

*Samuel Davies*

*Divine Conduct vindicated, or the Operations of  
GOD shown to be the Operations of Wisdom :*

In the SUBSTANCE of TWO

**DISCOURSES,**

PREACHED AT

**HABERDASHERS-HALL,**

**LONDON, MARCH 29, 1761;**

Occasioned by the DECEASE of

The Rev. Mr SAMUEL DAVIES, M. A.

And President of the College of Nassau-Hall in New-Jersey,

FEBRUARY 4, 1761.

By THOMAS GIBBONS, M. A.

In which are contained

Some MEMOIRS of Mr DAVIES, and  
some EXTRACTS from his LETTERS.

Sive tribulemur & angustemur, sive lætemur, & exultemus Deus  
laudandus est, qui & in Tribulationibus erudit, & in Lætitia  
consolatur. Laus enim Dei à Corde & Ore Christiani recedere  
non debet, non ut laudet in prosperis, & maledicat in adver-  
sis: sed quemadmodum Psalmus ille scribit, semper Laus ejus  
in Ore meo. Gaudes, agnosce Patrem blandientem: tribularis,  
agnosce Patrem emendantem: sive blandiatur, sive emendet,  
eum erudit, cui parat Hæreditatem.

AUGUSTIN: in Psal. liv.

L O N D O N :

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EPHES. I. 11.

— *Who works all Things after the Counsel  
of his own Will.*

**T**HE last Week gave me the awful Assurance of the sudden and unexpected Death of that most excellent and amiable Man and Minister of Jesus Christ, the Rev. Mr *Samuel Davies*, President of the College of *Nassau-Hall* in *New-Jersey*, by a most moving and melting Letter from a Gentleman of *Philadelphia*, an Acquaintance of Mr *Davies*, and who well knew his Worth, to a Correspondent of the Gentleman's here in *London*.

A greater Loss, all Things considered, could not perhaps befall the Church of God in the Death of a single Person. The God of Nature had endowed Mr *Davies* with extraordinary Talents. Perhaps in Sublimity and Strength of Genius there were very few, if any, who surpassed him. To the brightest and richest Intellects Mr *Davies* had superadded the Improvements of Science, and a large Acquaintance with Books, and possibly, had he lived, there would have been scarcely a Man in our World who had been a more accomplished Divine, or a more eminent Scholar. His Character in Life was wonderfully accommodated both to his natural and acquired Abilities. He was President of *New-Jersey* College, in the Discharge of which Office there would have been a Demand for the Exertion of his amazing Talents, and the Exhibition of all his Treasures of Literature and

A 2

Knowledge.

Knowledge. Thus as he was a Star of the first Magnitude, so he was placed in a Situation where he might have shone without any Waste of his distinguished and supereminent Glories.

But what crowned all, or advanced his Distinction as a Man and a Scholar into the highest Value and Lustre, was, that his pious Character appeared not at all inferior to his great Intellects, and acquired Accomplishments. Nay, (let me not be thought, for I intimately knew him, to exceed the Limits of Truth in the Ardor of my Friendship) his pious Character as much surpassed all else that was remarkable in him, as the sparkling Eye in the Countenance of a great Genius does all the other Features of the Face. If Mr *Davies's* good Sense and Learning were *the Pictures of Silver*, his Graces and Virtues were *the Apples of Gold* \*.

Here let me stay awhile; and, though I can only at present give you a few Outlines of his Piety and amiable Disposition, yet let me be allowed to present you with such a View of him as shall not only be sufficient to demonstrate him to be the best of Men and Ministers, but as shall leave room for you to conclude that great Additions might be made to his Character by Persons who had a longer Acquaintance with him than myself, and the collected Testimonies of the Friends who were favoured with his intimate Correspondence.

He informed me in one of his Letters, for I was honoured with a close Intimacy with him several Years, “ that he was blessed with a Mother  
 “ whom he might account, without filial Vanity  
 “ or Partiality, one of the most eminent Saints he  
 “ ever knew upon Earth. And here, says he, I  
 “ cannot but mention to my Friend an Anecdote  
 “ known but to few, that is, that I am a Son of  
 “ Prayer,

“ Prayer, like my Namesake *Samuel* the Prophet;  
 “ and my Mother called me *Samuel* because she  
 “ said, I have asked him of the Lord, *1 Sam. i. 20.*  
 “ This early Dedication to God has always been a  
 “ strong Inducement to me to devote myself to  
 “ Him by my own personal Act; and the most  
 “ important Blessings of my Life I have looked  
 “ upon as immediate Answers to the Prayers of a  
 “ pious Mother. But, alas! what a degenerate  
 “ Plant am I! How unworthy of such a Parent,  
 “ and such a Birth!”

From the Accounts *Mr Davies* gave of himself  
 in the Conversation that passed between us when  
 he was here in *England*, I learnt, as the Inference  
 from related Fact, that he must have been very  
 assiduous in his Studies. When he was about en-  
 tering the Ministry, he was judged to be in a deep  
 and irrecoverable Consumption. Finding himself  
 upon the Borders of the Grave, and without any  
 Hopes of Recovery, he determined to spend the  
 little Remains of an almost exhausted Life in en-  
 deavouring to advance his Master's Glory in the  
 Good of Souls. Accordingly he removed from  
 the Place where he was to another about an Hun-  
 dred Miles Distance, that was then in Want of a  
 Minister. Here he laboured in Season and out of  
 Season; and, as he told me, preached in the Day,  
 and had his Hectic Fever by Night, and that to  
 such a Degree as to be sometimes delirious, and  
 to stand in Need of Persons to sit up with him.  
 Here God gave him some glorious First-fruits of  
 his Ministry; and two Instances particularly of the  
 Conversion of two Gentlemen he related to me  
 were very remarkable, and he had the Satisfaction,  
 as he informed me, to find in the After-Accounts  
 of them, that there was good Reason to believe  
 that they were Saints indeed, their Goodness being  
 by

by no Means like the Grass upon the House-tops, which withers afore it grows up, and with which the Mower fills not his Hand \*, but yielding the Fruits meet for Repentance in an holy and well-ordered Conversation.

