

DIVISION SECOND.—SINCERITY STRENGTHENS THE CHRISTIAN'S SPIRIT.

'Girt about with truth.'

Having despatched the first reason, why sincerity is compared to the soldier's girdle or belt, and discoursed of this grace under that notion, we proceed to the second ground or reason of the metaphor, taken from the other use of the soldier's girdle, which is, to strengthen his loins, and fasten his armour, over which it goes, close to him; whereby he is more able to march, and strong to fight. Girdling, in Scripture phrase, imports strength. 'Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle,' Ps. 18:39. He 'weakeneth the strength of the mighty,' Job 12:21; in the Hebrew it is, he looseth their girdle, sincerity doth bear a fit analogy. It is a grace that establisheth and strengthens the Christian in his whole course; as, on the contrary, hypocrisy weakens and unsettles the heart. 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' As it is in bodies, so in souls. Earthly bodies, because mixed, are corruptible; whereas the heavenly bodies, being simple and unmixed, are not subject to corruption. So much a soul hath of heaven's purity and incorruptibility as it hath of sincerity. 'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,' ἐν ἁφθαρσίᾳ, with incorruption, Eph. 6:24. The strength of every grace lies in the sincerity of it. So that without any more ado, the point which offers itself to our consideration from this second notion of the girdle, is this,

DOCTRINE. That sincerity doth not only cover all our infirmities, but is excellent, yea necessary, to establish the soul in, and strengthen it for, its whole Christian warfare. 'The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them,' Prov. 11:3. The hypocrite falls shamefully, and comes to naught, with all his shifts and stratagems to save himself; whereas sincerity carries that soul, that dares follow its conduct, safe above all dangers, though in the midst of them. But open the point. There is a threefold strength sincerity brings with it, which the false hypocritical heart wants. **FIRST.** A preserving strength. **SECOND.** A recovering strength. **THIRD.** A comforting strength.

[The preserving strength of sincerity.]

First. Sincerity hath a preserving strength to keep the soul from the defilement of sin. When temptation comes on furiously, and chargeth the soul home, a false heart is put to the run, it cannot possibly stand. We are told of Israel's hypocrisy, they were 'a generation that set not their heart aright'—and what follows?—'and whose spirit was not steadfast with God,' Ps. 78:8. Stones that are not set right on the foundation, cannot stand strong or long. You may see more of this bitter fruit growing on the hypocrite's branches, in the same Psalm, ver. 56, 57. They 'turned back, and dealt unfaithfully; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow.' When the bow is unbent, the rift it hath may be undiscerned, but go to use it by drawing the arrow to the head, and it flies a piece. Thus doth a false heart when put to the trial. As the ape in the fable, dressed like a man, when nuts are thrown before her, cannot then dissemble her nature any longer, but shows herself an ape indeed; so does a false heart betray itself before it is aware, when a fair occasion is presented for its lust. Sincerity however keeps the soul pure in the face of temptation. 'He that walketh uprightly walketh surely,' Prov. 10:9—that is, he treads strong on their ground, like one whose feet are sound—and though stones lie in his way, he goes over them safely; 'but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.' He is like one that hath some corn or other ailment about his feet. Though he may make a shift to go in a green smooth way, yet when he meets with a hobbling stony way, he presently comes down, and falters. Now that this preserving strength, which sincerity girds the soul with, may better appear, it will be requisite to instance in some of those seasons wherein sincerity keeps the soul from the power of temptation, as also some of those seasons wherein, on the contrary, hypocrisy cowardly and tamely yields the soul up into temptations' hands.

1. A false heart usually starts aside, and yields to sin, when it can hide itself in a crowd, and have store of company, under which it may shroud itself. The

hypocrite sets his watch, not by the sun—the word I mean—but by the town clock. What most do, that he will be easily persuaded to do. *Vox populi* is his *vox Dei*. Therefore it is, that you seldom have him swim against the tide of corrupt times. Light things are carried by the stream, and light spirits by the multitude. But the sincere Christian is massy and weighty. He will sooner sink to the bottom, and yield to the fury of a multitude by suffering from them, than float after their example in sinning with them. The hypocrite hath no inward principle to act him, and therefore, like the dead fish, must drive with the current. But sincerity being a principle of divine life, it directs the soul to its way, and improves it to walk in it, without the help of company to lean on, yea against any opposition it meets. Joshua spake what was in his heart, when ten of twelve that were sent with him, perceiving on which side the wind lay, accommodated themselves to the humour of the people, Num. 14:7. The false prophet's pleasing words, with which they clawed Ahab's proud humour, could by no means be brought to fit good Micaiah's mouth, though he should make himself very ridiculous by choosing to stand alone, rather than fall in with so goodly a company, 'four hundred prophets,' who were all agreed of their verdict, I Kings 22:6.

2. A false heart yields when sin comes with a bribe in its hand. None but Christ, and such as know the truth as it is in Jesus, can scorn the devil's offer, *omnia hæc dabo*—'all these will I give thee.' The hypocrite, let him be got pinnacle high in his profession, will yet make haste down to his prey, if it lies fair before him; one that carries not his reward in his bosom, that counts it not portion enough to have God and enjoy him, may be bought and sold by any huckster, to betray his soul, God, and all. The hypocrite, when he seems most devout, waits but for a better market, and then he will play the merchant with his profession. There is no more difference betwixt a hypocrite and an apostate, than betwixt a green apple and a ripe one; come a while hence, and you will see him fall rotten-ripe from his profession. Judas, a close hypocrite, how soon an open traitor! And as fruit ripens sooner or later, as the heat of the year proves, so doth hypocrisy, as the temptation is strong or weak. Some hypocrites go longer before they are discovered than others, because they meet not with such powerful temptations to draw out their corrup-

tions. It is observed that the fruits of the earth ripen more in a week, when the sun is in conjunction with the dog-star, than in a month before. When the hypocrite hath a door opened, by which he may enter into possession of that worldly prize he hath been projecting to obtain, then his lust within, and the occasion without, are in conjunction, and the day hastens wherein he will fall. The hook is baited, and he cannot but nibble at it. Now sincerity preserves the soul in this hour of temptation. David prays, Ps. 26:9, that God would 'not gather his soul with sinners, whose right hand is full of bribes,'—such as, for advantage, would be bribed to sin. To this wicked gang he opposeth himself, ver. 11. 'But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity;' where he tell us what kept him from being corrupted, and enticed, as they were, from God—it was his integrity. A soul walking in its integrity will take bribes neither from men nor sin itself, and therefore he saith, ver. 12, 'His foot stood in an even place;' or as some read it, 'my foot standeth in righteousness.'

