastened every morning ' verse 13, 14.

They were tempted to a profane misbelief; their thoughts were discomposed, for a little while, but presently setled again; as appears in the process of the discourse, in which they recover into the way of reasoning aright concerning these things, and answer their own objections.

Solomon calls this an evil under the sun, that there is one event to all: Eccles. ix. 3. Not that he either doubts of, or blames God's Providence, but the great evil spoken of is the evil of men's foolish construction of a false consequence, mentioned in the words following. ' Yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live ' This seems to be the same effect of the same cause, which is plainly described, Eccl. viii 1.. ' Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set to evil '

But whatever those men, who would by all means discharge themselves of the fear of God, may be forward to infer from this uncertainty of events, either that there is no Providence, or, that God is unconcerned whether men be just or unjust; it will appear, when the whole matter is laid together, that their inference is rash and ill-grounded; that reason, as well as religion, is against them; but this order in the government of the world is necessary to the wisdom, and consistent with the justice of God, and with his goodness too, and with David's testimony concerning him, Psalm. xi 7 ' The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold it upright.'

It is not that very often one event of health is sent to the good, and peace and war, victory and calamity be given to the wicked, of which consequence is a proof enough, without the

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thority of the scriptures: But this is no argument against Providence, as will appear, if these three things be considered.

- I. That for the same things uncertainly and indifferently to befall the righteous and the wicked in this life, is unavoidably necessary
- II. That they who from thence object against Providence, are no competent judges in the case, and suppose in their objection that which is false.
- III. That, however, the day of judgement is sufficient answer to their objection.

I. For the same things uncertainly and indifferently to befall the righteous and the wicked in this life, is unavoidable necessary.

If prosperity and affliction were the certain effects of God's love and hatred, the constant marks of his favour and displeasure, it would be impossible to reconcile what we see every day, with what we are taught to believe. But prosperity and affliction have other causes, and there is a necessity of their happening uncertainly, 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked,' as well from the nature of men, as from their relations and mutual dependencies, and from the order of this life to the next as a state of probation. This necessity will be evident if we consider,

1. There must be 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked,' because men have the same dominion over their own actions, and do that which themselves choose to do.

The fire and hail, the ice and snow fulfil the will of God, the plants flourish and wither, and the seasons change, and the heavenly bodies move exactly according to the intention and design of their maker, not by sense and knowledge in them, but by necessity of nature. But man is endued with knowledge, and must fulfil the will of God in another way, as directed by a rule, and persuaded by sufficient motives; not constrained by almighty Power, as the mechanical world, but submitting freely to the sovereign authority of God, who hath shew-

ed him the end of his creation, and expects from him a reasonable service, and hath set before him good and evil, life and death, that he may chuse either obedience and its reward, or sin and its punishment.

This is man's nature, and God's way of governing it. And tho' sometimes he changes the hearts of men, alters their inclinations, makes them chuse and resolve as it seems expedient to him, by an influence of their understanding and will, which they neither discern nor can resist; yet the reason of this argument is still the same, because this secret and effectual operation of God doth not take away the natural liberty of man's will, but only over rule and determine it in some particular cases. In others he leaves men to themselves. He commands them to worship him, and suffers them to worship idols; he requires them to be obedient to superiors, and just to one another, and permits them to be guilty of disobedience, rebellion, murder, adultery, robbery, false witness, and all the malice and fraud, and violent perverting of judgment and justice that men are tempted to by ambition and covetousness.

Since therefore a great part of men's calamities happen to them by the wickedness of their neighbours, and wealth and greatness oftentimes are procured by their own wickedness and usurpation, which tho' God disapprove and strictly forbid, and declares that he will punish, yet, if he doth not interpose his irresistible power to hinder, it evidently follows, that the sin of the oppressor may make him rich and prosperous, and the innocent oppressed man poor and afflicted; and that these things may fall out as uncertainly as we see they do, because they depend upon so uncertain a thing as the will of man.

2. There must be 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked,' because a great deal of prosperity or affliction befalls men, not as the reward or the effect of any thing done by themselves, but by descent from their parents, whose virtues and vices have great influence upon the persons and fortunes of their children, by the Providence of God, and by the laws of men, and by the course of nature.