Afterwards he was sent as a Missionary into *Virginia*, a Colony where Profaneness and Immorality called aloud for his sacred Labours. His Patience and Perseverance, his Magnanimity and Piety, together with his powerful and evangelical Ministrations, were not without Success. The Wilderness and the solitary Places, in the Course of his Stay there, bloomed and blossomed before him. His Tract of Preaching, if I remember right, for some Time was not less than Sixty Miles, and by what I have learnt, though not from himself, but little had he of this World's Goods to repay his zealous and indefatigable Labours; but his Reward, as he well knew, was in Heaven; and he felt, I doubt not, the animating Joy that every Negroe-Slave, which under his Ministrations became the Lord's Freeman, would furnish an additional Jewel to his eternal Crown.

Upon the Decease of that excellent Man the Rev. Mr *Jonathan Edwards*, President of the College of *Nassau-Hall* in *New-Jersey*, Mr *Davies* writes me Word, that Mr *Lockwood* in *New England*, a Gentleman of worthy Character, was chosen to fill up the Vacancy. "I have not yet heard," says Mr *Davies*, whether he has accepted the Place. The Trustees were divided between him, Mr *Finley* and myself, but I happily escaped." But so it was ordered, by Mr *Lockwood's* not accepting the Invitation, that Mr *Davies* was afterwards elected President of the College; and what Concern, and indeed what Consternation this Choice gave

\* *Psal.* cxxix. 6, 7.

gave him, his Letters to me amply testify; and I could particularly relate to you what Views he had of Things, and what Steps he took to determine what was his Duty. At last he accepted the Call to his important Office of presiding in the College; and tells me in a Letter, dated *June 6, 1759*, “That the Evidence of his Duty was so plain, that even his sceptical Mind was satisfied; and that his People saw the Hand of Providence in it, and dared not to oppose.”

Here he was settled for about Eighteen Months; and as he could exercise his Ministry as well as preside over the College, great Things might have been expected from that rare and remarkable Union there was in him of what was Great and Good; and with Pleasure I have received the Information from his Friends how well he supported and adorned his Character, and what high Expectations were formed as to the Benefit and Blessing he was likely to prove to that Seminary of Religion and Learning. “His whole Soul, says the Letter that gives the News of his Death, was engaged for the Good of the Youth under his Care.” And again, “*Nassau-Hall* in Tears, disconsolate, and refusing to be comforted.”

But, alas! in the midst of his Days, (I conjecture from former Comparison of our Ages about Thirty-eight or Thirty-nine Years) he was called away from this but opening Scene of large and extraordinary Usefulness to the invisible World, the World of Glory and Blessedness, never to sojourn in mortal Clay, or to irradiate and bless the Church Militant more. He is dead, he is departed — *America* in Groans proclaims her inexpressible Loss, and we in *Great Britain* share the Distress, and echo Groan for Groan.

Thus

Thus ended the Days on Earth of this truly great and good Man, having in his little Circle of Life shed more Beams, and done more Service than many a languid and less illuminated Soul, even in a public Sphere, in the Revolution of Sixty or Fourscore Years.

Truly Great and Good I may stile him without the Suspicion of Flattery, and without the Flight of Hyperbole. Let me call to your Remembrance, as Proofs of what I say, the excellent Discourses he has delivered in this Pulpit, and the several Sermons of his which have been published, strong in manly Sense, loaden with full Ideas, rich with evangelical Truth, and animated with the most sacred Fervor for the Good of Souls. And to these Evidences of the admirable Spirit that dwelt in him, let me add a few Paragraphs from the many Letters with which, in the Course of about Eleven Years Correspondence, he has favoured me.

Speaking in one of his Letters concerning his Children, he says; “ I am solicitous for them. “ when I consider what a contagious World they “ have entered into, and the innate Infection of “ their Natures. There is nothing that can wound “ a Parent’s Heart so deep, as the Thought that “ he should bring up Children to dishonour his “ God here, and be miserable hereafter. I beg “ your Prayers for mine, and you may expect a “ Retaliation in the same Kind.”

In another Letter he says, “ We have now “ three Sons and two Daughters, whose young “ Minds as they open I am endeavouring to cul- “ tivate with my own Hand, unwilling to trust “ them to a Stranger; and I find the Business of “ Education much more difficult than I expected. “ — My dear little Creatures sob and drop a Tear “ now

“ now and then under my Instructions, but I am  
“ not so happy as to see them under deep and last-  
“ ing Impressions of Religion; and this is the  
“ greatest Grief they afford me. Grace cannot  
“ be communicated by natural Descent, and if it  
“ could they would receive but little from me. I  
“ earnestly beg your Prayers for them.”

In another Letter, “ I desire seriously to devote  
“ to God and my dear Country all the Labours  
“ of my Head, my Heart, my Hand and Pen,  
“ and if he pleases to bless any of them I hope I  
“ shall be thankful, and wonder at his condescend-  
“ ing Grace. — Oh! my dear Brother, could we  
“ spend and be spent all our Lives in painful, dis-  
“ interested, indefatigable Service for God and the  
“ World, how serene and bright would it render  
“ the swift approaching Eve of Life! I am la-  
“ bouring to do a little to save my Country, and,  
“ which is of much more Consequence, to save  
“ Souls — those precious, immortal Things, Souls  
“ — from Death — from that tremendous Kind of  
“ Death, which a *Soul* can die. I have but little  
“ Success of late, but blessed be God, it surpasses  
“ my Expectation, and much more my Desert.  
“ Some of my Brethren, particularly Mr *Henry*  
“ and Mr *Wright*, labour to better Purpose. The  
“ Pleasure of the Lord prospers in their Hands.”