3. The hypocrite yields to the temptation, when he may sin without being controlled by man, which falls out in a double case. First. When he may embrace his lust in a secret corner, where the eye of man is not privy to it. Second. When the greatness of his place and power lifts him above the stroke of justice from man's hand. In both these he discovers his baseness, but sincerity preserves the soul in both.

(1.) See how the hypocrite behaves himself, when he thinks he is safe from man's sight. It was the care of Ananias and Sapphira to blind man's eye, by laying some of their estates at the apostle's feet; and having made sure of this, as they thought, by drawing this curtain of seeming zeal between it and them, they pocket up the rest without trembling at, or thinking of, God's revenging eye looking on them all the while, and boldly, when they have done this, present themselves to Peter, as if they were as good saints as any in the company. The hypocrite stands more on the saving of his credit in this world, than on the saving of his soul in the other; and therefore when he can insure that, he will not stick to venture the putting of the other to the hazard; which shows he is either a flat atheist, and doth not believe there is another world, to save or damn his soul in, or on purpose stands aloof off the thoughts of it, knowing it is such a melancholy subject, and inconsistent with the way he is

in, in that he dare not suffer his own conscience to tell him what he thinks of it; and so it comes to pass, that it hath no power to awe and sway him, because it cannot be heard to speak for itself. Now sincerity preserves the soul in this case. It was not enough that Joseph's master was abroad, so long as his God was present. 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Gen. 39:9. Mark, not against his master, but 'against God.' Sincerity makes faithful to man, but for more than man's sake. Joseph served his master with eye-service—he had God in his eye, when Potiphar had not him in his. Happy are those masters that have any who will serve them with this eye-service of sincerity.

(2.) The hypocrite, if he cannot get out of man's sight, yet he may but stand out of the reach of his arm and power, it is as well for his turn, and doth often discover him. How unworthily and cruelly dealt Laban with Jacob, cheating him in his wife, oppressing him in his wages by changing it ten times? Alas! he knew Jacob was a poor shiftless creature, in a strange place, unable to contest with him, a great man in his country. Some princes, who, before they have come to their power and greatness, have seemed humble and courteous, kind and merciful, just and upright, as soon as they have leaped into the saddle, got the reins of government into their hands, and begun to know what their power was, have even rid their subjects off their legs with oppression and cruelty, without any mercy to their estates, liberties, and lives. Such instances the history of the world doth sadly abound with. Even Nero himself, who played the part of a devil at last, began so, that in the Roman hopes he was hugged for a state saint. Set but hypocrisy upon the stage of power and greatness, and it will not be long before its mask falls off. The prophet meant thus much when he made only this reply to Hazael's seeming abhorrency of what he had foretold concerning him. 'The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria,' II Kings 8:13; as if he had said, 'Hazael, thou never yet didst sit in a king's chair, and knowest not what a discovery that will make of thy deceitful heart.' Mark from when Rehoboam's revolt from God is dated. 'And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord,' II Chr. 12:1. Policy bade him conceal his intentions, while [i.e. until] he had settled himself in his throne, lest he

should have hazarded his crown; but that set on sure, and his party made strong, now all breaks out. He is like a false captain who victuals his castle, and furnisheth it with all kind of provision and ammunition, and then, and not till then, declares himself a traitor, when he thinks he is able to defend his treason. But here also sincerity preserves the gracious soul.

Two famous instances we have for this. The one we have in Joseph, who had his unnatural brethren, that would once have taken away his life, yea, who did that which might have proved worse for all that they knew—barbarously sell him as a slave into a strange land—strangely brought into his hands while he was in all his honour and power in Egypt; and now when he might have paid them in their own coin, without any fear or control from man, behold this holy man is lift above all thoughts of revenge. He pays their cruelty in his own tears, not in their blood; he weeps over them for joy to see them, that once had no joy till they had rid their hands of him; yea, when their own guilt made them afraid of his presence, measuring him by their own revengeful hearts, how soon doth he deliver them from all fears of any evil intended by him against them! Yea, he will not allow them to darken the joy which that day had with them brought to him, so much as by expressing their own grief before him for their old cruelty to him; so perfect a conquest had he got of all revenge, Gen. 45:5. And what preserved him in his hour of great temptation? He told them, Gen. 42:18, 'This do, and live; for I fear God;' as if he had said, 'Though you be here my prisoners at my will and mercy, for all that you do to resist, yet I have that which binds my hands and heart too from doing or thinking you evil—I fear God.' This was his preservative;—he sincerely feared God.

The other instance is Nehemiah. Being governor of that colony of Jews which, under the favour of the Persian princes, were again planting their native country, he, by his place, had an advantage of oppressing his brethren if he durst have been so wicked, and from those that had before him been honoured with that office, he had examples of such as could not swallow the common allowance of the governor, without a rising in their consciences—which showed a digestion strong enough, considering the peeled state of the Jews at that time—but could, when themselves had sucked the milk, let their cruel servants suck the

blood of this poor people also, by illegal exactions, so that, coming after such oppressors, Nehemiah, if he had taken his allowance, and but eased them of the other burdens which they groaned under, no doubt he might have passed for merciful in their thoughts; but he durst not so far. A man may possibly be an oppressor in exacting his own. Nehemiah knew they were not in case to pay, and therefore he durst not require it. But as one who comes after a bad husbandman that hath driven his land, and sucked out the heart of it, casts it up fallow for a time till it recovers its lost strength, so did Nehemiah spare this oppressed people. And what, I pray, was it that preserved him from doing as the rest had done? 'But I did not so, because of the fear of the Lord,' see Neh. 5:15. The man was honest, his heart touched with a sincere fear of God, and this kept him right.

[The recovering strength of sincerity.]