First, Prosperity or affliction happens to the children

from the obedience or sin of the parents, by the Providence of God, according to this declared and oft repeated rule, 'That he visits the iniquity of the Fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him: and sheweth mercy to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments.' Exod. xx. 5, 6 and xxxiv. 7. Deut. v. 9-10. Jer. xxvi. 18.

Of this there are many examples in the scripture, not only when children imitate the sins of their parents, as for instance, when they commit idolatry, and worship the false gods of their fathers; or, when they partake in their guilt, in keeping that which to their knowledge was gotten with a curse for the injustice and extortion with which they were raised, though that injustice and extortion be unknown to them, in which case the estate may be found guilty and the owner acquitted.

Besides all these cases, we find the innocent children suffering for the sins of their forefathers.

Some think it very difficult to make out the justice of this proceeding.

But the sovereignty of God signifies little if it will not serve to defend his justice, in making men rich or poor, live long or die soon: if it be not a satisfactory account for such things, that the supreme Lord gave and took away.

But this way and method of Providence may be also defended, from the usefulness of it to restrain men that believe, from the commission of sin, especially those gross and crying sins for which the sinner shall be punished not in his person only, but also in the families and destruction of his posterity.

Thus the wisdom of God provides, that the antidote shall grow upon the same root from which the poison springs, that the remedy against the most dangerous temptations shall be found in the same affection from whence the temptation arises.

Nothing doth more generally, powerfully and constantly affect men, that the concerns of their children: For their sakes, they will embitter their whole life with

continual cares, patiently undergo the most slavish drudgeries, be guilty of the vilest actions, do any thing, and endure any thing, to leave their posterity more wealthy and a higher place; and yet, if some of them may be believed, they desire neither riches nor honour for themselves: they talk of the world like philosophers: a life is enough for all the necessities and all the delights of nature; a retired life is the most pleasant and the most secure; to sit always at a feast it but to be always tempted to surfeits, and, from numerous attendance, there is more trouble and danger than useful service.

Now, if the desire to leave their posterity great makes this fine talk signify nothing, and forces them, notwithstanding into all the troubles, and dangers, and temptations to which covetous and ambitious men are exposed, let them consider this way of Providence, and if they believe it, it will cure them of that diseased temper of mind for which their philosophy, though true, proves an insufficient remedy: they will be convinced, that a little left to their children, with all the blessings that attend upon religion and faithfulness, and justice and charity, is a better inheritance than the greatest fortunes with a curse: that the biggest heap of treasure is but a poor provision, whilst the father lays up the grains of oppression, 'God lays up his iniquity for his children.' Job. xxi. 10.

Secondly, Prosperity or affliction happens to the children from the virtues or sins of the parents, by the laws of men. A man sees himself entering into possession of the honour and wealth of his ancestors, and rejoices in the blessings of his family which he was born to inherit; but suddenly he finds his condition changed, the descent of the honour of his house intercepted, the estate confiscated, and the blood tainted; and all this, not for his own sin but the sin of his father. This proceeding of the law is prudent, because many men are so desperate, that no consideration of themselves can restrain them from mischief, and yet such men are afraid to ruin their posterity, and by that fear, are withheld from the greatest mischief. And this proceeding is not only prudent but just, because the reason of the public good hath a title in all men's humours and estates antecedent and

superior to their private right, and reserved, either implicitly or expressly, in the laws of all nations

There is another consideration of human laws in this argument of prosperity or affliction by descent, viz. That laws make not a man's virtue his title to his estate, but inheritance, or gift, or purchase, or any just way of acquiring it; nor doth a man forfeit what he hath, by the most common vices; so that a foolish and riotous heir of a provident father justly possesses that wealth and plenty which he abuses, and turfeits upon, and wastes prodigally, till it be all gone, and leaves, perhaps, to a wife and good son all the calamities of poverty, and more; for mere poverty is not so great an affliction, as poverty after riches and want after abundance.

To conclude; there is a descent of good and evil, by the course of nature. A riotous man may have received from his temperate and healthful parents such a vigorous and firm constitution as will endure great, and long, and frequent debauches before it be quite broken, and this man's sober and temperate son, notwithstanding all his care and good government for himself, may be sick for those debauches, and feel those pains and aches which his fathers excess deserved; for, in this sense too, 'the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children.'