Another Epistle tells me, “ As for myself, I  
“ am just striving not to live in vain. I entered  
“ the Ministry with such a Sense of my Unfitness  
“ for it, that I had no sanguine Expectations of  
“ Success. And a condescending God (O, how  
“ condescending!) has made me much more ser-  
“ viceable than I could hope. But, alas! my  
“ Brother, I have but little, very little true Reli-  
“ gion. My Advancements in Holiness are ex-  
“ tremely small, I feel what I confess, and am

“ sure it is true, and not the Rant of excessive or  
 “ affected Humility. It is an easy Thing to make  
 “ a Noise in the World, to flourish and harangue,  
 “ *to dazzle the Crowd and set them all agape*, but  
 “ deeply to imbibe the Spirit of Christianity, to  
 “ maintain a secret Walk with God, to be holy  
 “ as he is holy, this is the Labour, this the Work.  
 “ I beg the Assistance of your Prayers in so grand  
 “ and important an Enterprize. — The Difficulty  
 “ of the Ministerial Work seems to grow upon my  
 “ Hands. Perhaps once in three or four Months  
 “ I preach in some measure as I could wish; that  
 “ is, I preach as in the Sight of God, and as if I  
 “ were to step from the Pulpit to the supreme  
 “ Tribunal. I *feel* my Subject. I melt into  
 “ Tears, or I shudder with Horror, when I de-  
 “ nounce the Terrors of the Lord. I glow, I  
 “ soar in sacred Extasies, when the Love of JESUS  
 “ is my Theme, and as Mr *Baxter* was wont to  
 “ express it in Lines more striking to me than all  
 “ the fine Poetry in the World;

“ *I preach as if I ne'er should preach again;*  
 “ *And as a dying Man to dying Men.*

“ But, alas! my Spirits soon flag, my Devotions  
 “ languish, and my Zeal cools. It is really an  
 “ afflictive Thought that I serve so good a Master  
 “ with so much Inconstancy; but so it is, and my  
 “ Soul mourns upon the Account.”

In another Letter he says, “ I am labouring to  
 “ do a little Good in the World. But, alas! I  
 “ find I am of little Use or Importance. I have  
 “ many Defects, but none gives me so much Pain  
 “ and Mortification as my slow Progress in per-  
 “ sonal Holiness. This is the grand Qualification  
 “ for the Office we sustain, as well as for that  
 “ Heaven

“ Heaven we hope for, and I am shocked at myself when I see how little I have of it.”

In one of his Letters he acquaints me, “ That he indeed feels an Union of Hearts which cannot bear without Pain the Intervention of the huge *Atlantic*, nor even the Absence of a Week. But our condescending Lord, adds he, calls his Ministers *Stars*, and he knows best in what Part of the Firmament of the Church to fix them : and (O the delightful Thought!) they can never be out of the Reach of his Beams, though they shine in different Hemispheres with Regard to each other. This leads me, undesignedly, to a Criticism on *Jude* 13, on which perhaps an Astronomer would be the best Commentor. ἄστρες πλανῆται, οἷς ὁ ζῶσθ τῷ σκότειε εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τελήρηται. *Wandering Stars, to whom is reserved the Blackness of Darkness for ever.* Perhaps an Astronomical Critic would observe that false Teachers are represented as *planetary* or *wandering Stars* that in their Eccentricities run out into an eternal *Aphelion* from the Sun of Righteousness, beyond the System which he warms, illuminates, and beatifies, and are constantly receding from the Fountain of Light, Life and Bliss, and therefore must wander through the Blackness of Darkness for ever; a Darkness unpierced by one Ray from the great Sun and Center of the moral World — *Blackness of Darkness*, an Abstract predicated of an Abstract. How gloomy and strong the Expression!”

One more Passage shall conclude my Quotations from his Letters. “ I am very much pleased and affected, says he, with the Subject of this Week’s Study, and next Lords-Day’s Entertainment, namely, *A bruised Reed shall be not break, and the smoking Flax shall be not quench.* Such a

“ *bruised Reed* at best am I: a weak, oppressed,  
 “ uselefs Thing: a *stridens Stipula* that can make  
 “ no agreeable Melody to entertain my great Shep-  
 “ herd. Yet this *bruised Reed* I have Reason to  
 “ hope he will not break, but bind up and sup-  
 “ port. This shattered Pipe of Straw he will not  
 “ cast away, but repair and tune to join in the  
 “ Angelic Concert on high. I am at best but  
 “ *smoking Flax*; a dying Snuff in the Candlestick  
 “ of his Church; a Wick just put out in the Lamp  
 “ of his Sanctuary. The Flame of divine Love,  
 “ sunk deep into the Socket of a corrupt Heart,  
 “ quivers, and breaks, and catches, and seems just  
 “ expiring at Times. The Devil and the World  
 “ raise many Storms to blow upon it. And yet  
 “ this *smoking Flax* where the least Spark of that  
 “ sacred Passion still remains which renders it more  
 “ susceptible of his Love, as a Candle just put out  
 “ but still smoking, is easily rekindled. — This  
 “ *smoking Flax* he will not quench, but blow it to  
 “ a Flame, which shall shine brighter and brighter  
 “ till it mingle with its kindred Flames in the  
 “ pure Element of Love.”

And thither this burning and shining Light is now gone, and must illuminate the Tabernacle of our God on Earth no more.

Judge you from these Passages, wrote in the Freedom of Friendship, and to one to whom he scrupled not to lay open the Secrets of his Bosom, what a Loss the Church has sustained, and how much our World is impoverished by the Death of dear Mr *Davies*, in the Vigour of his Days, and in the Meridian of his Usefulness.

