

Articles and Sermons :: Observations upon the repentance of worldly men - Fletcher

Observations upon the repentance of worldly men - Fletcher - posted by hredii (), on: 2006/8/24 1:20

This comes from the book from Fletcher "The Portrait of St. Paul".

I know it is a little long but well well worth the read. It goes with the three next chapters that I will post.

Part 2

(https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id12013&post_id93300&order1&viewmodeflat&pid0&forum34#93300) The second point of doctrine, insisted upon by the true minister, is a living faith

Part 3 (https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id12014&forum34) The second point of doctrine, insisted upon by the true minister, is a living faith

Part 4

(https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id12015&post_id93302&order0&viewmodethread&pid0&forum34#93302) The second point of doctrine, insisted upon by the true minister, is a living faith

Enjoy!

Observations upon the repentance of worldly men

If it be inquired, do not all ministers preach repentance? We answer that, ordinarily, true ministers alone preach true repentance. The preachers of the day, as they are conformable to the world in other things, so they are perfectly contented with practicing the repentance of worldly men. Now, as he who receives only base coin, cannot possibly circulate good money, so he who satisfies his own heart with a short-lived sorrow for sin cannot possibly give free course to that evangelical repentance which the Gospel requires. And it is observable that the hearers of such ill-instructed scribes generally fix those bounds to their repentance which are satisfactory to their impenitent pastors.

The repentance we here condemn may be known by the following marks:--

1. It is superficial and founded only upon the most vague ideas of our corruption. Hence, it cannot, like that of David and Jeremiah, trace sin to its source and bewail the depravity of the whole heart, (Psalm li, 5; Jer. xvii, 9.)
2. It is Pharisaical regarding only outward sins. The righteousness of the Pharisees rested upon the most trifling observances while they neglected those weighty commands of the law which respect the love of God and our neighbor (Matt. xxiii, 23.) They afflicted themselves when they had not scrupulously paid the tenths of their herbs; but they smote not upon their breasts when they had rejected the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the same dangerous circumstances are those penitents of the present day who are less sorrowful on account of having offended God and rejected Christ than that they are become objects of ridicule, contempt, or punishment, by the commission of some impious or dishonorable action. We frequently hear these false penitents bewailing the condition to which they have reduced themselves and giving vent to the most passionate expressions of sorrow. But when are they seen to afflict themselves because they have not been wholly devoted to God? Or when do they shed a single tear at the recollection that they have not cherished their neighbor as themselves? Are they ever heard to lament the want of that faith in Christ, "Which worketh by love?" (Gal. v, 6.) Are they ever engaged in seeking after that communion of saints by which believers become of one heart and one soul? Alas! So far are they from this that they continue equally tranquil under the maledictions of the Gospel as under those of the law. They hear, without terror, those dreadful words of the apostle, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha," (1 Cor. xvi, 22.) And though they neither love nor know him, yet they vainly look upon themselves as godly mourners and unfeigned penitents.
3. This repentance is unfruitful, inasmuch as those who repent after this manner are utter strangers to compunction of heart. None of these are constrained to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts ii, 37.) They come not to the Redeemer among such as "are weary and heavy laden," (Matt. xi, 28.) They have no experience of that godly sorrow by which the true penitent dies to sin: and so far are they from being born again of the Spirit that they neither expect nor desire any such regeneration. In short, this repentance is rarely as sincere as that of Judas, who confessed his sin, justified the innocent, subdued his ruling passion, and returned the money he had so dearly obtained.

Evangelical repentance is an incomprehensible work to the generality of ministers. Wherever it appears they are prepared to censure it; and are earnest in exhorting men to flee from it, rather than request it as a gift from God. Thus, when they behold any one truly mourning under a sense of sin, smiting upon his breast with the publican, stripping it off, with St. Paul, the covering of his own righteousness and inquiring, with the convicted jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts xvi, 30.) They suppose these to be certain signs of a deep melancholy. They imagine the conversation of some enthusiast has driven the man to despair and will not scruple to affirm that he has lost the proper use of his reason. So true it is that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," (1 Cor. ii, 14.) Nor is even able to form any just ideas of that repentance, which is the first duty imposed upon us by the Gospel, and the first step toward that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

