

S E R M O N S,

B Y

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ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS IN
ORDINARY IN SCOTLAND.



L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR CHARLES DILLY IN THE POULTRY.

M D C C L X X X.

16

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S E R M O N VII.

CONSTANCY IN RELIGION ENFORCED BY
THE COMMON SUFFERINGS OF HUMAN
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I C O R. x. 13.

*There hath no temptation taken you, but such as
is common to man.*

FROM observing that, in the present state, calamities befall good and bad men indiscriminately, the irreligious have concluded, that God takes no concern about the behaviour of men, and that *it is therefore vain to serve him** : and from observing that a strict adherence to virtue is, in some cases, the direct cause of suffering or loss, they have affected to conclude farther, that it is even folly to be virtuous. The great reward which God has promised to good men in the future life, is doubtless sufficient to render it our highest

* Mal. iii. 14.

wisdom to adhere to virtue, whatever sufferings it may bring upon us in the present life. But earthly things take so fast an hold of the minds of men, that sufferings for religion must always have some tendency to prevent their looking forward to the heavenly reward, with faith firm enough to sustain their fortitude, and secure their stedfastness. On this account the scripture often calls such sufferings, by way of eminence, *temptations*.

It is in the time of persecution chiefly, that men are exposed to temptations of this kind: but they are not totally exempt from them at any time. There will always be particular situations in which religion obstructs mens' worldly interest; in which we may forfeit some immediate advantage, or incur something troublesome or disagreeable, by inflexible and uncomplying virtue: and there will be many more situations, in which we may be apprehensive of these consequences. Though we be under no temptation to renounce our religion altogether, we may be very strongly tempted to what is inconsistent with some of its particular laws. Dread of incurring the ridicule of the world, the displeasure of friends, the resentment of the powerful, the loss of a favourable opportunity for gain, are often pleaded by men in every age, as ex-

cases for acknowledged deviations from the strict line of integrity and innocence. Never therefore can it be unseasonable to exhort Christians to constancy in virtuous practice, notwithstanding the sufferings, losses, and inconveniences in which it may involve them, or to urge upon them for this purpose, the same arguments which the sacred writers proposed, for the confirmation of the first Christians enduring persecution for the sake of the gospel.

In this earthly state, all men without exception are subjected to suffering and affliction. Far from considering this as unfavourable to the cause of virtue or religion, the sacred writers deduce from this very topic, an argument for resolution, patience, and constancy under the peculiar sufferings to which religion and virtue sometimes expose good men. To support the Christians of that age under persecution for righteousness sake, they remind them, that all mankind, as well as they, are obnoxious to many sufferings. *We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now* *, says the apostle, in fortifying the Romans against *the sufferings of this present time* †. The Corinthians also were in

* Rom. viii. 22.

† 1 Cor. 13.

danger

danger of suffering for religion. They dreaded that their refusing all communion with the Pagans in their idolatrous feasts, might provoke their resentment and raise a persecution: perhaps they had experienced this in some degree. The gospel notwithstanding required them to persist in their refusal: compliance with any appendage of Pagan worship, would have been an apostasy from the faith of Christ, and from the service of the one living God. The apostle exhorts them to inflexible resolution, *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall;* and enforceth the exhortation by this argument, *there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man.* The sufferings which you have incurred by your steadfastness, and all the sufferings which by it you can incur, are only such as are ordinary in the life of man: therefore you ought to meet them with fortitude, to bear them with patience, and not allow yourselves to be moved by them to deviate from the purity of the gospel in a point so essential. The force of the argument cannot but be felt, as soon as it is proposed. Yet its impression may be strengthened by its being deliberately unfolded, by our considering attentively in what particular ways the common troubles of human life urge us to submit cheerfully to those troubles which the good man may sometimes incur by doing his duty.

duty. They urge us to this conduct, by the example of suffering which they exhibit,—by leading us to conclude that, if we had not been exposed to sufferings for virtue, other afflictions would have been allotted to us,—by convincing us that by deviating from virtue we can obtain no security against falling into the like sufferings,—and by stamping vanity upon all present outward things.