With how much Justice may we apply to him with a little Alteration an Epitaph which he composed for a most beloved Friend of his, and an eminent Christian\*.

“ The

\* Captain Grant of Philadelphia.

- “ The Colours of Expression are too faint,  
 “ Let Thought describe what Thought alone can  
 paint :  
 “ Think what the Christian, Preacher, Friend  
 should be,  
 “ You’ve then his Character : for such was He.

Such a Blow, such an uncommon and distressing Blow has been given in the Death of Mr *Davies*. And now what shall we do? To what shall we recur, or to what Quarter shall we look for Help under such an awful Providence? My Advice is, that we should seriously and attentively turn our Minds to the Passage of sacred Writ which I mentioned at the Beginning of my Discourse.

*Who* (that is, God) *works all Things after the Counsel of his own Will.*

Without enquiring into the Context, the Words may be regarded as a distinct Proposition. He, that is, God, *works*. *He works*, or he works with Energy and irresistible Power, in such a Manner as none besides Him either has Ability or Right to work. He works like himself, he works with the Omnipotence that belongs to Him, and which is his essential and distinguishing Attribute \*. Farther, Not only does God work, but he works *all Things*, all Things done by Him in Heaven and Earth, in all the Provinces of his vast Empire, all Things in Nature, Providence, and Grace, all Things

\* That the Word (Ενεργειν,) here translated *who works*, contains in it that forcible Meaning which I have here ascribed to it, we may learn from what the Critics have said upon it. “ Hac Voce significatur Actio conjuncta cum Efficacia, & quidem summa, quæ prohiberi nullo modo possit. LXX utuntur, *Isai. xli. 4.*” LEIGHTON in Verb. “ At Græca Vox magis sonat, *ejus cujus Vi & Virtute fiunt omnia*, h. e. omnia agentis ac moderantis.” ERASMUS in Loc. Could we admit of such an *English* Word, the Original might be rendered *who energizes all Things, &c.*

Things in Time, and all Things in Eternity. And He works all Things after the Counsel of his *own Will*, that is, as He pleases. His Will is the Source of his Action. He gives an Account of his Matters to none. None in the Army of Heaven, or among the Inhabitants of the Earth have any Authority to say unto Him, What dost Thou? He depends upon none, but all, all Worlds and Beings depend upon Him, and therefore none are to presume to dictate to Him or direct Him what is or what is not to be done by Him. But observe, that though He works, and works all Things, and all this as He pleases, yet it is *after the Counsel* of his own Will. We are to consider God indeed as a great Sovereign, as Lord of All, higher than the Highest, of supreme and unrivalled Perfection and Glory, who is not to be called to the Tribunal of his Creatures, or to be questioned by them as to what He pleases to perform. We are not to snatch the Sceptre or the Balance from his Hands. But yet this we may be assured of, that whatever God does is done not from a Kind of blind though omnipotent Necessity, or done in a Kind of Random, or by an unguided or unmeaning Exertion of Power; but that he works all Things after the *Counsel*, the *Design*, or *Wisdom* of his own Will\*.

Survey

\* The Word (*βουλή*) here translated *Counsel* may, according to the learned Stephens in his *Thesaurus Græcæ Linguae*, be rendered a *Decree*, or *Resolution*, a *Counsel* or *Advice*, whether good or bad, or a *Consultation* or *Deliberation*. If we understand the Word here of *Decree* or *Resolution* as applied to God we are certain that such a *Decree* or *Resolution* in Deity had its Birth in Wisdom, or in no Way derogatory to it. If we interpret the Word of *Counsel* or *Advice*, who sees not that Wisdom is taken into the Account? It is the *Counsel*, it is the *Advice* of the God of unerring Wisdom. But if we take the Word, and what forbids that we should not so translate it, as denoting *Consultation* or *Deliberation*, then we are led in the strongest Manner to conclude

Survey the great Jehovah as he is indeed in his own Nature, and in the Revelation he has made of himself. If He is sovereign, and accountable to none, yet He is wise, and infinitely wise. We are not to view God partially but as far as we can compleatly, as the Fountain of all Perfection, as containing in his Nature an Harmony of all that is excellent and glorious. He has a Right to do, and He can do whatsoever He pleases in all his wide-extended Dominions, yet what He pleases is always worthy of himself. He is the Aggregate, the System of Excellence, and one Attribute never displays itself to the Diminution or Eclipse of another. As He is the greatest, so He is the best of Beings. Wisdom dwells eternally and essentially in the divine Will, and who possessed of so much Reason as its unoriginated and indefectible Source? Though none can limit God, yet He, with Reverence be it spoken, limits himself, limits himself by the Rule which infinite Wisdom prescribes to infinite Power. Hear the Accounts Scripture gives of Him. *He is the Rock, his Works are perfect, for all his Ways are Judgment; a God of Truth, and without Iniquity, just and right is he (a). He is wise in Heart, as well as mighty in Strength (b).*

*His*

clude that the Will of God proceeds upon Wisdom. Not that there is properly or strictly any such Thing as *Consultation* or *Deliberation* in the divine Mind; but we may hereby conceive, speaking of God after the manner of Men, that God when he wills, wills in such a wise Manner, and upon such worthy Reasons, as if he had first *consulted* and *deliberated* with himself what was proper to be done. Liberè quidem, quia ex Voluntate, sed tamen etiam sapienter & justè quia ex Consilio Voluntatis. ZANCH. "But because (says the great Mr *Howe*) "He orders all Things according to the Counsel of his Will, "we must conceive some weighty Reason did induce hereto." *Howe's Redeemer's Dominion over the Invisible World*, p. 72. Folio Edition, Vol. II.

(a) Deut. xxxii. 4.

(b) Job ix. 4.