The moralists of the present time acknowledge that all men are sinners; but they neglect to draw the just consequences from so sad a truth. To be found a sinner before an infinitely holy and just God is to forfeit, at once, both our felicity and existence. To appear as an offender in the eyes of our all-seeing Judge is to lie in the condition of a broken vessel, which the potter throws aside as refuse. It is to stand in the circumstances of a criminal, convicted of violating the most sacred laws of his prince. The two most important laws of God are those which require piety toward himself, and charity toward our neighbor. Now if we have violated both the one and the other of these laws, and that times without number it becomes us not only to confess our transgression, but to consider our danger. When a traitor is convicted of treason, or an assassin of murder, he immediately expects to hear his sentence pronounced. And thus, when a sinner confesses himself to be such, he makes a tacit acknowledgement that sentence of death might justly be pronounced upon him.

Some persons are naturally so short-sighted that they can only discover the most striking objects about them. Many in the moral world are in similar circumstances, to whom nothing appears as sin, except impieties of the grossest kind. If we judge of God's commands according to the prejudices of these men, idolatry is nothing less than the act of prostrating ourselves before an idol; and murder is merely the act by which a man destroys the life of his fellow creature. But if these deluded persons could contemplate sin in a Scriptural light; if they could avail themselves of the law of God, as of an observatory erected for sacred meditation, their moral view would be sufficiently strengthened to discover the following truths:

1. If we have not, at all times, placed a greater confidence in the Creator than in any of his creatures, if we have either feared or loved any one more than our celestial Parent, we have then really set up another god, in opposition to the Lord of heaven and earth.
2. If, neglected to worship the Almighty in spirit and truth, we have suffered ourselves to be seduced by any splendid vanity of the age, we have sinned in the same degree, as though we had fallen down a molten image.
3. If, in our conversation, our reading, or our prayers, we have ever irreverently pronounced the "name of God," we have then taken that "sacred name in vain"; and God himself declares that he will not hold such a one guiltless.
4. If we have refused to labor diligently, through the week, in the work of our particular calling; or if we have ever made the Sabbath a day of spiritual indolence and frivolous amusement; then we have neglected and broken that law which we are peculiarly commanded to "remember and keep."
5. If we have, at any time, been wanting in obedience, respect, or love to our parents, our pastors, our magistrates, or to any of our superiors, or if we have neglected any of those duties, which our relationship in society, or our particular vocation has imposed upon us, we have merited that God should cut us off from the land of the living.
6. If we have weakened our constitution by excess of any kind; if we have struck our neighbor in a moment of passion; if we have ever spoken an injurious word; if we have ever cast a look directed by malice; if we have ever formed in our hearts a single evil wish against any person whatever, or if we have ever ceased to love our brother; we have then, in the sight of God, committed a species of murder (1 John iii, 15.)
7. If we have ever looked upon a woman with any other feelings than those of chastity, (Matt. V, 28), or if we have at any time cast a wishful glance upon the honors and pleasures of the world, we have sufficiently proved the impurity of our nature, and must be considered as living in enmity with God, (James iv, 4.)
8. If we have received the profit annexed to any post or employment, without carefully discharging the duties incumbent upon us in such situations, or if we have taken advantage either of the ignorance or the necessity of others, at their expense; we may justly rank ourselves with those who openly violate the eighth command.
9. If we have ever offended against truth in our ordinary conversation; if we have neglected to fulfill our promises; or have ever broken our vows, whether made to God or man; we have reason, in this respect, to plead guilty before the tribunal of immutable truth.
10. If we have ever been dissatisfied with our lot in life; if we have ever indulged restless desires, or have given way to envious and irregular wishes; we have then assuredly admitted into our hearts that covetous which is the root of every evil.

When St. Paul considered the law, in this point of view, he cried out, "It is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Rom. vii, 14.) And when Isaiah, passing from the letter to the spirit, discovered the vast extent of the Decalogue, he explained, "Wo is me! For I am a man on unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." (Isa. vi, 5.) If our self-applauding moralists would be persuaded to weigh their piety in the same balance, they would find it as defective at

least as that of Isaiah and St. Paul.