Now, if parents, being evil themselves; may have good children, and, being good themselves; may have evil children, and may have children like themselves, whether they be good or evil, and yet prosperity or affliction shall befall these children by the actions of their parents; it must necessarily follow, that these things are uncertain, and that there must be 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked'

3 There must be 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked' because they are so mixt together in their persons, and interests, and employments, and places of abode, that they cannot be distinguished in the events that befall them. They march and fight in the same army, and fare alike in danger or safety, abundance or famine, conquest or defeat. They live together in the city, and must breathe in the same wholesome or infected air. They sail in the same ships, and the hazards of the sea,

forms or good weather, fair or cross, a safe arrival or ship wreck are alike for them both. They eat of the delicious or coarse fare, the plentiful or scarce provision at the same table.

Good and bad men are mix'd in the world as the tares and the wheat in the parable: if you will have the wheat grow, the tares must grow too; if you will pull up the tares the roots are intangl'd, and the wheat must come up with it; they cannot be parted till the harvest; then the wheat must be gather'd into the barn by itself, and the tares burnt. So shall the good and bad, who must for a while live together, and take part one with another in such things as happen, be for ever divid'd at the 'resurrection of the dead.'

Then the believing husband and the unbelieving wife, the religious parents and ungracious children, the just magistrate and the seditious and unruly people, the good and charitable man and his envious and malicious neighbour, who could not be separated in many of the blessings and calamities of life, shall now for ever be separated, to be happy or miserable alone by themselves.

But whilst they live here, they must share in one another's fortune, and enjoy the same prosperity, or suffer the same affliction together.

4. There must be 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked,' for the more evident and certain distinguishing of them from one another.

The devil's insinuation against Job's integrity would have been unanswerable if it had been true, viz. That his service of God was for the world's sake, that his love would be changed into dispiht, and his prayers into cursing, if he were afflicted. But his behaviour, in the greatest affliction that ever befel a mere man, was an undeniable proof of his sincerity. Those in whom the love of the world is the ruling affection, as the case now stands, trouble not yourselves much about religion or justice. Virtue sometimes helps a little, but more often hinders them from attaining their end; at least they think so; yet these men would be very devout and precise, if by such means they might be rich and great, and enjoy all manner of pleasure; and have satisfaction to all their des-

res. The men to whom gain is better than godliness, could not be extortioners if more were to be gotten by justice: They would not be cruel and without compassion to the poor, if they believed that their wealth would increase by what they gave away: They would not send their adventures to Arabia and India, if they could have a better market at home; if building the temple, and giving liberally to the altar would return their stock with more profit. If religion were now become the only way for the proud to be advanced, and for the voluptuous to be filled with sensual delights, and for the spiteful to be revenged, what a change would there suddenly be in the manners of wicked men! How reformed would they seem? Very good in outward appearance, and yet as bad as ever; in a garb indeed of religion, but deceiving themselves as well as others with a disguise; 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power; being all the while in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity; lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;' having their hearts full of all the abominations of pride, and the idolatry of covetousness.

Flatterers pretend to be, and sometimes think themselves, sincere and faithful friends; but when the man whom they love so passionately is falling, and they get as far off as they can from the ruins of his greatness, then at last they find out the mystery, if they know it not before, that all their fond and officious service was not respect to him, but themselves; that they did not love his person but his fortune, his gifts, and the benefits they hoped to receive from his power.

Such a discovery doth this way of Providence make, since there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked: since men are poor and despised, notwithstanding their justice and religion, and, as it sometimes happens, the poorer and the more despised for their sake; the men, who care for nothing but this world's good, will be un-just and faithless, and unthankful, and perjured, if it will serve their turn better, 'They will say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And

what profit should we have, if we pray unto him
Job xxi. 14. 15

That which would have been hypocrisy, if religious would have done their business, will be profaneness if will not. That which would have been the secret wickedness of the most close and retired thoughts scarce reflected on by him that thinks it, will now be the open wickedness of word and deed. The man will be known to the world that would have been unknown to himself. He will be thus much nearer to repentance, that he cannot be deceived in himself, and think he needs it not.