FIRST, The afflictions and sorrows which are common, and even universal in human life, excite us to constancy under sufferings for religion and a good conscience, by the very example of suffering which they exhibit. Think not for a single moment of deserting religion, or transgressing any one of its laws, on account of the inconveniences to which it may expose you; for these inconveniences, whatever they be, are only such as men, in this mortal state, very commonly endure.

IF the generality passed through life without seeing any evil days, you might have some excuse for thinking it hard that you alone should be subjected to affliction, especially that you should be subjected to it by a strict adherence to your duty. But every one that is *born of a woman, is of few days, and full of*
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trouble;

trouble *; on every man sorrows are multiplied by one cause or another: you cannot expect an exemption from the necessary condition of your species; when you too *find trouble and sorrow* †, why should you repine? Its being occasioned by your steadfastness in your duty, renders your condition no worse than that of many, who have fallen into as great trouble by other means. If the fulfilling of the obligations of religion exposes you to suffering, you ought not to venture on transgressing them in order to avoid it, till you have first surveyed all the miseries of those who suffer, but not for religion; till you have traced the disasters of all ages down from Adam to the present hour; and till you be able to say, that what you must endure in *retaining your integrity* ‡, is bitterer than ever fell to the lot of man. But truly, religion never exposed its most determined champions, even in the bloodiest persecutions, to greater losses or severer pains, than many have been forced to encounter in the common course of providence, or have brought upon themselves by their imprudence or their crimes. Religion has exposed men to *the spoiling of their goods* §, to *suffer the loss of all things for Christ Jesus* ** : suppose it should require you, in ad-

* Job xiv. 1. † Psal. cxvi. 3. ‡ Job ii. 9. § Heb. x. 34.
** Phil. iii. 8.

hering to virtue, to relinquish all your possessions: yet would it reduce you to a worse condition than that man whom you see contentedly earning a scanty livelihood by his daily labour, or than that other whom you find always chearful, though he be begging his bread. Look to them, and be ashamed to commit the smallest sin through dread of poverty. Religion has exposed men to *bonds and imprisonment* *: they are grievous: but have not many suffered them, and suffered them with patience, for other causes than firmness in religion? Religion has exposed men to death: but is death an uncommon event? Is it not strictly universal and inevitable? Do you not see men dying around you every day? If God brings you into such circumstances, that you must either desert your duty or lay down your life, can you hesitate in fixing your choice? There are a thousand other ways in which you may lose your life: in some way, you must lose it soon; but in no other way, can it be so honourable, so glorious, to lose it. If it be in the very prime of your days that you are called to sacrifice your life to the fulfilment of your duty; yet still you shall be but one of many hundreds who are cut off in the prime of their days; and when it

* Heb. xi. 26.

is certain that you must die once, can it be of very great importance, whether you die to-day, or to-morrow, or not many days hence? The dread of death, strong as it naturally is in men, cannot always prevent their exposing themselves to the danger of it, in the prosecution of their worldly interests, nay in the very train of their amusements: shall we, notwithstanding, allow it to prevent our exposing ourselves to that danger, in securing our eternal interests by constancy in avoiding evil and doing good? The dread of a violent death has not always power enough to restrain the wicked from the crimes against which it is denounced: and shall it be able to pervert us from our virtue? Shall they encounter tribulations in the way of destruction, which we refuse to meet in the way of salvation? *Forward and strange is the way of man**: he is *wise and bold to do evil; but to do good he hath no knowledge* †, no resolution. The fury of wicked men has sometimes prepared cruel tortures for the martyrs of God: but tortures as cruel have often been inflicted on the atrocious criminal, the detested rival, or even the unhappy captive: and the pains of natural death in some of its forms, are both greater and more lasting than any artificial torments.

* Prov. xxi. 8.

† Jer. iv. 22.

What sufferings can excuse your being deterred from your duty or frightened into sin? The greatest that you can incur, are only such as multitudes have sustained when religion was not at all concerned.