Here, perhaps, some objecting Pharisee may say, "If I have sinned in some degree, yet I have not committed such crimes as many others have done and I trust that God will not be severe in attending to trifling sins." But, (1.) These pretended trifling sins are ordinarily of so great a number that the multitude of them becomes equivalent to the enormity of those crimes which are rarely committed; so mountains and seas are but collections of grains of sand and drops of water.

2. Every voluntary transgression argues a real contempt of the legislator's authority; and in such contempt there is found the seed of every sin that can possibly be committed, in opposition to his express command. All the commands of God, whether they be great or small, have no other sanction than that which consists in his Divine authority, and this authority is trampled under foot by every petty delinquent, as well as by every daring transgressor.

3. Those which we usually esteem trivial sins, are the more dangerous on account of their being less attended to. They are committed without fear, without remorse, and generally without intermission. As there are more ships of war destroyed by worms than by the shot of the enemy, so the multitude of those who destroy themselves through ordinary sins exceeds the number of those who perish by enormous offenses.

4. We have a thousand proofs that small sins will lead a man, by insensible degrees, to the commission of a greater. Nothing is more common among us than the custom of swearing and giving way to wrath without reason; and these are usually regarded as offences of an inconsiderable nature. But there is every reason to believe, that they who have contracted these vicious habits would be equally deposed to perjury and murder, were they assailed by a forcible temptation and unrestrained with the dread of forfeiting their honor or their life. If we judge of a commodity by observing a small sample; so by little sins, as well as by trivial acts of virtue, we may form a judgment of the heart. Hence the widow's two mites appeared a considerable oblation in the eyes of Christ, who judged by them how rich an offering the same woman would have made, had she been possessed of the means. For the same reason, those frequent exclamations, in which the name of God is taken in vain, those poignant raileries and those frivolous lies which are produced in common conversation, discover the true disposition of those persons who, without insult or temptation, can violate the sacred laws of piety and love. The same seeds produce fruit more or less perfect, according to the sterility or luxuriance of the soil in which they are sown. Thus the very same principle of malice which leads a child to torment an insect acts more forcibly upon the heart of a slanderous woman, whose highest joy consists in mangling the reputation of a neighbor; nor is the cruel tyrant actuated by a different principle, who finds a barbarous pleasure in persecuting the righteous and shedding the blood of the innocent.

If prejudice will not allow these observations to be just, reason declares the contrary. The very same action that, in certain cases would be esteemed a failing, becomes, in some circumstances, an offence; and, in others, an enormous crime. For instance: if I despise an inferior, I commit a fault; if the offended party is my equal, my fault rises in magnitude. If he is my superior, it is greater still; if he is a respectable magistrate—a beneficent prince—if that prince is my sovereign Lord, whose lenity I have experienced after repeated acts of rebellion; who has heaped upon me many kindnesses; who means to bestow upon me still greater favors: and if, after all, I have been led to deny and oppose him, my crime is undoubtedly aggravated, by all these circumstances to an extraordinary degree. But if this offended benefactor is Lord of lords and King of kings—the Creator of man—the Monarch of angels—the Ancient of days, before whom the majesty of all the monarchs upon earth disappears, as the luster of a thousand stars is eclipsed by the presence of the sun—if this glorious Being has given his beloved Son to suffer infamy and death, in order to procure for me eternal life and celestial glory—my crime must then be aggravated in proportion to my own meanness, the greatness of benefits received, and the dignity of my exalted Benefactor. But our imagination is bewildered, when we attempt to scan the enormity which these accumulated circumstances add to those acts of rebellion, denominated sins.

They who are not working out their "salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii, 12,) must necessarily live in the practice of some constitutional sin; and this self-indulgence, however secret it may be, will not suffer them to perceive the demerit of their daily transgressions. An old debauchee, whose chief delight has been in seducing women, or an infamous murderer, who has shed human blood like water, may as easily conceive the horror that adultery and murder excite in virtuous souls.