Second. Sincerity hath a recovering strength with it. When it doth not privilege from falling, yet it helps up again, whereas the hypocrite lies where he falls, and perisheth where he lies. He is therefore said to 'fall into mischief,' Prov. 24:16. The sincere soul falls as a traveller may do, by stumbling at some stone in his path, but gets up and goes on his way with more care and speed; the other falls as a man from the top of a mast, that is engulfed past all recovering in the devouring sea. He falls as Haman did before Mordecai—when he begins he stays not, but falls till he can fall no lower. This we see in Saul, who was never right. When once his naughty heart discovered itself, he tumbled down the hill apace, and stopped not, but from one sin went to a worse, and in a few years you see how far he was got from his first stage, when he first took his leave of God. He that should have told Saul, when he betrayed his distrust and unbelief in not staying the full time for Samuel's coming—which was the first wry step taken notice of in his apostasy—that he, who now was so hot for the worship of God, that he could not stay for the prophet's coming, would ere long quite give it over, yea, fall from inquiring of the Lord, to ask counsel of the devil, by seeking to a witch, and from seeking counsel of the devil, should, at the last and worst act of his bloody tragedy, with his own hands throw himself desperately into the devil's mouth by self-murder;

surely he would have strangled more than Hazeel did at the plain character Elisha gave of him to his face. And truly all the account we can give of it is, that his heart was naught at first, which Samuel upon that occasion hinted to him, 1 Sam. 13:14, when he told him, 'The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart'—David he meant, who afterward fell into a sin greater as to the matter of the fact than that for which Saul was rejected of God, and yet having but a habitual sincerity as 'the root of the matter in him,' happily recovered out of it, for want of which hypocritical Saul miscarried finally. So true is that proverb, that 'frost and fraud have dirty ends.' Now there is a double reason for this recovering strength of sincerity—one taken from the nature of sincerity itself, the other from the promise by God settled on the soul where sincerity is found.

1. From the nature of sincerity itself. Sincerity is to the soul as the soul is to the body. It is a spark of divine life kindled in the bosom of the creature by the Spirit of God. It is 'the seed of God remaining' in the saint, 1 John 3:9. Now as the seed cast into the womb of the earth, and quickened there by the influence of heaven upon it, doth put forth its head fresh and green in the spring, after the many cold nips it hath had in winter; so doth sincere grace, after temptations and falls, when God looks out upon it with the beams of his exciting grace. But the hypocrite wanting this inward principle of life, doth not so. He is a Christian by art, not by a new nature; dressed up like a puppet, in the fashion and outward shape of a man, that moves by the jimmers which the workman fastens to it, and not informed by a soul of its own. And therefore, as such an image, when worn by time, or broken by violence, can do nothing to renew itself, but crumbles away by piecemeals, till it comes at last to nothing; so doth the hypocrite waste in his profession, without a vital principle to oppose his ruin that is coming upon him. There is great difference between the wool on the sheep's back, which shorn, will grow again, and the wool of the sheep's skin on a wolf's back. Clip that, and you shall see no more grow in its room. The sincere Christian is the sheep, the hypocrite is the wolf, clad in the sheep's skin. The application of it is obvious.

2. The sincere soul is under a promise, and promises are restorative, Ps. 19:7. 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul,' Heb. מַשִּׁיב (mā-

shīb)—restoring the soul. It fetcheth back the soul to life, as a strong cordial one in a fainting fit—which virtue is proper to the promissory part of the word, and therefore so to be taken in this place. Now the sincere soul is the only right heir of the promises. Many sweet promises are laid in for assuring succour and auxiliary aid to bring them off all their dangers and temptations: Prov. 28:18, ‘Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved;’ now mark the opposition—‘but he that is perverse... shall fall at once;’ that is, suddenly, irrecoverably. ‘God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil-doers,’ Job 8:20—he will not take them by the hand, Heb.—that is, to help them up when they fall. Nay, the hypocrite is not only destitute of a promise for his help, but lies also under a curse from God. Great pains we find him take to rear his house, and, when he hath done, he leans on it, ‘but it shall not stand—he holds it fast, but it shall not endure,’ Job 8:15. ‘A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked,’ Ps. 37:16. But why? See the reason: ‘For the arms of the wicked shall be broken; but the Lord upholdeth the righteous;’ ver. 17, 18. The righteous man in that psalm is the upright; by the wicked is meant the hypocrite. A little true grace mixed with much corruption in the sincere Christian is better than the hypocrite’s riches—the great faith, zeal and devotion, he brags so of. The former hath the blessing of the promise, to recover it when decaying; these the curse of God threatening to blast them, when in their greatest pomp and glory. The hypocrite’s doom is to grow ‘worse and worse,’ II Tim. 2:13. Those very ordinances which are effectual, through the blessing of the promise, to recover the sincere soul, being cursed to the hypocrite, give him his bane and ruin. The word which opens the eyes of the one, puts out the eyes of the other; as we find in the hypocritical Jews, to whom the word was sent, to make them blind, Isa. 6:9,10. It melts and breaks the sincere soul, as in Josiah, II Kings 22:19; but meeting with a naughty false heart, it hardens exceedingly, as appeared in the same Jews, Jer. 42:20. Before the sermon they speak fair, ‘Whatever God saith they will do;’ but when sermon is done, they are farther off than ever from complying with the command of God. The hypocrite, he hears from the worse, prays for the worse, fasts for the worse. Every ordinance is a wide door, to let Satan in more fully to possess him, as

Judas found to the sop.

[The comforting strength of sincerity.]

Third. Sincerity hath a supporting comforting strength. It lifts the head above water, and makes the Christian float atop the waves of all troubles, with a holy presence and gallantry of spirit. ‘Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness,’ Ps. 112:4, not only light after darkness, when the night is past, but in darkness also. Out of the eater cometh meat, and out of the strong, sweetness. Those afflictions which feed on, yea, eat out the hypocrite’s heart, the sincere soul can feed on, suck sweetness from, yea, hath such a digestion, that he can turn them into high nourishment both to his grace and comfort. A naughty heart is merry only while his carnal cheer is before him. God tells Israel he will take away her feasts, and all her mirth shall cease, Hosea 2:11. Her joy is taken away with the cloth. Sincerity makes the Christian sing when he hath nothing to his supper. David was in none of the best conditions when in the cave, yet we never find him merrier. His heart makes sweeter music than ever his harp did. ‘My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise,’ Ps. 57:7. The hypocrite’s joy, like the strings of musical instruments, crack in wet weather; but sincerity keeps the soul in tune in all weather. They are unsound bodies that sympathize with the season—cheery in fair, but ill and full of aches in foul. So the unsound heart. A few pinching providences set him going, kill him as doth a sharp winter doth weak bodies. Whereas the sincere soul is never more hale, never more comfortable. Afflictions do him but this courtesy—to call in his affections, which in the summer of prosperity were possibly too much diffused and scattered among creature delights, and unite them more entirely and closely upon Christ, into whose bosom it goes as directly, when storms come, as the bee to its hive; and he must needs be comfortable that hath so soft a pillow to lay his head on as Christ’s lap. Sincerity keeps the soul’s mouth open, to receive the sweet consolations that drop from word and Spirit; indeed all the promises are directed to such. But