*His Judgments are a great Deep (c), but they are Judgments, the Children of Wisdom and Counsel still. If Clouds and Darknefs are round about him, yet Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation of his Throne (d). His Works are Truth, and his Ways Judgment (e). The Almighty will not pervert Judgments (f). His Ways are equal (g), directed by the strait unerring Line of infinite Wisdom. Be this then an established Truth with us, that whatever Perplexity and Darknefs may encompass the divine Proceedings, that there is nothing which God does, that God who works all Things after the Counsel of his own Will, but what is just and right and good, and that his every Action is no other than the Birth of consummate Counsel, or that the Plan of Wisdom is laid as the Foundation of all his Government. And particularly in such an Event as we are now considering, the Removal of such an excellent and worthy Person as Mr Davies from our World, in the Prime of Life, and at such a Juncture as this, when there are so few surviving Persons of such Ability and Character we are to believe and own that, as the Blow was unquestionably given by God, it was perfectly right, and that not the least Shadow or Suspicion of Blame or Wrong is to be ascribed to the most High, most Holy, most Wise, most Faithful, and most Merciful God. And even though we could not discern one Reason, one End of Wisdom or Goodness answered by such an awful Providence as we are now considering, yet still we are not to doubt but that the All-wise as well as Almighty God has proceeded upon Motives, though absolutely impene-trable by us, worthy of himself; that he dwells in*

the

(c) Psal. xxxvi. 6.

(e) Dan. iv. 37.

(g) Ezek. xviii. 25.

(d) Psal. xcvi. 2.

(f) Job xxxiv. 12.

the thickest Darkness, and that the Glories of his Perfections are introned at the Center, though not a Ray of them penetrates and breaks through the external Veil. But perhaps upon a careful and steady Survey of this most afflictive Providence we may attain to some Discovery of the Purposes or Counsels of Deity in the Decease of such an excellent Person as Mr *Davies* in the Prime of his Days, and in the very Height of his Usefulness. And, though we are not to call the Lord of All to our Tribunal, yet perhaps we may not venture beyond our Line, or deviate from the Path of Duty, nay we may on the other hand be glorifying God, as well as composing and comforting ourselves, if with profound Humility and Reverence we make the Enquiry, wherefore it is that God, *who works all Things after the Counsel of his own Will*, is pleased to call away by Death the Excellent of the Earth in the Vigour of Life, and in the Meridian of their Services for the Glory of God and the Good of his Church. These hard Mysteries may not upon a diligent Research be altogether inexplicable, and these dark Passages of Providence upon a close Survey may appear illuminated with evident and illustrious Beams of Wisdom and Love. Accordingly I shall endeavour, I trust with a Decency becoming a poor imperfect Creature examining into the Ways of the most high and glorious God, to resolve this Problem of Providence, “Why the Excellent of the Earth should be taken away in the Flower or Prime of their Age, and from the most enlarged Spheres of Usefulness, or what Instructions and Improvement we may gather from such seemingly unkind and undesirable Dispensations?” If *Job* said to his God, and we do not find he was blamed for it, *Shew*

me wherefore thou contendest with me (b)? If we are to bear the Rod, and that God who has appointed it (i)? And if in the Day of Adversity we are to consider (k), certainly we are so far from wandering out of the Path of Duty, that we are on the contrary found in it, when with a due Deference to Deity we not only acknowledge his Righteousness, but talk with him concerning his Judgments (l). And,

(1.) In the Removal of the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Height of their Usefulness, we may be taught the wonderful Majesty and independent Glories of the great God over all blessed for evermore. “ God will have it known, says the venerable Mr. Howe on an Occasion not unlike that which has given Rise to our Discourse\*, that though he uses Instruments, he needs them not. It is a Piece of divine Royalty and Magnificence, that when he hath prepared and polished such an Utensil, so as to be capable of great Service, he can lay it by without Loss.” God can maintain and carry on his own Cause, and answer his Counsels, without the Interposition of his Creatures, or, if he pleases, he may employ only meaner Instruments, and may call home from the Vineyard the ablest and best of his Servants, to shew his Church he can accomplish his Pleasure without them.

(2.) God may cut off the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Height of their Usefulness, to endear and magnify his Power and Grace in unexpectedly raising up others amidst the desponding Fears and Sorrows of his People. When God takes away the Excellent  
of

(b) Job x. 2.

(i) Micah vi. 9.

(k) Eccl. vii. 14.

(l) Jer. xii. 1.

\* *Howe's Redeemer's Dominion over the Invisible World, on the Death of John Houghton, Esq;*

of the Earth, such as were most eminently formed for Service, in the midst of their Days, the Church of God, the Friends of *Zion*, are apt to sink into great Anxiety and Distress, and to say with *Zion* of old, *The Lord has forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me* (m); or with *Jacob*, *All these Things are against me* (n). Now at the very Juncture when the People of God are thus dejected, when their Hearts are trembling for the Ark of the Lord, for God then to arise and to make the Time of his Church's Extremity the Time of his Mercy, in raising up others, and pouring out his Spirit upon them in a plentiful Effusion of Gifts and Graces, how does he hereby most wonderfully illustrate his Power and Love? His Light, his Favour towards *Zion* appears as it were with a double Brightness, thus breaking out from amidst a Night of thick Darkness; and the Church of God with a most lively and powerful Sense of the divine Goodness acknowledges that God has done great Things for them which they looked not for, and that nothing but his own Arm, and his own Love, could have helped them in such a distressing Season. Hereby God is more eminently seen, and glorified, and the Work appears to be the Lord's, and is wonderful in his People's Eyes.

(3.) God may take away the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Meridian of their Usefulness, to shew us more powerfully and affectingly the Vanity of the present State. God shews us the Vanity of the present State when he takes away Persons in old Age, when they have reached their Threescore Years and ten, or Fourscore Years, for by such Instances we are taught what a mere Hands-breadth of Being this Life is, even in its utmost Extent,

(m) Isa. xlix. 14.