On the other side, if a man will be religious and just tho' he be ever so great a loser by it, if he will hold fast his integrity in riches and poverty, in honour and disgrace, in good and evil report, when he is advanced and when he is persecuted for righteousness' sake; this will be a demonstration that he fears and loves God above all, that the laws of God are the rules of his life that he makes it his business to be saved, that his religion and worship is not for worldly respects, and that his good actions are not prevented and changed into sin by corrupt ends and motives.

The sum of all these particulars is, that many of the good and evil things of this life, happen to men by the justice or injustice of their neighbour, who have free-will and tho' they are forbidden, under severe penalties, yet they are not irresistibly restrained from doing injury; that men are prosperous or afflicted by the virtues or vices of their parents; that the good and bad are so mixed that they cannot, in many cases, but fare alike; and that the distinction betwixt the good and the bad is thereby made much more evident and undeniable; and therefore there must be one event to the righteous and to the wicked.

But for a further answer, all is not true that is implied in this objection. For,

II It will appear, that they who make this objection against Providence are not competent judges of that which their objection supposes

It is supposed in this objection that the righteous endure so much grief, and the wicked enjoy so much plea-

... God's love to the righteous
... he take notice and be con-
cerned in ... which happens.

The manner to judge of this supposition, let two things
be considered. 1. That by the outward estate of men
we know very little of their present grief or pleasure, we
cannot infer from thence which is the good and which
is the bad condition.

1. By the outward estate of men we know very little
of their present grief or pleasure. That is a secret thing
and depends upon hidden causes, most of all upon those
prevailing affections that take up and employ their
thoughts.

It is visible who hath lands and great houses, and who
hath none, who is followed by a long train and receives
the respects and the compliments, and who may go whe-
ther he will without any notice; but which of these two
enjoys himself best, and lives most at ease, is still a ques-
tion, which they, who resolve by what they see, are like-
ly to be mistaken in their resolution, to misplace their
envy and pity, to envy the men that are miserable in all
their great pomp and state, and to pity them, who are
happy in their obscurity; to judge unrighteous judge-
ment, because they judge by outward appearance.

Scripture and reason, and experience teach us, that
good men have the most true delight, both in prosperity
and affliction; that they have great peace who love God's
law, and nothing can offend them, Psalm cxix. 165.

In prosperity there are many things contribute to
and improve the joy of the good: A quiet conscience,
trust in God, moderation, humility, Prudence and
temperance, and justice and fortitude which are such
things that men can have nothing more profitable in
their life? Wils. viii. 7.

In ordinary calamity, such as sickness, losses, &c. the
righteous have great relief and ease from their repent-
ance and prayers, and endeavour to make a benefit of
their cross, and humble resignation and submission to God,
in their belief concerning the wisdom and goodness of
Providence; but if they be persecuted for righteous-
ness sake; if the apostles and martyrs suffer for the con-

sion of Christ, it may be a calamity in the judgment
 of their persecutors, but their own sense it is a state of
 joy and triumph. Christ tells his disciples, ' In the world
 ye shall have tribulation but in me ye shall have peace
 Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your re-
 ward in heaven. These things have I spoken that my joy
 might remain in you, and that your joy might be full
 St. Paul exhorts them, ' Rejoice in the Lord always. Be
 careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and
 supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be
 made known unto God; and the peace of God which
 passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and
 minds through Christ Jesus. Rejoice evermore; in
 every thing give thanks.' He gives an account of him-
 self when he was going to his martyrdom not like a man
 overpressed with grief, ' I am now ready to be offered
 and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought
 a good fight I have finished my course, I have kept the
 faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of
 righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge
 shall give me at that day,' 2 Tim iv 6, 7, 8. They
 were imprisoned, and scourged, and bawled, and killed
 all the day long, yet full of consolation. ' They were
 troubled on every side, but not distressed: perplexed, yet
 not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down
 but not destroyed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; ha-
 ving nothing, yet possessing all things.' They suffer
 all that malicious men in power could do, ' but they were
 strengthened with all might unto all patience and long-
 suffering with joyfulness.' They were thought to
 be in great misery, by those who could look no further than
 the outward appearance; but all that while they had the
 mighty support of faith and hope, the strong conso-
 lations of grace and the Holy Spirit, St Stephen's vision
 ' Heaven opened, and Jesus on the right hand of God
 into whose presence, where there is fulness of joy, they
 should make so much the more haste, by how much
 the sharper their sufferings were.