Before we can form a rational judgment of sin, and the punishment it deserves, it becomes us to entertain just ideas of moral order, to mark the obligation laid upon the supreme Legislator to maintain that order by wholesome laws, and to discover, in some degree, the sanctity, the excellence, and the extent of those absolute commands. It is necessary to understand the dependence of the creature upon the Creator; since the image formed by the presence of an object before a mirror is not more dependent upon that object than all orders of created beings depend upon the Creator; if he withdraw his protecting hand, they are no more; if he stretch out the arm of his vengeance, they are plunged, at once, into an abyss of misery. We must reflect upon all the various obligations under which we lie to the Almighty, as Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Comforter. We must consider those examples of his vengeful justice, which he has placed before our eyes, on purpose to awaken our fears, together with the unmerited favors by which he has constantly sought to engage our grateful affections. It becomes us likewise to observe the vanity of all those appearances by which we are allured into sin: and lastly, it is necessary to remember that "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing" (Eccl

es. Xii, 14.) While we pay not a proper attention to every one of these circumstances, we must necessarily form an imperfect judgment concerning the nature of sin, the severity with which God has determined to punish it, and the greatness of that expiatory sacrifice by virtue of which his justice and his mercy unite in pardoning the penitent.

When the law of God is willfully transgressed, it is ridiculous in any man to attempt the justification of himself by pleading that he has committed no enormous crimes; or that, if ever he has been guilty of any such offences, his good actions have always been sufficient to counterbalance their demerit. Frivolous excuses! Is not one treasonable act sufficient to mark the traitor? Is not that soldier punished as a deserter, who flies his colors but a single time? And does not a woman forfeit her honor by one moment of weakness?

Though we grant, there are some sins of a peculiarly atrocious kind; yet as murder will always appear before an earthly tribunal, according to its horrible nature, so sin will ever be considered as such before an infinitely holy God. If a man, accused of having willfully poisoned a fellow creature, should address his judge in terms like these: "The charge brought against me is just; but let it be considered that the person I have destroyed was only an infant—that he was the child of a common beggar—and that this is the only murder I have committed through the whole of my life. On the other hand, I have been a constant benefactor to the poor; and surely a thousand acts of charity will abundantly outweigh one little dose of arsenic." "No," the judge would answer, "when you prolonged the life of the indigent by your alms, you merely performed a duty which is universally required of every worthy citizen; and the law allows you nothing on this account. But if you have given the smallest dose of poison to any human creature, with an intent to destroy his life, the law pronounces you a murderer, and will punish you as such."

After our first parents had offended by eating the forbidden fruit, they had but vainly excused themselves in saying, "We have only gathered that which appeared to be of little worth; we have tasted it but once; moreover, our labor in the garden is of much greater value than the fruit we have taken. Lord! Condemn us not to death for so inconsiderable an offence." Such, however, are the frivolous excuses with which every blinded moralist contents his seared conscience, and with which he hopes to satisfy his omniscient Judge. When St. Paul was one of this class, he practiced upon himself the same delusions. Capable only of natural sentiments, the hidden truths of a spiritual law were not only incomprehensible, but vain and foolish things in his estimation. This we learn from the following passage in the Epistle to the Romans: "I was alive without the law once," paying little attention to the spirituality of its precepts, or the severity of its threatenings, and indulging no suspicion either of my corruption or of my condemnation. "But when the commandment came," in its spiritual energy, "sin revived," assuming an appearance suited to its infernal nature, and, receiving a sentence of death in myself, "I died. I had not then known sin, but by the law, for I had not known lust," which is the source of every evil, and the first cause of our condemnation, "except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet," (Rom. vii, 9, 7.)

Every sincere Christian, in imitation of this apostle, may with propriety say, There are various sins, which I had never seen as such, but by the light of the Gospel; for example, I had lived in security with respect to abusing the faculty of speech and had never known the Almighty's intention of judging me upon that article if Christ himself had not openly declared, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned," (Matt. xii, 36, 37.) If those who trust in their own righteousness would seriously examine themselves by the twofold law of Moses and of Christ, they would form a new judgment of their spiritual circumstances, and pass, with St. Paul, from the state of the Pharisee into that of the publican.