(n) Gen. xlii. 36.

and how soon our Existence in this World will be terminated, even though it is protracted to its farthest Limit. But when Death, usurping, as it were, by Violence the Sickle from the delaying Hands of Time, cuts off Persons in the Bloom or in the Prime of Life, then is the Vanity of the present State preached to us in the most striking, affecting manner. And if with the Bloom of Youth or Prime of Manhood great intellectual Abilities and superior acquired Accomplishments, distinguished Piety and most enlarged Usefulness, are cut off, then, in the most solemn awful Accents, is the Vanity of the present State proclaimed to us, and our Ears receive the Lesson, not in soft Whispers, not in a common Voice, but in Peals of Thunder. Then we hear the Cry sounding, as it were, in an overwhelming and irresistible Energy, *All Flesh is Grass, and all the Goodliness thereof is as the Flower of the Field: the Grass withers, the Flower fades, because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it* (o). I see a Man in the Vigour and Strength of Constitution, a Man ennobled beyond the common Multitude by a bright and lively Imagination, by a clear and piercing Judgment, by a manly and commanding Eloquence: I see a Man superior to his Fellow-Christians and his Fellow-Ministers, by a most sublime, steady, rational, and uniform Piety, and by an unextinguishable Zeal, and indefatigable Labour for the Glory of God and the Good of Souls, this Man, thus richly furnished and qualified, is taken away by a sudden Stroke, or after a few Days Illness, and an End, an utter End is put to all his Lustre and Benefit in our World. What Inference results from all this, but that all is Vanity here below? If the best we meet with on Earth

(o) Isa. xl. 6, 7.

Earth is thus fugitive and uncertain, if it may so soon be gone, for ever gone from us, then *verily every Man at his best Estate*, and the best of Men too, *are altogether Vanity* (p). The Pearls and Jewels of our World may be as soon taken from it as the Dirt and Dross. There is Mortality, there is Death in my choicest Enjoyments. I see that the tall Cedar may be cut down as well as the humble Plant. Stars of the first Magnitude, as well as the smaller Orbs, may quit the Skies, and vanish from my Sight. Death makes no Distinction between Good and Bad, between the Greatest and Meanest, the Best and Worst. Now he hurls his Dart at the poor Peasant, and now he bends it at the Monarch on his Throne. Now his Shaft finites the Christian in his private Walks of Life, and now his unerring Stroke lays the eminent Genius, Scholar, and Minister in the Dust. *All Things*, in this Sense, *come alike to all* (q). And is this the Case, do the Floods of Death alike overwhelm the stately and richly freighted Ship, as the small Bark or Boat, then why should I doat upon the Creature? If I build my fond Expectations of Peace and Comfort upon the best of Men, I build upon the Sand. My dearest Friendships, and richest Joys on Earth may be dashed in pieces in an Hour, in a Moment. All on Earth is Shadow, and when I look even to the very best it can afford, I see the same Vanity and Frailty there, which are common to lower and meaner Things.

(4.) God may cut off the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Height of their Usefulness, to bring our Hearts into a nearer and more intimate Dependence upon himself. How pleased are we apt to be with our Enjoyments here below, and especially with our  
pious

(p) Psal. xxxix. 5.

(q) Eccl. ix. 2.

pious Friendships and Connections? And it may be that we are in such Cases the less aware of Danger, and the less upon our Guard as to Excess, as we are certain that it is no Way sinful, but on the other Hand acceptable in the Sight of God, to value the Excellent of the Earth, and to be delighted with their Converse and Company. But even here we may exceed, and by an inordinate Regard to only Creatures and Instruments, we may be led astray from our God, or may not so much consider, adore, and enjoy Him in them as we ought. The Creature, the Instrument therefore of which we were too fond, and on which we relied too much, may be removed from us in order to prevent that Sacrilege of our best Affections, or that unwarrantable withdrawment of a great Part of them from Heaven, which we were before too apt to indulge. God has a Right to our entire Hearts, and unless we look to him, and own him in all our best Enjoyments, we may provoke him to remove them from us, and this he may do that he may bring us into more intimate Union with himself, and Dependence upon him, that the Creature may be shewn to be nothing better than a Creature, and that he may be honoured and acknowledged as All in All. *Peter*, upon the Mount of Transfiguration, says, that it was good for them to be there, and was for making three Tabernacles, one for his Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elias, but it is told us, *he knew not what he said* (r), and the bright Vision was soon concluded. God may righteously, and indeed graciously remove Creatures, the best of Creatures from us, if they draw off too much of the Current of our Affections from himself: the Cistern breaking may endear to us the living Fountain: the Reed sinking may recommend us to the Rock of Ages.

God

(r) Luke ix. 33.

God may take away this and the other created Excellency that our Weakness has set up as a Veil between Him and our Souls, that we may lie the more open to his immediate Communications, and that we may better remember and practise our Duty, *to love the Lord our God with all our Heart, with all our Soul, with all our Mind, and with all our Strength* (s).