On the other side, men magnify the prosperity of the
 rich, let them be ever so bad, and they call them happy;
 but the account will be another thing, if the

gements be deducted. Their pleasures are short, a blaze
 e crackling of thorns under a pot, 'often interrupted,
 ot by unlucky accidents only, but most of all by their
 wn unruly passions; which are so many vipers, always
 eeling within them, and gnawing through their bow-
 s. 'The wicked are like the troubled sea when it can-
 t rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.' There is
 eace, saith my God, to the wicked, I' a lvi. 10.

What peace can they have who entertain such ene-
 es to peace within themselves? Pride, scornfulness, en-
 , vain glory, foolish hope, insatiable desire; whose en-
 ziments are easily corrupted with discontent; who de-
 se their own success, in things of the greatest value;
 they be disappointed in a trife; whose pleasures are
 en purchased with long and sharp pains, that tread
 on the heels of them. And although conscience seems
 give them but little trouble, to be either reconciled
 what they do, or fall all up, and to observe nothing;
 t every now and then it sears them with dreams, and
 rises them with visions; and upon some surprising
 ident, will be apt to start of a sudden, and awake
 a great affright, and will not, without much ado, be
 ified and laid to sleep again.

This is very often the inside of that gawdy shew that
 e prosperity of the wicked makes. Their afflictions
 not so apt to deceive the standers by; there it is easy
 ee how their sins and unmortified lusts, and evil con-
 nces, increase their torment; they have used religion
 ill to expect any relief from thence; they know not
 v to make God their refuge; they are, it may be, too
 born and desperate to pray at all, or too guilty to
 y with confidence; their pride and haughtiness make
 o more impatient; they break their teeth with biting
 chain; they struggle with that which is too strong
 them; they can neither cast off nor bear their bur-
 ; they have no patience, because they have 'no hope.
 d are without God in a world?

The sum of this consideration is, That whatever the
 dition of men be, high or low, rich or poor, Solo-
 's observation will be found true; that 'God giveth
 man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and know-

ledge and joy, but to the sinner he giveth travail.' Ecc. ii. 26. And therefore they who conclude of men present grief or pleasure by the outward estate, are incompetent judges, and mistake the matter.

But supposing their judgment concerning men's present estate were true, and the calamities were grievous and the pleasures as perfect and entire as they seem: Yet
 2. From the knowledge of men's present grief or pleasure, we cannot infer which is the good, and which is the bad condition.

When the effect of men's fortunes upon their minds and manners is seen, how a lasting contentment is obtained or lost; how the happiness of another life is secured or neglected; then, and not till then, a certain judgement may be made. Now, upon inquiry, it will be found, that, in these respects, both conditions prove an advantage to the good by their good use, and a mischief to the wicked by their abuse of them.

The righteous, in authority, encourage and countenance the good, relieve the oppressed, 'break the jaws of the wicked,' and pluck the spoil out of their teeth. Job. xxix. 7 and by their justice and temperance, and reverence to God and to holy things, bring religion and virtue into more esteem; and do as much as in them lies to convert sinners. However, they are such a check and restraint upon them, that their wicked disposition cannot so openly and boldly discover itself as it would, if they were left alone, both in doing wrong, and enticing others to do the same sins which they commit.

When the righteous abound in wealth, 'they make themselves friends of the unrighteous Mammon;' they give alms, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the fatherless and the widow in their distress; watch and prevent luxury, or pride, or profaneness, or uncharitableness, should turn their temporal blessings into plagues and curses; they trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God, whose gifts they receive with thankfulness and fear; they do good, and are rich in good works as well as great possessions; 'ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time

come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.' (Tim. vi. 18, 19.