Farther: sins of omission, as well as those of commission, are sufficient to draw upon us the maledictions of the law, which equally commands us to do good and to abstain from evil. Offence of this nature is seldom regarded as sins by the generality of mankind; and hence they are wholly unalarmed at the recollection of them. To lack diligence in our duties, moderation in our joys, attention in our prayers, and zeal in our devotions; to live without gratitude toward our Divine Benefactor, without resignation under losses, patience in affliction, confidence in God during times of danger, and content in the state to which he has called us; to want humility toward our superiors, courtesy toward our equals, affability toward our inferiors, meekness toward those who displease us, faithfulness to our word, strict truth in our conversation, or charity in the judgment we form of others; all these are things that never disturb the repose of a worldly man; nor does he esteem them as real offences in the sight of God. He considers not that an inattentive nurse may as effectually destroy a child by withholding from it proper nourishment, as though she obliged it to sip a poisonous draught; that a soldier would be condemned to death if the enemy should surprise a town while he was sleeping on his post, equally as though he had been busy in opening the gates for their admission; and that Christ represents the want of a holy fervor as the grand reason why lukewarm Christians excite in him the utmost detestation and abhorrence, (Rev. iii, 16.) An entire chapter in the Gospel is employed to teach us that sins of omission will constitute the principal cause of a sinner's condemnation at the last day. The slothful servant is cast into outer darkness, not for having robbed another of his talents, but for the non-improvement of his own; the foolish virgins are excluded from the marriage feast, not for having betrayed the bridegroom, but because they were unprepared to receive him; and every Christian is acquainted with that terrible sentence, which shall one day be pronounced upon the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed; for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat," (&c, Matt. xxv.) To have that religion, "which is pure and unspotted from the world," but we must also "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," (James i, 27.); relieving the unfortunate to the utmost of our ability, and exerting our whole power in spreading truth and happiness among all around us.

Thus hunted, at length, from many a dangerous shelter, unhumiliated sinners will still presume to adopt the following plea: "We pray, we fast, we give alms, we receive the holy sacrament; and what more do you require?" Such was the foundation of the ancient Pharisees' hope; but Christ and his apostles overthrew their vain confidence, by the same arguments which evangelical ministers are still obliged to turn against multitudes of religious professors, who indulge an exalted opinion of their own contemptible merits.

The Gospel requires, say these faithful pastors, that to the external marks of religion, you should be careful to add humility and charity; and if these two capital graces are wanting, your religion is but a body without a soul. You have received the holy sacraments of our Church but what salutary effects have they produced in your life and conversation? The circumcision, which saved the Jews, was not the circumcision of the flesh, but that of the heart, (Rom. ii, 29.); and the baptism, which saves Christians, is not that by which the body is sprinkled with water, but that which purifies the soul, (1 Pet. ii, 21.) So the Passover, which was acceptable to God on the part of the Jews, consisted not simply in eating the paschal lamb, but in penetrating their souls with gratitude, on recollecting the many wonderful deliverances which the Almighty had wrought for his people. And the communion, which is acceptable on the part of Christians, consists not merely in receiving the consecrated elements, as various classes of sinners are accustomed to do; but in uniting themselves to the Lord by a living faith, and to all his members by an ardent charity. You pray – and did not the Pharisees so? Yea, they were remarkable for their long and zealous prayers; but, alas! While they acknowledged "God with their lips, their hearts were far from him." (Isaiah xxix, 13.) You give alms, but, if you mean with these to purchase heaven, you do but deceive your own souls, while your pretended charity degenerates into insolence; or, if you merely seek to procure the reputation of being charitably disposed, you have your reward. You fast – but if you do this chiefly through custom, or through respect to the orders of your prince, your fast can no more be counted religious than the regimen prescribed you by a physician. And if these facts have not produced in you a sincere repentance, and a true conversion, however you may regard them as acts of devotion, they are in reality no other than acts of hypocrisy. Moreover, the Pharisees fasted twice in the week; while you, it may be, are among the number of those who imagine they have made a valuable sacrifice to God, by abstaining from a single repast in a year.

As Pharisaical moralists "have sought out so many inventions," (Eccles. vii, 29), to evade the necessity of an unfeigned repentance; and as philosophizing Christians rise up with one consent against this doctrine of the Gospel, we shall conclude this subject by disclosing the sources of their common error.