(5.) As by the Death of the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, we are taught that no Strength of Constitution, or Eminency, or Usefulness, are Securities from Death, so we may hereby be excited the more diligently to attend to our Work, and prepare for our Dismission. If we see others taken away younger and stronger than ourselves, then what is the Inference, but that we may be cut off as well as they, and indeed more easily than they? If we observe others more eminent and more serviceable than ourselves, called away from Life, if their brighter Splendors and more extensive Benefit to Mankind were no Protections from the Arrest of Death, then what may we their Inferiors expect? We have no Exemption from Sickness, Pain, or sudden Death, or Death in the midst of our Days any more than others. If we had the Wisdom of *Solomon*, or the Zeal and Usefulness of *St Paul*, still, like them, we should be no better than mortal. Hear then the Voice of God to you, speaking from the Ashes of the Young, the Strong, the Learned, the eminently Pious and Useful, “Stand with your Loins  
 “girded, and your Lamps burning. Give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure.  
 “Work while it is Day; the Night comes when  
 “no Man can work. Whatsoever thine Hand  
 “finds to do, do it with thy might.” Do not think

(s) Mark xii. 30.

think that because you are a Tree, even a Palm, or a Vine whose Fruit cheers both God and Man (1), that therefore the Order will not be issued out, Hew down the Tree, cut off its Branches, and even pluck up its Roots. Flatter not yourself because you are a Saint and Servant of God, or a Minister of some considerable Influence and Importance in the Church, that Death can have no Power over you; dream not of an abiding Place here; you dwell in a Tabernacle that may be soon taken down, even though it is a Tabernacle which is Holiness to the Lord. Attend then to your Work; every Day look out for Death, and view yourself as at the Brink of the Grave, and at the Door of Eternity.

(6.) By the Death of the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the midst of their Services to God and his Church, we may be led to enquire, Whether there is no Anger expressed against us by their sudden, and in respect of the common Age of Man, untimely Removal.

As, (1.) We may do well to consider whether there may not be some Judgments impending over us. If Ambassadors are called Home, it may become the Nation, where they were, to consider whether a Rupture is not likely to ensue. Every good Man that is taken away from our World is a Loss to it, a Deduction from its Worth, in proportion to his Goodness. There is a Loss of his Instructions, his Example, and his Prayers. And if the best of Men are cut off, the Loss grows so much the greater, and our Apprehensions of the divine Resentment may very justly be so much the more awakened. Doves fly Home to their Windows at the coming Storm. *The Righteous perishes and no Man lays it to Heart; and merciful Men are taken*

(1) Judges xi. 13.

taken away, none considering that the Righteous is taken away from the Evil to come (u). Lot leaves Sodom, and when he is gone the Floodgates of Vengeance are set open, and the City is turned into Destruction. Do not let us think lightly of the Matter, that we see the best of Men, Men that were holy Wrestlers with God, and stood in the Breach to plead with him to turn away his Wrath, removed from our World in the midst of their Days, especially when so few Servants and Saints of God remain behind, and the World is so generally filled with Impiety, and all Manner of Wick- edness. Good *Hezekiah*, and after him good *Jaq- siab*, must go to their Graves before the Destruc- tion comes upon *Judah* and *Jerusalem*.

(2.) And as we know not but the Deaths of the Excellent of the Earth in the midst of their Days, and in the midst of their Usefulness, may portend some Judgments from God coming upon us, so let us hence be excited the more earnestly to deprecate them, and pray for his merciful Regards to us. If the Excellent of the Earth are taken away, and taken away in the midst of their Usefulness, and if, in such Dispensations of Providence, we may hear, as it were, the first Alarms of the Almighty's Anger from his secret Place of Thunder, let us be the more fervent in our Supplications that he would turn away his Anger, and not deal with us after our Sins, nor reward us according to our Iniquities. The more gloomy Apprehension, the more appa- rent Danger, the more should we be excited to Prayer, lively and importunate Prayer. Let us beg of God, and beg the more earnestly, that he would have Compassion upon us, and that the Tokens of his Judgments may proceed no farther, and not continue upon us till the Judgments them- selves

D

selves

(u) *Isaiah* lvii. 1.

elves descend upon us in a Storm of resistless and overwhelming Vengeance. And,

(3.) As we know not but the Deaths of the Excellent of the Earth, in the midst of their Days and Usefulness, may be the Forerunners of some Judgments from God at the Door, let us prepare to meet our God if he should come out against us in the Way of his Judgments. Do we hear the Sound of his Anger, and are there some awful Flashes, though at present at a Distance, that seem to signify a gathering Tempest, then let us prepare to meet our God. *Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel (w)*. Let us gird our Christian Armour close about us. Let us strengthen ourselves in our God, and abound in the Exercises of a Dependence upon him whose *Grace only is sufficient for us, and whose Strength alone can be perfected in our Weakness (x)*. Let us be in a Readiness to follow our God at his Call either through the Waters or Fires of Affliction, being as willing magnanimously to suffer for him, as we are chearfully to serve him, and not being at all shaken in Mind or Spirit by the most grievous Calamities and Trials of Life, having an inviolable Connection with, and a sure Interest in him *who will make all Things work together for our Good (y)*, and who has promised us a better Life and a better World, after we have suffered awhile, *even an Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away (z)*, and an Admission into his Palace and Presence where *there is Fulness of Joy, and a Place at his right Hand where are Pleasures for evermore (a)*.

(7.) By the Deaths of the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the midst

(w) Amos iv. 12.

(y) Rom. viii. 28.

(a) Psal. xvi. 11.

(x) 2 Cor. xii. 9.

(z) 1 Pet. i. 4.

midst of their Usefulness, let us be excited to exert ourselves more vigorously and constantly to glorify God, and serve our Generation, than hitherto we have done. Their Removal shews us that we may be removed, and so quickens us to our Duty, and their Loss likewise, their Loss to the World, should also excite us to Duty, since, though there is as much Work as ever, yet there are fewer Labourers to perform it. The more the World is impoverished, the more let us endeavour to enrich it. If an Army is thinned of its Numbers, let the Officers, the Soldiers that remain, not be unwilling to go through double Service, and to exert themselves with a double Activity and Vigour.