The wicked may be in the same prosperity, but with another behaviour. The worse they are, the more they will be tempted and insnared; they who were proud and vain before, will be insensibly led away into more pride and more vanity, forgetful of him who made the difference, easily abused into monstrous conceits of themselves, and the most unjust comparisons of themselves with others, softened so much with delight, that they will be able to endure nothing that is cross to their will and humour, setting no bounds to their enjoyments, impatient of having their present pleasures allayed with consideration of the future, with the fear of God, or the remembrance of death; which, notwithstanding, comes on apace, somewhat the faster it may be, by reason of their pleasures, and if they take no better care, will surprise them altogether unprepared for the change of their pleasant life (if it were granted to be so) into sickness and languishing, and the expectation of death, and the day of judgement.

The difference is no less in the afflictions that befall the righteous and the wicked together: for the wicked, if they continue impenitence, will grow worse and worse, more vicious, and malicious, and sullen, and farther from seeking to God than in their prosperity; but the same condition shall be to the good a monitor to examine themselves, search and try their ways, and be very exact in their reformation, to inquire out and amend their smallest faults, of which in their better estate they took little notice, and contented themselves with being kept back from presumptuous sins; to renew, and confirm, and strengthen their good resolutions, which even lawful delight had made too loose and slack: And whereas, in their sorrows, many of the wicked renounce God, and dishonour him with pride, and stubbornness, and insensibility, and blasphemy, and impatience; they own God's dominion, and humble themselves under his mighty hand and acknowledge his justice, and honour him become men with confession of sin, and repentance, and supplications, and prayers, and thanksgiving.

Thus the same events are to the righteous a nourishing food, or a wholesome medicine, and to the wicked, a sweet or a bitter poison.

If then, by what is visible of men's condition, we cannot judge certainly of their grief and pleasure, and if we could, yet grief or pleasure may either of them be a blessing or a curse, and which it is in a particular case no man can tell, if he know not how either of them will be used, and what effect they will have: Also, if the objection be of no more force, unless it be granted that present delight is good, and pain is evil, it will be plain enough, that something is supposed which is very obscure and doubtful, and hard to be judged of, when this is used as an argument against Providence, that there is 'one event to the righteous and to the wicked.'

III. However, the day of judgement is a sufficient answer to the objection.

The belief and expectation of this was implied in the last particular, as the great reason of the behaviour of the righteous in both conditions, and as their great support in affliction, and the not believing or considering this, or considering it rather with despair than hope, the reason why the wicked are so ill-governed, and often so unhappy in their prosperity, and so comfortless in affliction: But if bad men live in more delight, and good men in more trouble and grief than indeed they do, and God would not interpose his almighty power to alter the course of things; yet, when the wicked 'go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous to life eternal,' Matth. xxv. 46. 'then shall ye ret and discern betwixt the righteous and the wicked, betwixt him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.' Mal. iii. 18. And though men are apt to to that time stands almost still when they feel sharp pain, and the extremity of them makes minutes seem longer than days, as days, in a transport of pleasure, fly swifter than minutes, yet the no proportion betwixt this and eternity will endure all this false reckoning, makes a clear account and unanswerable apology

vidence notwithstanding. When men feel the smart
 their own, or think of their friend's affliction, or their
 ny's prosperity, they are easily deluded with impa-
 ce, or envy, or compassion. But if you would judge
 y how inconsiderable the things that happen now,
 in comparison of an eternal state, look back to the
 iarchs and prophets, to the apostles and martyrs,
 above all, to 'J-sus, the author and finisher of our
 n, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured
 cross, despising the shame and is set down at the
 t hand of the throne of God' Heb. xii. 2. What
 that intoment of life in which they were persecuted,
 eted, tormented, in comparison of all the time since
 or ever to come, in all which they enjoy the most
 and ravishing delights, wherewith God is now re-
 ing their obedience, and humility, and faith, and
 ence? Is the objection against Providence, for leav-
 them exposed to so many calamities, too hard for
 n to answer? Do they think heaven, upon the
 is they had it too dear a purchase? It was expedi-
 and necessary, in pursuance of the wise counsels and
 ooses of God, that they should suffer for a while:
 is God unrighteous? 'Doth he forget their work
 faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope?'
 Paul, when he felt the smart of his present afflic-
 s, called them 'light afflictions, for a moment, not
 thy to be compared with the glory to be revealed.'
 at must he judge of them now, that the afflictions
 past, and remembered only for the help and increase
 is joy, now that he is entered into the possession of
 glorious reward, which he then had only in view
 prospect.