hypocrisy is like the squinancy¹ in the throat of the sick man, he burns within, and can get nothing down to quench the fire which his sins have kindled in his soul. Conscience tells him, when sweet promises are offered, ‘These are not for me, I have dealt falsely with God and man. It is the sincere soul God invites; but I am a rotten-hearted hypocrite.’ And how much short comes a poor wretch of Dives in his misery in hell, I pray? Dives burns, and hath not a drop to quench his tongue. The hypocrite in affliction, he burns too, and hath indeed, not a drop, but a river, a fountain full of water, yea of blood, presented to him, but he cannot drink it down, he cannot make any use of it for his good. His teeth are set so close, no key can open them. His hypocrisy stares him in the face; it lies like a mastiff at his door, and will suffer no comfort to come near him. And which is worst—he that hath no bread, or he that hath and cannot eat it? None so witty and cunning as the hypocrite—in prosperity to ward off the reproofs, to shift them from the counsels of the word; and in affliction, when conscience awakes, none so skilful to dispute against the comforts of the word. Now he is God’s close prisoner, no comfort can come at him. If God speak terror, who can speak peace? ‘Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them,’ Lam. 3:65. Sorrow of heart is the hypocrite’s curse from God in affliction; and what God lays on sticks close. The word for sorrow in the Hebrew signifies a shield that fenceth and covers over; and, saith one upon this place, it denotes that disease which physicians call *cardiaca passio*, which so oppresseth the heart that it is covered sicut scuto—as with a shield or lid over it, and keeps all relief from the heart. Such is the sorrow of the hypocrite in affliction, when once his conscience awakes, and God fills him with the amazing thoughts of his own sins, and God’s wrath pursuing him for them. But I shall descend to instance in a few particular kinds of afflictions, and show what comfort attends sincerity in them all.

1. Sincerity supports and comforts the soul under reproaches from men. These are no petty trials; they are reckoned among the saints’ martyrdoms, Heb. 11:36, called there ‘cruel mockings,’ yea, not unworthy

to be recorded among the sufferings of Christ. The matchless patience and magnanimity of his spirit appeared not only in enduring the cross, but in ‘despising the shame,’ which the foul tongues of his bloody enemies loaded him unmercifully with. Man’s aspiring mind can least brook shame. Credit and applause is the great idol of men that stand at the upper end of the world for parts or place. Give but this, and what will not men do or suffer? One wiser than the rest could see this proud humour in Diogenes, that endured to stand naked, embracing a heap of snow, while he had spectators about him to admire his patience, as they thought it, and therefore was asked, ‘whether he would do thus if he had none to see him?’ The hypocrite is the greatest credit-monger in the world; it is all he lives on almost, what the breath of men’s praise sends him in; when that fails, his heart faints; but when it turns to scorn and reproaches, then he dies, and needs must, because he has no credit with God while he is scorned by man; whereas sincerity bears up the soul against the wind of man’s vain breath, because it hath conscience, and God himself, to be his compurgator², to whom he dare appeal from man’s bar. O how sweetly do a good conscience, and the Spirit of God witnessing with it, feast the Christian at such a time! And no matter for the hail of man’s reproaches that rattle without, while the Christian is so merry within doors. David is a pregnant instance for this: ‘By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me,’ Ps. 41:11. How, David? does not thy enemy triumph over thee? I pray see the condition he at present was in. He had fallen into a great sin, and the hand of God was on him in a disease, chastising him for it, it appears, ver. 4. His enemies from this take advantage to speak him all to nought, ver. 5. ‘Mine enemies speak evil of me’—no doubt, charging him for a hypocrite. When they come to visit him, it is but to gather some matter of reproach, which they presently blab abroad, ver. 6; yea, they are not ashamed to say, ver. 8, that an evil disease, or as it is in the Hebrew, ‘a thing of Belial’—that is, his sin—‘cleaveth to him.’ Now God hath met with him;

1. Squinancy, commonly quinsy—an inflammation of the tonsils, or any parts of the throat.

2. Compurgator, one that under oath vouches for the character or conduct of an accused person. From Webster’s — SDB

now he lieth, he shall rise no more; yea, his familiar friend, in whom he trusted, serves him as ill as the worst of his enemies, ver. 9. Was ever poor man lower? and can he say his enemy triumphs not over him? His meaning therefore we must take thus: that notwithstanding all these reproaches have been cast upon him, yet his spirit did not quail. This was above them all. God kept that up, and gave him such inward comfort as wiped off their scorn as fast as they threw it on. Their reproaches fell as sometimes we see snow, melting as fast as they fell. None lay upon his spirit to load and trouble it. And how came David by this holy magnanimity of spirit—these inward comforts? He tells us ‘And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever,’ ver. 12. As if he had said, ‘Thou dost not by me, O Lord, as mine enemies do. They pick out my worst, and revile me for it. If there be but one sore plat—one sinful part in my life—like flies, they light there, but thou overlookest my sinful slips and failings, pardoning them, and takest notice of my uprightness, which amidst all my infirmities thou upholdest, and so settest me before thy face, communicating thy love and favour to me, notwithstanding the sins that are found, mingled with my course of obedience.’ This kept up the holy man’s spirit, and makes him end the psalm joyfully. ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting,’ ver. 13.