(8.) By the Removal of the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Height of their Usefulness, we are sure that we have lost by their Departure from our World one Tie to Earth, and gained one Attachment more to Heaven. The Excellent of the Earth are taken away, our Friends, our Companions with whom we took sweet Counsel. In every such Instance one more Bond to Earth and Time is consequently broken. We are in one more degree detached from the Charms of the Creature, and hereby may come nearer, if we rightly improve the Providence, to a Deliverance from this World, that may have had too fast an Hold of our Hopes and Affections. Had our pious and excellent Friends stayed behind us, the Thought of parting from them, though but for a Time, might have thrown a Gloom upon our expiring Moments, and sharpened the Sting of Death. But they are gone, and Life has lost by the Departure of each of them one of its strongest Engagements. And as we have dropt one Tie to Earth by their Removal, so we have gained one more Argument for Heaven. Heaven

lets down one more Attractive, and a sweet and powerful Attractive it is, to draw up our Hearts and Hopes to it; Heaven, where our immortal Treasure lies, and whither our pious Friends are gone. Let us feel the Attachment, and the more Heaven enlarges its glorious and blessed Company of Saints made perfect, the more let us look by Faith within the Veil, and the more ready let us be to follow our Brethren that have died in Christ to the World of Glory, that we may share with them in their eternal Blessedness, and in the Joys of an intimate, perfect, and indissoluble Friendship.

(9.) And lastly, Let the Removal of the Excellent of the Earth, in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Meridian of their Usefulness, quicken us to importunate and incessant Prayer that God would pour out his Spirit upon such of his Servants as remain, and upon our rising Ministry, and rising Generation. The Residue of the Spirit is with God, and it is a Residue copious enough to qualify and consecrate such as survive, or such as are entering into Life, and Service, with as eminent Gifts, and as eminent Graces, as those who are gone before us. O for the Spirit of the ascended *Elijahs* to rest upon our young *Elishas*! *The Harvest truly is great, but the Labourers are few; let us earnestly and incessantly beseech the Lord of the Harvest that he would send forth Labourers into his Harvest* (b). O that God would kindle by his Almighty Breath, and a rich Unction from himself, bright and burning Lamps, to fill up the Places of those which are removed from his Sanctuary below to shine in his Temple above! Let the Death of such an eminent Servant of Christ as Mr *Davies*, in the Prime of his Age, and in the Height of his Usefulness, stir us up to importunate  
and

(1) Matt ix. 37, 38.

and abundant Prayer that God would be pleased, in Compassion to our World, to raise up like Instruments of his Glory both in our Land, and wherever his Name is known, or there are any Opportunities to preach his Gospel! O for the Descent of a double Portion of the Spirit upon surviving Ministers, and upon all other Nurseries of Religion and Learning at Home and Abroad! *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* He lives, he is still with us, though *Elijah* is gone. To him therefore let us look, to him let us pray with holy Importunity and Zeal that the Time, even the set Time to favour his Zion, may come. Let but the Lord give the Word, and pour out of his Spirit, and great shall be the Number of those that publish it (c). Let him but clothe his Priests with Salvation, and his People shall shout aloud for Joy (d).

And thus have I endeavoured, from various Considerations, to resolve this Problem in Providence, “Why the Excellent of the Earth should be taken away in the Flower or Prime of their Age, and from the most enlarged Spheres of Usefulness, or what Instructions and Improvement we may gather from such seemingly unkind and undesirable Dispensations.” I pretend not to assign all the Reasons of such a Conduct in Deity, in that *God who works all Things after the Counsel of his own Will*, but yet possibly I may have assigned some, and some such as may convince us that even these afflictive, and perhaps frequently supposed impenetrable Proceedings are not without the evident Traces of the divine Wisdom, Righteousness, and Mercy upon them to a duly observing Eye, so that we may not only as the Voice of Faith, but as the Confession of Experience,

(c) Psa. lxxviii. 11.

(d) Psa. cxxxii. 16.

ence, say, I know, O Lord, that thy Judgments are right, and that thou in Faithfulness hast afflicted me (e).

I shall only add, that whether we can or cannot investigate the Motives in the Counsels of a holy, wise, and merciful God, why such Providences should take place, as the Removal of the Excellent of the Earth in the Flower or Prime of their Days, and in the Height of their Usefulness, yet two Things methinks are indispensable Duties upon us in such Dispensations, *Congratulation* and *Submission*. *Congratulation* that our pious Friends are gone to a better World, for as one says \*, “ Was  
 “ not Self-love too predominant, and our Faith  
 “ of invisible Realities too weak, we should re-  
 “ joice at a pious Relative (or Friend’s) Admission  
 “ into the Society of the Blessed. We congratu-  
 “ late them upon some petty Advantage gained  
 “ in this low State of Being, and again we mourn  
 “ their Advancement to the highest Degree of  
 “ Honour and Felicity, because out of our Ken!  
 “ Such aukward and preposterous Creatures are  
 “ we!”

The other Duty is *Submission*. *Submission* to the high and holy, though awful Will of Heaven. *Patience* has its Hour of Exertion and Effulgence in the Darkness of Providence, and the Season of our greatest Trials. *Father, not my Will but thine be done*, how glorious, how pleasant to hear from under the Pressures of the sorest Afflictions! I have often thought of the noble Speech of the Archbishop of *Cambrai*, who, when he heard the News of the Duke of *Burgundy’s* Death, to whom he

(e) Psalm cxix. 75.

\* Extracts of the Letters of *Samuel Holden*, Esq; preserved in a Funeral Discourse of *Dr Benjamin Colman’s* for that worthy Gentleman.

he had been Preceptor, and for whom he had the most tender Affection, burst into Tears, but yet presently said, “ If I knew that by the Turn of a  
“ Straw I could recover him to Life, and yet at  
“ the same Time was assured that it was contrary  
“ to the Will of God, I would not do it.” O  
for a complacential Acquiescence in the divine Dis-  
posals! O for the meek and chearful Surrender of  
our Wills to the Will of our God! This Tem-  
per how loyal and dutiful, and how comfortable  
and happy! May this be our Experience till Faith  
is turned into Sight, and Hope and Patience shall  
be swallowed up in boundless and everlasting Fru-  
ition and Joy!

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