On the other side, whither are the great oppressors
 destroyers of mankind gone? Where is Herod and
 rius Pilate, and the rest of the bloody persecutors of
 st and his saints? What is become of all their pride
 their envied power and glory? Is God their debt or
 for their injustice and blasphemies, and their inso-
 and profane joys? Hath he forgotten what they
 (Or, doth he approve it? Now they know that
 whether they did not believe, or would not confi-

der before; they abated his patience that waited for penitance, and now they feel the punishment of their in the exquisite torments of the soul: and, full of pain and terror, expect greater at the resurrection of the day. If it seem strange to you that God should suffer the righteous to be at the mercy of the wicked, behold the rich man in torment looking up to Abraham, and begging for a drop of water to cool his tongue; and Abraham, without any compassion of his son, defending the justice of God's dealing with him and the poor beggar that lay at his door

Behold the goodness and severity of God!

'His goodness,' leading the righteous into all the way of discipline and trial, proving their obedience in the most dangerous temptations, both from that pleasure which their nature covets, and that pain which their nature abhors: that when the world and the flesh, and the devil have assaulted them with all their weapons, they may get an entire and perfect victory, and their integrity may have the clearest evidence, and they may be confirmed in faith, and made strong, and constant, and persevering in virtue, and, after their good and faithful service, 'enter into their master's joy.

'His severity,' suffering the wicked sometimes to be pampered with fulness of delight, and satisfied in their desires, and sometimes to be afflicted with crosses and disappointments, and tempted with miseries and plagues to the utmost impatience, that they also may be tried, and that the wickedness which would lie concealed for want of occasion, may break out and be brought to light, that in the variety of conditions, they may be led, if they will themselves, into the commission of sins, and may add iniquity to iniquity till the measure be full, that God may be glorified in the day of visitation and the revelation of that righteous judgment (which how hard soever they may seem now) will plainly resolve all the problems and riddles of Providence.

The sum of what hath been said, is, That it is unavoidably necessary for things to fall out to the good and to the bad indifferently and uncertainly: To no judgment can be made by what happens to men, of their

pleasure, nor which of them is good or bad for them: that there will be a day of judgement, wherein every man shall receive according to his works, and therefore is no argument against Providence, that 'there is one vent to the righteous and to the wicked?'

But it may be objected from scripture: How doth this consist with what there is declared, that 'godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is,' 1 Tim vi 8. According to which, we find Moses and the Psalms, and the writings of Solomon and the Prophets, and in the New Testament several expressions which seem to import a promise of prosperity to the righteous.

A sufficient answer to all the places of Scripture that are alledged to that purpose, will be given in some of these three particulars.

1. Abundance of these promises usually insisted on, are made to particular persons or nations, and must not be extended farther, as promises for the performance of which God's faithfulness is engaged, though they may be applied as an encouragement to hope, when there seems to be a parity or advantage of reason in the case. Many things were promised to the patriarchs, and to the captains, and judges, and kings of Israel, and to the prophets, and apostles, and they were assured that these things must happen, for which they had the security of God's word. But it would be a great extravagance for any man else to be assured of the same events by applying those promises. If a soldier be certain that he shall have victory, because it was promised to Joshua, or a sick man that he shall recover, because a prophet was sent to Hezekiah, to tell him that he should be healed, or if a passenger in his ship assure all his company of escape with life when they are driven by a storm upon the rocks, because the angel of God was sent to tell the apostle Paul, 'God hath given thee all them that I wish thee,' Acts xvii. 27. The things may happen accordingly, as the prediction of a false prophet may come to pass by chance, and then they, who use the scripture in this fashion, may talk as they please of the skill and power of faith, and what wonders it can do,

with all the promises that are to be found in the Bible. But if these things happen not, then their confident application to themselves, of promises that were made to others, runs into scandal and blasphemy, and represents God as a deceiver, that promises and does not perform. But though the promises to them, are not promises to us, yet the consideration of them is of great use to engage our obedience, and encourage our hope, when we see how liberally God bestowed upon them temporal blessings; and though we cannot infer from thence that we shall be blessed in the same manner, we may infer the same love and care of us, and acceptance of our faithful service. In this sense, 'whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, thro' patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' Rom. x. v. 4.