We live, Christians, in reproaching times. He that is so over-dainty of his name that he cannot bear to see some dirt, and that good store too, cast upon his back by reviling tongues, must seek a path to travel in by himself to heaven; but, for thy comfort, Christian, sincerity, though it cannot privilege thee from traveller’s fare, and keep thee from being dashed with calumnies, yet it will do thee this kind office, that the dirt which lights on thy coat shall not soak into thy soul, to damp thy joy and chill thy inward comfort. Reproaches without may be comfortably endured, yea triumphantly worn as a crown, if they meet not with a reproaching conscience within. Yea, sincerity will do more than this comes to. It will not only comfort thee under the ‘persecution of the tongue, but of the hand also’—not only quench the fire, which from thence is spit on thy face by tongues set on fire by hell, but it will comfort thee in the very mouth of fire itself, if God shall suffer thee by perse-

cutors to be cast into it. Sincerity makes thee, indeed, fearful to sin. O, thou darest not touch one of these coals; but it will make thee bold to burn, and even hug joyfully the flames of martyrdom when called to them. So little afraid was that sincere servant of Christ, an Italian martyr whom Mr. Fox makes mention of among many other undaunted champions of the truth, that, when the magistrate of the place where he was to be burned, and the officers of the bishop that condemned him, were in a hot contest—wrangling which of them should pay for the wood that should make the fire for his burning—he pleasantly sent to desire them, ‘they would not fall out upon the occasion, for he would take off the burden from them both, and be at the cost himself.’ Blessed soul! he made not so much ado of spending his blood and sacrificing his life, as they about a few pence wickedly to procure the same.

2. Sincerity girds the soul with comforting strength, when conflicting with affliction from the hand of God. Many are the sorts of afflictions with which God exerciseth his sincere servants. To name a few.

(1.) When the Lord toucheth his outward man by sickness, or his inward man by spiritual conflicts, sincerity is a comfortable companion in both. The hypocrite, above all, fears falling into God’s hands. And well he may; for he is able to do him most hurt. Therefore, no sooner does God take hold of his collar, either of these ways, but his joy gives up the ghost. Like some murderer, whose doom is written plain in the law, he gives himself for a dead man, when once he is clapped up in prison. This made Job such an object of wonder to his wife, because he held up his holy course when battered so sadly by the afflicting hand of God, with renewed afflictions—‘Dost thou yet hold thy integrity?’ What! nothing but blows come from God’s hand, and yet continue to bless him? This was strange to her, but not to him, who could call her ‘foolish woman’ for her pains, but not charge God foolishly, for all he smarted so under his hand. Sincerity enables the Christian to do two things in this case, which the hypocrite cannot—to speak good of God, and to expect good from God—and the soul cannot be uncomfortable, though head and heart ache together, which is able to do these.

(a) Sincerity enables the Christian to think and speak well of God. A false-hearted hypocrite, his

countenance falls, and his heart rises, yea, swells with venom against God. Though he dare not always drivel out of his mouth, yet he has bloody thoughts against him in his heart. ‘Hast thou found me, O my enemy?’ saith the wretch. He loves not God, and therefore a good thought of God cannot dwell in his soul. All that God has done for him, though never so bountifully, it is forgotten and embittered with the overflowing of his gall at the present dealings of God to him. He frets and fumes. You shall sooner hear him curse God than charge himself. But the sincere soul nourisheth most sweet and amiable apprehensions of God, which bind him to the peace, that he dare not think or speak unbeseeming the glory or goodness of God; as we see in David, ‘I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou, Lord, didst it,’ Ps. 39:9. This holy man had a breach made both in his body and spirit at this time. He was sick and sad, yet he remembers from whose hand the blow came. ‘Thou, Lord, didst it:’ thou whom I love dearly, and so can take it kindly; thou whom I have offended, and so take it patiently: yea, thou who mightest have cast me into a bed of flames, instead of my bed of sickness; and therefore I accept my correction thankfully. Thus he catches the blow without retorting it back upon God, by any quarreling discontented language.

(b) Sincerity enables the soul to expect good from God, when his hand presseth hardest on body or soul, Ps. 38. Never was David in a worse case for body and soul; it would break a flinty heart to read the sad moans that this throbbing soul makes, in the anguish of his flesh, and bitter agony of his spirit. One would have thought they had been the pangs of a soul going away in despair; yet even in this great storm, we find him casting out his sheet-anchor of hope, and that takes sure hold of God for his mercy: ‘For in thee, O Lord, do I hope; thou wilt hear, O Lord my God,’ Ps. 38:15. This expectation of good from God corrects and qualifies the bitterness that is upon his palate, from his present sorrow. ‘But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me,’ Ps. 40:17. My state at present is sad enough, but my comfort is, ‘I am not cast out of his mind, I know his thoughts are at work to do me good.’ Holy Job proves that he is not a hypocrite—as his friends uncharitably charged him—by this confidence he had on God in the depth of all his afflictions: ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

I will maintain my ways before him; he also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him,’ Job 13:15, 16. As if he had said, ‘If I were not sincere, I durst not appeal thus to God, and comfortably believe, while God is killing me, that he would yet save me, ‘for a hypocrite shall not come before him.’” That is, he dare not thus trust himself in God’s hands, and acquiesce in his promise, when his neck is on the block, and God’s knife at his throat. No; if he could, he would never come in his sight. His conscience tells him God knows him too well to intend him any good, and therefore, when God begins to lay his hand on him—except his conscience be de-dolent and seared, which is the curse which God now and then brands the gross hypocrite with—he presently hath the scent of hell-fire in his soul, in a fearful expectation thereof, and looks on these present afflictions, though but a cloud of a handbreadth, as those which will spread further and further, till the shades of that everlasting night overtake and encompass him in hell’s utter darkness.

(2.) Sincerity comforts the Christian when he wants success, visibly to crown his endeavours, in his place and calling. A great affliction this is, no doubt, to a gracious soul. It is as when a minister of the gospel spends his strength and sweals out his life to a gainsaying people, that sit like stocks and stones under his ministry, no more moved than the seats they sit on and the pillars they lean to; ignorant and profane he found them, and such he sees he is like to leave them, after twenty years, may be, almost twice told, spent among them. This must needs be a heart-aching trial to one whom God hath given a compassionate heart to souls. It costs the mother no small pains to bring forth a living child; but what are the bitter throws of one that travails with a dead child? Such is the travail of a poor minister with a dead-hearted people, yet the portion of none of the meanest of God’s messengers; indeed, God sets his most eminent servants about the hardest work. Now sincerity lightens this affliction, and sends in that which may cheer the soul under it. Paul saw he should not carry all to heaven with him he preached unto—to many the gospel was ‘a savour of death unto death.’ The sweet perfume of the gospel proved a deadly scent to hasten and heighten their damnation. This could not be but sad to so tender a physician—to see his patients die under his hands—yet he thanks God,