1. There are phantoms of virtue, or virtues purely natural, which pass in the world for Divine. But who ever imagined the dove to be really virtuous because she is not seen, like the eagle, to make a stoop at birds of a weaker frame than herself? Or who supposed wasps to be generous insects, because they are observed mutually to defend themselves when their nest is attacked? Is not the conjugal and maternal tenderness of the human species apparent, in an eminent degree, among various tribes of the feathered kind? And do we not see among bees and ants that ardent patriotism which was so highly extolled among the Romans? Does not the spider exhibit as manifest proofs of ingenuity and vigilance as the most industrious artist? And do not carnivorous animals discover all that fearless intrepidity which is so universally boasted of by vain-glorious heroes? Let us not mistake in a matter of so much importance: as nothing but charity can give to our alms the value of good works so nothing less than the fear of God and a sincere intention of pleasing him, can give to our most valuable propensities the stamp of solid virtues. If we could completely expose the worthless alloy, which worldly men are accustomed to pass off as sterling virtue, many of those who now esteem themselves rich in good works would be constrained to "abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes," (Job xlii, 6.)

2. Many persons indulge too favorable ideas of the human heart, through their ignorance of that unsullied purity which God requires of his intelligent creatures. They judge of themselves and others as a peasant judges of a theme replete with solecisms, who, far from expressing the discernment of a critic, admires the vast erudition of the young composer. Thus some external acts of devotion are applauded by undiscerning Christians as commendable works, which, in the sight of God, and before holy spirits, appear altogether polluted and worthy of punishment.

3. If we are sometimes deceived by our own ignorance, we more frequently impose upon others by our innate hypocrisy. Unregenerate men, after having thrown a cloak over their distinguishing vices, are anxious to make a parade of virtues which they do not possess. The proud man is sometimes observed putting on the garb of humility, and with the most lowly obeisance, professing himself the very humble servant of an approaching stranger. Immodesty is frequently masked with an affected air of chastity and bashfulness; hatred, envy, and duplicity veil themselves under the appearances of good nature, friendship, and simplicity; and this universal hypocrisy contributes to render its practitioners less outwardly offensive than they would otherwise be; as an unhandsome woman appears less defective to a distant beholder, after having nicely varnished over the blemishes of her face.

4. It frequently happens, that one vice puts a period to the progress of another. Thus vanity, at times, obliges us to act contrary to the maxims of avarice, avarice contrary to those of indolence, and indolence contrary to those of ambition. A refined pride is generally sufficient to overcome contemptible vices, and may influence its possessor to the performance of many apparently virtuous actions; hence the impious and sordid Pharisee went regularly to the temple; he prayed, he fasted, he gave alms; and, by all these appearances of piety and benevolence, acquired the commendation of the world.

Society makes a kind of gain by these acts of dissimulation, which are as the homage paid to virtue by vice, and by impiety to devotion. But, notwithstanding every plausible appearance that can possibly be put on, when the minister of the Gospel declares the fall of man, together with the absolute need of regeneration, he is supported at once by revelation, reason, and experience.

5. If the moral disorder, with which human nature is infected, appear not always at its utmost height, it is because regeneration having commenced in many persons of every rank, the wicked are overawed by the influence of their example. Added to this that God restrains them, as with a bridle, by his providence, and by those motions of conscience which they vainly endeavor to stifle. It is notorious that the fear of public contempt and punishment is sometimes able to arrest the most abandoned in their vicious career; since they cannot discover what they really are without arming against themselves the secular power. Thus the terror which prisons and gibbets inspire, constrains ravening wolves to appear in the garb of inoffensive sheep. But is it possible that innocence so constrained should be accounted of any value even among heathens themselves? It is impossible, since we find one of their own poets declaring Å—
Oderunt peccare mali, formidine paenae.

The wicked abstain from mischief through fear of punishment. And all the recompense he conceives due to such guiltless persons, consists in not becoming the food of ravens upon a gibbet Å—
Non pasces in cruce corvos.