2 These promises, which concern all good men, are not promises of prosperity, but of God's protection and care of them in every condition, and causing 'all things to work together for good to them that love God.' Rom. viii. 28. Nothing shall happen to them without his notice and allowance. It may be good for them to be afflicted, and therefore the same love of God sometimes prevents afflictions from befalling them, sometimes delivers them after they have suffered a little, sometimes keeps them for a long time under severe discipline, but comforts and supports them all the while: 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand,' Psalm xxxviii. 23. 2. 'God will not forsake him, nor forget his complaint: If troubles abound, 'Consolation shall abound much more. Tho' the outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day,' 2 Cor. iv. 16. 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,' 1 Pet. ii. 9 either by keeping them out of that condition, which they will be tempted, or so assisting them with his grace, that they shall not fall into that sin (for example, that apostacy) to which they are tempted; that they may fall into that persecution, from whence very strong temptations to apostacy may arise. 'God is faithful.'

1, who will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able; but will with the temptation also make way to escape, that they may be able to bear it, Cor. x. 13. This watching of Providence over the righteous and care for them, and assisting them in every condition with convenient grace, is the sum of those promises which are absolutely made to godliness in the scripture, and especially in the New Testament.

3. Many of the places of scripture most insisted on this argument, are not promises, but general rules, wherein the ordinary method of Providence, and the usual effects of many virtues and vices are declared. Solomon tells us of that wisdom, which consists especially in the fear of God; 'Length of days are in her right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honour,' Prov.

16. 'By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honour and life,' Prov. xxiii. 4. There are many such general rules as these, the reason and truth of which are evident in most cases, and it is as evident, that they will not hold always. In the ordinary course of things, the most strength, and best courage, and the best conduct shall get the victory: Diligence in a probable calling, shall make a man rich; if he be humble, he shall be beloved; if he be faithful, he shall be trusted: he that is prudent and just in his actions shall be esteemed and have a good reputation; but for all that, accidents which no man can foresee or prevent, may interpose betwixt the most lively means and the ends. The chance of war, thieves, robbers, unfaithful servants, treacherous friends, the constructions of jealousy and ill nature, secret whisperings, or open defaming, and false accusing; the pestilence that walketh in darkness, infecting a man's good name, and the arrows which wound at noon-day, may hinder all those virtues of that kind which is also the natural effect and consequence of them. And in such cases, 'The race will not be to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill' Eccl. ix. 11. Those are general rules, but time and chance make many exceptions; from all which it appears consistent

with scripture, as well as reason, that ' there is one
' vent to the righteous and to the wicked.'

The consideration of what has been said, will dispos-
us to be slow in judging our neighbours, and careful in
governing ourselves, as we pass together thro' all the
changes and chances of this mortal life. Events will
no better justify our opinion of men's actions, than ex-
amples will prove the goodness of our own. We must
judge by rules, not by success, and we must live by
rules, not by examples.

Despise no man for his poverty or ill success, lest you
despise a man whom God will honour. ' Bless not the
covetous whom the Lord abhorreth. Let not thine
heart envy sinners: But be thou in the fear of the Lord
all the day long: For surely there is an end, and thine
expectation shall not be cut off ' Prov' xxiii. 17, 18
In affliction be patient. In the day of adversity con-
sider. In prosperity, ' be not high minded, but fear.
Remember, that a low estate may be your great benefit
and security, and that power and riches may be a snare
to their owner. Learn of St Paul, ' In whatsoever
state you are, therewith to be content.' Take in good
part, and make the best use of every thing that hap-
pens, and be well assured, that nothing can happen a
miss, if that be your continual care, which was the re-
sult of all Solomon's study and experience, Eccl' xi.
13, 14, ' Fear God and keep his commandment, for
this is the whole duty of man: for God shall bring e-
very work into judgement, with every secret thing
whether it be good or whether it be evil.'

FINIS.