that makes him 'triumph in Christ,' II Cor. 2:14. But how can he do this? poor souls drop to hell from under his pulpit hearing him, and he triumph? This is as strange to see the father follow his child's mournful hearse, not weeping, but singing and dancing. Mark, and wonder will cease. He doth not triumph that they perish, but that he is not guilty of their blood; not that they are damned, but that he sincerely endeavoured their salvation. 'For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ,' ver. 17. Had Paul dropped some wild gourd of error into his doctrine, or mingled some ingredient of his own, with what Christ the great physician had ordered, he would have had little list to triumph; but preaching pure gospel, and that purely, with a sincere heart, he might triumph in Christ that made him faithful, and shall triumph over them when he meets them again at the great day at the bar of Christ, where, to their face, he shall witness against them, and vote with Christ for their eternal destruction. Methinks I hear all the faithful ministers of Christ giving an account to him, on whose errand they were sent, in the language of Jeremiah's prayer, 'Lord, we desired the woeful day; thou knowest,' Jer. 17:16, which now hath taken hold of these wretched souls, and which we warned them of. That which came out of our lips, in our preaching to them, was right before thee. The life of their souls was dear and precious to us. We could have sacrificed our temporal lives, to save the eternal life of their souls; but nothing we could say, or do, would stay them; to hell they would go over all the prayers, tears, and entreaties out of thy word, which stood in their way. This will make the sincere ministers of Christ lift up their head with joy, and such forlorn wretches hang down their heads with shame to look Christ or them in the face, though now they can brazen it out with an impudent forehead. So for parents and masters, sincerity in your relations will comfort you, though you see not your seed come up which you have sown upon them in your godly examples, holy instructions, and seasonable corrections. David was one that 'walked in his house with a perfect heart,' Ps. 101:2—careful in the nurture of his children, as appears in his pious counsel to Solomon, I Chr. 28:9, though not without failings. But many of his children were none of the best; one incestuous, another imbruing his hands in his brother's blood, a

third catching traitorously at his crown while he himself was alive—a fact which made this holy man sadly foresee how the squares would go when he was dead and gone. Yet in this great disorder of his family, how comfortable do we find him in his dying bed! 'Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure,' II Sam. 23:5. Surely he had done his duty sincerely. This was his evidence for his interest in the covenant, and the covenant was all his desire and salvation.

In a word, in times of public calamity, when the flood of God's wrath comes rolling in upon a nation, like waves irresistibly, at the wide breach which the high crying sins of the times make, and the few righteous that are found upon the place labour to stand in the gap, by their prayers, begging the life of the nation, but God will not hear, even then sincerity will be a sweet support while we share with others in this common calamity. Thus, indeed, it sometimes falls out—although the righteous ones be, like Noah, Job, and Daniel, beloved of God—that no bail will be taken for a nation under arrest of God's judgments. Jeremiah, he bestirred him zealously for God in testifying against the sins of the times, and for the people faithfully and earnestly with God by prayer; but he could neither convert them by his preaching, nor divert the wrath of God by his praying. The Jews bade him hold his peace, and prophesy no more against them. God stops his mouth also, and bids him pray no more for them. Now in this dismal state of things, what easeth his sorrowful heart, swollen with grief for their sins, and judgments hastening upon them, like an eagle to her prey? Truly nothing can, but the remembrance of his sincerity to God and man in those debauched times. 'Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them,' Jer. 18:20. As if he had said, 'O Lord, though I cannot prevail with this rebellious generation to repent of their sins, or with thy majesty, to repent of thy wrath gone out by an irreversible decree against them; yet remember that I have been faithful in my place both to thee and to them.' Whereas, on the contrary, horror and amazement of spirit is the portion, in such times of public calamity, of hypocrites, as we see in Pashur, Jer. 20; who was a man that bare great sway at court in Jeremiah's time, a bitter enemy to the prophet himself and to the

message he brought from God to the Jews, labouring to soothe up the king and princes with vain hopes of golden days coming—point blank against the word of the Lord in the mouth of Jeremiah. And what becomes of him when the storm falls on that unhappy people? Jeremiah tells him his doom, ver. 4—that God will make him a *magor missabib*—a terror to himself. He should not only share in the common calamity, but have a brand of God's special wrath set upon him above others.

(3.) Sincerity girds the Christian with strength of comfort, when deprived of those opportunities which sometime God had intrusted him with for serving of him. [This is] an affliction which, considered in itself, [is] so grievous to a gracious soul that he knows none he fears more. He could choose any, might he be his own carver, before it; yea, to be poor, disgraced, persecuted, anything rather than be laid aside as a broken instrument, unserviceable to his God. Indeed, he values his life, and all the comforts of it, by the opportunities they afford for the glorifying God. David stops the mouth of his soul, which began to whisper some discontented language, with this, that he should yet praise God. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul, . . . I shall yet praise him,' Ps. 45:5. All is well with David, and no cause of disquiet in his soul, whatever besides goes cross to him, may he but praise God, and have opportunity of glorifying him. Joseph, when God had so strangely raised him pinnacle high, as I may say, to honour in a strange land, he doth not bless himself in his preferment, carnally to think how great a man he is, but interprets the whole series of providence, bringing him at last to that place, wherein he stood compeer to a mighty king, to be no other than giving him an opportunity of being eminently serviceable to God in the preservation of his church, which was at that time contained in his father's family. 'God sent me hither,' saith he, 'before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance,' Gen. 45:7. This holy man made his place give place to the work he was called to act in it for God, counting the honour of his honour, to lie in the opportunity he had by it of serving God and his church. It must therefore needs be a sad affliction to a saint, when such opportunities are taken from him that at anytime he hath enjoyed. But sincerity can make good work of this also, if God will have it so. It is sad to the Christian to be laid aside,