6. If servile fear is sometimes the cause of our innocence, necessity is more commonly the cause of our apparent virtues. A youth of any modesty is generally cautious among his superiors, who afford him neither money to indulge, nor liberty to discover his inclinations. Now, if this forced discretion should, at length, become habitual to him, he may in such circumstances esteem himself a virtuous man, because he has not, like the son of a dissolute courtier, plunged himself into every kind of impiety. Whereas had he enjoyed but equal liberty with the licentious rake, he might have surpassed him in every sinful excess. On the other hand, when an infamous voluptuary, enfeebled either by age or by his frequent debaucheries, finds it absolutely needful to live in a more sober and orderly style, immediately he takes himself for another Cato; not considering that necessity alone is the source of his temperance. The least excess disorders his health and the weakness of his stomach obliges him to abstain from those luxurious feasts of which he can still converse with so much satisfaction. If such a one be virtuous because no longer incorrigible robber to be an honest man, while the irons are on his hands, or when scared by the officers of justice, he flies to some secret retreat. Has that woman any reason to boast of her virtuous conduct, who was never solicited by those men who were most likely to have triumphed over her modesty? And yet, many such, filled with self approbation, will frequently applaud their own innocence, placing that to the account of virtue, which was merely owing to providential circumstances; or perhaps, to the want of personal attraction. Such plausible appearances no more merit the commendation due to solid virtue than the sickly wolf, who peaceably passes by a flock of sheep, can be said to deserve the caresses which a shepherd bestows upon his faithful dog.

7. Effectually to impose upon others by a beautiful outside, we practice a deeper deceit upon our own hearts; and very frequently we succeed as well, in hiding from ourselves our own evil dispositions, as in concealing from others our unworthy actions. Could we discover all that secretly passes in the world, we should not want demonstrative proofs of the depravity of the human heart. But why need we go abroad in search of a truth, which is easily evidenced at home? Had we ourselves but dared to have executed openly what we have acted in imagination, when our irascible or concupiscible passions have been roused, where should we have hidden our guilty heads, or how should we have escaped the sword of justice? Convinced too late of our degenerate nature, we should, haply, have smitten upon our breasts, with the repentant publican, adopting long ago his humiliating confession, in the anguish of our souls. Every thinking person must allow, that had evil intentions fallen under the cognizance of human laws, and had the secular power possessed equal ability to punish them, as it punishes those actions, of which they are the very root and soul, the whole earth must, in such case, have become as vast a scaffold, as it is now a place of graves. Can it be necessary to multiply observations upon this head, when the Almighty, whose mercy and justice are infinite, sufficiently declares the universal depravity of mankind, by the variety of scourges with which he is constrained to punish both individuals and commonwealths?

8. If the children of this world are unable to form any just conception of the human heart and its evil propensities, it is because they are in the number of those natural men of whom the Apostle Paul makes mention, (1 Cor. ii, 14.) And such, having a natural antipathy to the Gospel, while they are ever ready to cast reproach upon the faithful, are equally prepared to favor those of a like disposition with themselves. Thus Herod, Caiaphas, and Pilate, mutually overlooked the faults of each other, while they united in accusing and persecuting Christ.

It is usual with many who are destitute of true religion to esteem some of their sinful companions as moral and well-disposed men. But were they themselves to be really converted, their error, in this respect, would soon become apparent. Upon daring to oppose any torrent of impiety with the zeal of their heavenly Master, instead of finding among their associates any natural disposition to real virtue, they would meet with indisputable proofs, in spite of a thousand amiable qualities, that all unregenerate men resemble on another in their Å—enmity against God,Å— (Rom. viii, 7.) Yes; whether they inhabit the banks of the Thames or the Seine; the lake of Genesareth or that of Geneva; they are, in the sight of God, as filthy swine trampling under foot the pearls of the Gospel, (Matt. vii, 6), or like Å—ravening wolvesÅ— (Matt. vii, 15), outrageo

usly tearing in pieces the Lamb of God.

It might, perhaps, have been objected that this portrait is overcharged, had not Christ himself, who is immutable Truth, and unsearchable Love, penciled out the gloomiest traits observable in it. Following such a guide, though we may give much offense, yet we can never err.