but it is comfortable to him to remember that when he was not, he did not melt his talents away in sloth, or waste them away in riot, but was faithful in improving them for God. He counts it his affliction that God employs him not as he hath done, but he is not sorry that God can do his work without him; yea, it is a sweet comfort to him, as he lies at the grave's mouth, to think that the glory of God shall not go down to the grave with him. Though he dies, yet God lives to take care of his own work; and it is not the cracking of one string, or of all, that can mar the music of God's providence, who can perform his pleasure without using any creature for his instrument. In a word, it is sad to him to be taken from any work wherein he might more eminently glorify God; yet this again comforts him that God counts that done which the Christian sincerely desires to do. David's good-will in desiring to build the temple, was so much in God's account as if he had done it. Many shall be at the last day rewarded by Christ for clothing and feeding the poor, who, when on earth, had neither clothes nor bread to give, yet having had a heart to give, shall be reckoned amongst the greatest benefactors to the poor. This appears from Matt. 25:34, where Christ is represented speaking not to some few saints that had great estates to bestow on charitable uses, but to all his saints, poor as well as rich. 'Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you,' &c. 'For I was hungered and ye gave me meat,' &c. Mark, not 'ye that were rich,' but 'ye'—that is, 'all—such as had bread,' you gave that out, you that had not bread or money to give, when you could not draw out your purse, you yet drew out your souls to the hungry. Hear this, O ye precious souls that God hath made sincere, and take comfort. May be you stand low in the world; your calling is mean; your estate next to nothing; which makes you little regarded by your neighbours that overtop you. Canst thou say, though you beest but a servant to some poor cobbler, that thou desirest to walk in the truth of thy heart, approving thyself to God in thy whole course? This bird will sing as sweet a note in thy breast, as if thou wert the greatest monarch in the world. That which brings comfort to the greatest saint in a time of distress, is the same which comforts the meanest in the family, and that is the love and favour of God, interest in Christ, and the precious

promises which in him are 'yea' and 'amen.' Now, sincerity is the best evidence for our title to those. It will not be so much insisted on, whether much or little has been done by us, as whether that much or little were in sincerity. 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' Not 'well done, thou hast done great things, ruled states and kingdoms, been a famous preacher in thy time,' &c; but 'thou hast been faithful;' and that thou mayest be that standest in the obscurest corner of the world. Good Hezekiah knew this, and therefore, on his sick-bed, he doth not tell God of his great services he hath done—though none had done more—but only desires God to take notice of the truth and sincerity of his heart, 'Remember, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight,' Isa. 38:3.

[A short improvement of the general subject.]

It remains that the point be applied in its several branches, which were three, viz. sincerity hath a preserving strength, a restoring strength, and a comforting strength. But for quick despatch we shall do it under two heads, clapping the two former into one.

Use First. Therefore, sincerity hath a strengthening virtue, whereby it wither preserves the soul from falling into sin, or helps the Christian fallen to rise again.

1. The affords thee, Christian, a further discovery of thy heart, whether sincere or not. Put it here upon the trial. Dost thou find a power imparted to thee, whereby thou art enabled to repel a temptation to sin, when thou hast no weapon left thee to defend thee against it, but the command forbidding it, or some arrow taken out of the quiver of the gospel, such as the love of Christ to thee, thy love to him, and the like? May be the temptation is laid so cunningly, that thou mayest sin, and save thy credit too, having a backdoor opened to let thee in to it secretly. Thou shalt hazard nothing, apparently, of thy temporal concernment; yea, rather greatly advantage it, if thou wilt hearken to the motion. Only, God stands up to oppose it. His Spirit tells thee it is against his glory, inconsistent with the duty thou owest and the love thou professest to him. Now, speak what thou thinkest of sinning, the case being thus stated. Canst thou yet stand it out valiantly, and tell Satan sin is no match

for thee, till thou canst have God's consent, and reconcile sinning against him and loving of him together? If so, bless God that hath given thee a sincere heart, and hath also opened such a window as this in thy soul, through which thou mayest see that grace to be there, which seen, is the best evidence that God can give thee for thy interest in him, and life everlasting with him. Wert thou a hypocrite, thou couldst no more resist a sin so offered, than powder fire, or chaff the wind.

Again, when thou art run down by the violence of temptation, what is the behaviour of thy soul in this case? Dost thou rally thy routed forces, and again make head against thy enemy so much the more eagerly, because foiled so shamefully? Or art thou content to sit down quietly by the loss, and choose rather to be a tame slave to thy lust, than to be at any further trouble to continue the war? The false heart indeed is soon cowed—quickly yields subjection to the conqueror—but the sincere Christian gets heart, even when he loseth ground. Uprightness makes the soul rebound higher in holy purposes against sin, by its very falls into sin. 'Once have I spoken,' he means foolishly, sinfully, 'but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further,' Job 40:5. This made holy David beg of God to be spared a little, that he might have time to recover his strength before he went hence. Loath he was to go beaten out of the field. Might he but live to recover his losses by repentance of, and some victory over, those sins that had weakened and worsted him, then death should be welcome. He felt like that brave captain who, wounded in fight, desired some to hold him up, that he might but see the enemy run before he died, and then he should close his eyes in peace. Deal therefore impartially with thy own soul. Which way do thy falls and failings work? If they wear off the edge of thy conscience, that it is not so keen and sharp in its reproofs for sin—if they bribe thy affections, that thou beginnest to comply with those sins with which formerly thy contest was, and likest pretty well their acquaintance—thy heart is not right. But if still thy heart meditates a revenge on thy sin that hath overpowered thee, and it lies on thy spirit, like undigested meat on a sick stomach, thou canst have no ease and content to thy troubled soul till thou hast cleared thyself of it, as to its reigning power; truly then thou discoverest a sincere heart.

2. This shows of what importance it is to labour for sincerity. Without it we can neither stand against, nor rise when we fall into temptation. Whatever thou beggest of God, forget not a sincere heart. David saw need of more of this grace than he had. 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,' Ps. 51:10; and happy was it for him that he had so much as to make him desire more of it. What folly it is to build a house with beams on fire! The hypocrite's building must needs come to nought. There is a fire unquenched—the power of hypocrisy unmortified—that will consume all his goodly profession. He carries into the field a heart that will deliver him up into his enemy's hands. And he is sure to be overcome to whom his own side is not true.

3. Bless God, O sincere Christian, for this grace, for it is a blessing invaluable—crowns and diadems are not to be compared with it. In this, thou hast a heart after God's own heart; a heart to his liking; yea, a heart to his likeness. Nothing makes thee liker to God in the simplicity and purity of his nature, than sincerity. Truth is that which God glories in. He is 'a God of truth.' When Haman was bid to say what should be done to the man that the king delighted to honour, he, thinking that the king meant no other than himself, would fly as high as his ambition could carry him; and what doth he choose, but to be clothed with the king's own apparel royal! When God gives thee sincerity, he clothes thy soul with that with which he wears himself—'who clothes himself with truth and righteousness as a garment.' By this thou art made a conqueror greater than ever Alexander was. He overcame a world of men; but thou, a world of lust and devils. Did one bless God, at the sight of a toad, that God made him a man and not a toad? how much more thankful oughtest thou to be, who hath made thee that wert a hypocrite by nature, which is far worse, an upright Christian? It is a notable saying of Lactantius,³ 'If,' saith he, 'a man would choose death, rather than to leave the face and shape of a beast—though withal he might keep the soul of a man—how much more miserable is it, under the

shape of a man to carry the heart of a beast?' Yet such a one is the hypocrite; yea worse, he doth only under the shape of a man, but in the disguise of a saint, carry a beastly filthy heart within him.

4. Let this encourage thee who art sincere against the fears of final apostasy. Though sincerity doth not privilege thee from falling, yet thy covenant-state which though art in, if sincere, secures thee from final apostasy. Because thy stock of grace in hand is small, thou questionest thy persevering. 'Can these weak legs,' thinkest thou, 'bring me to my journey's end; these few pence in my purse'—little grace in my heart—'bear my charges all the way to heaven, through so many expenses of trials and temptations?' Truly no, if thou wert to receive no more than thou hast at present. The bread thou hast in the cupboard will not maintain thee all thy life. But, soul, thou hast a covenant will help thee to more when that grows low. Hath not God taught thee to pray for thy 'daily bread?' and dost thou not find that the blessing of God in thy calling, diligently followed, supplies thee from day to day? And hast thou not the same bond to sue for thy spiritual 'daily bread?' hast thou not a Father in heaven that knows what thou needest for thy soul as well as body? hast thou not a dear Brother, yea Husband, that is gone to heaven, where plenty of all grace is to be had, and that on purpose on his children's errand, that he might keep their souls, graces, and comforts alive in this necessitous world? All power is in his hands; he may go to the heap, and send what he please for your succour. And can you starve, while he hath fulness of grace by him that hath undertaken to provide for you? Luke 10:35. The two pence which the Samaritan left were not enough to pay for cure and board of the wounded man; therefore he passeth his word 'for all that he should need besides.' Christ doth not only give a little grace in hand, but his bond for more to the sincere soul, even as much as will bring them to heaven. 'Grace and glory he will give,' and 'no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly,' Ps. 84:11.

5. Take heed of resting on, or glorying in, thy sincerity. It is true it will enable thee to resist temptations, but who enables that? Where grows the root that feeds thy grace? Not in thy own ground, but in heaven. It is God alone that holds thee and it in life; he that gave it is at cost to keep it. The Lord is thy

3. Si nemo est, quin emori malit, quàm converti in aliquam bestiae figuram, quamvis hominis mentem sit habiturus, quanto miserius est in hominis figura animo esse efferato?

strength; let him be thy song. What can the axe, though sharp, do without the workman? Shall the axe say, 'I have cut down?' or the chisel, 'I have carved?' is it not the skill and art of the workman rather? When able to resist temptation say, 'The Lord was on my side or else I had fallen.' Set up an "Ebenezer," and write on it, 'Hitherto the Lord hath helped me.'

Though God promiseth in the psalm even now cited, to give 'grace and glory' to the upright, yet he will not give the glory of his grace to uprightness. We have David asserting his uprightness, and how he was preserved by it: 'I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity,' 11 Sam. 22:24. He declares the fruit of his uprightness, how God bare testimony to it by rewarding him for it, in vindicating him before, and giving him victory over his enemies: 'Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eyesight,' ver. 25. Now, lest he should set up himself, or applaud his own uprightness, to the prejudice of God's grace, he sweetly corrects and bounds these passages, 'God is my strength and power, and he maketh my way perfect,' ver. 33. As if the holy man had said, 'I pray, mistake me not; I do not ascribe the victory over my enemies within me or without, to myself and my uprightness. No, God did all, he is my strength and power; yea, it is he that makes my way perfect. If I be sincere more than others in my way, I must thank him for it; for he makes my way perfect. He found me at first as crooked a piece, and walking in as crooked ways, as any other, but he made me and my way perfect and straight.' Had God pleased he could have made Saul as perfect as David. Had God left David, he would have been as crooked and false-hearted as Saul. The last branch of the point was that sincerity has a comforting strength in all sorts of affliction. The applicatory improvement of which shall be only this—

Use Second. Let it teach us not to fear affliction but hypocrisy believe it, friends, affliction is a harmless thing to a sincere soul; it cannot be so great

as to make it inconsistent with his joy and comfort. A gracious soul in the most sharp affliction can spare his tears and pity, to bestow them on the hypocrite when in all his pomp and glory. He hath that in his bosom that gives him more comfortable apprehensions of his own affliction, than standers-by have, or can have, of them. This once made a holy man, when the pangs of death were on him, to ask a servant of his, weeping by his bedside for him, 'What she meant by her fears,' saying, 'Never fear that my heavenly Father will do me any hurt.' Indeed affliction is not joyous to the flesh, which hath made some of God's dear children awhile to shrink, but after they have been acquainted with the work, and the comforts which God bestows on his poor prisoners through the grate, they have leamed another tune, like the bird that at first putting into the cage flutters, and shows her dislike of her restraint, but afterwards comes to sing more sweetly than when at liberty to fly where she pleased. Be not therefore so thoughtful about affliction, but be careful against hypocrisy. If the bed of affliction proves hard and uneasy to thee, it is thyself that brings with thee what makes it so. Approve thyself to God and trust him who hath promised to be his saint's bed-maker in affliction, to make it soft and easy for thee. O what a cutting word will it be in a dying hour, when thou art crying 'Lord, Lord, mercy on a poor creature,' to hear the Lord say, 'I know thee not.' It is not the voice of a sincere soul, but the voice of a hypocrite, that howls on his bed of sorrow. What then wilt thou do, when fallen into the hands of God, with whom thou hast but juggled in thy profession, and never sincerely dist love? If that speech of Joseph was so confounding to the patriarchs—'I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt'—that they could not endure his presence, knowing their own guilt, how intolerable will it be to hear from God's own mouth such language in a time of distress. 'I am God whom you have mocked, abused, and sold away, for the enjoyment of your lusts; and do you now come to me? Have I anything for you but a hell to torment you in to all eternity?'