BUT all the inconveniences which men ordinarily meet with in adhering to their duty, are far less than many of the most common evils of life: they are among the very slightest distresses incident to man: they are such as thousands and ten thousands suffer day after day, almost without a murmur. The sneer of the ungodly, the scoff of the prophane, the frown of the unprincipled or the misjudging, the forfeiture of a small immediate profit, the loss of an opportunity of becoming a little richer or a little greater, the sacrifice of a trifling proportion of what we have, the pain of denying ourselves some sensual pleasure which a brute might relish as much as we; These are the troubles, for exposing us to which we often complain of religion and of virtue as enemies to our present interest and enjoyment, and for avoiding which we too often venture to do what our hearts condemn! What are these amidst the multitudes of calamities under which human creatures groan? How many endure them, and endure them willingly, for purposes infinitely less considerable than
the

the preservation of a good conscience? For the sake of these, to entertain a thought of venturing on the least deviation from virtue, would demonstrate a want of all regard to it, would betray less spirit than the meanest of mankind exert almost every day. These are hardships very *common to man*; they are so very common and so very trivial, that they scarcely deserve to be called *temptations*; they are acknowledged by all, when religion is not in the question, to be extremely slight.

IN a word, Religion can never expose men to greater sufferings, it generally exposes men to much more tolerable sufferings than *such as are common to man*. Whatever you may suffer by *patient continuance in well-doing* *, you cannot be singular in your suffering. The present state is so much a state of sorrow and affliction to all, that to have the spirit of martyrdom for religion, is little more than to have the spirit of a man, the resolution necessary for bearing the ordinary vicissitudes and troubles of human life. We act not the part of men, if we shew any anxiety to shun whatever distresses cannot be shunned except by our forfeiting our innocence.

* Rom. ii 7.

SECONDLY,

SECONDLY, Because sorrows and sufferings are universal in this life, and every individual of the human species has a share of them, we reasonably conclude, that, if we were exempt from those which at any time we incur by doing our duty, other afflictions would have been allotted to us, perhaps equally, perhaps more severe. Let *no man*, therefore, *be moved by these afflictions* *; accept them as your lot without repining; endure them without being *shaken in mind* †, or *falling from your own steadfastness* ‡.

MAN *is born unto trouble* ||; it is the appointed inheritance of his nature; for any man to elude the appointment, is as impossible as to reverse the established law of matter by which *the sparks fly upward* ||. The God who made us, hath measured out to every man his portion of affliction. If it shall fall to your lot, to suffer affliction for the sake of virtue, be assured that without this, or some other equivalent affliction, your measure could not have been full. Whatever loss you incur, whatever hardship you undergo, by persevering in what is right, it is only in the place of some other loss or hardship, which else you must have incurred by different means. By encountering it, you render your condition no

* 1 Thess. iii. 3. † 2 Thess. ii. 2. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 17. || Job v. 7.

more than it would have been at any rate. Perhaps you reckon it an aggravation of your trouble, that it is occasioned by your virtue: when the excellence of virtue should secure its leading us to quietness, peace, joy, honour, and good report, is there not a peculiar hardship in being, for the very sake of it, plunged into the contrary evils? can we but be disappointed? can we but regret that the natural consequences of actions should be so much perverted? The regret is only the suggestion of a heart prone to repining, and cold in its attachment to virtue. The disappointment is only the failure of a groundless expectation: we are forewarned that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall sometimes suffer persecution* *. The hardship is only in imagination: sufferings occasioned by your doing your duty, cannot be more galling than the same or equal sufferings proceeding from other causes. They are on many accounts lighter and more eligible.

THE God of mercy *doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men* †. He mingles their cup with sorrow, only because it is necessary for their discipline and improvement in this state of probation. He chasteneth us only *for our profit, that we might be partakers of his*

* 2 Tim. iii. 12.

† Lam. iii. 33.

holiness *: and he never chasteneth any who serve him with sincerity, farther than is needful for answering this end. Now afflictions incurred by constancy in virtue, promote our improvement more directly and more powerfully, than those which are incurred by any other means. The latter, though we bear them in the best manner, curb only some of our carnal or worldly lusts, improve only some particular virtuous principles, the principles of resignation, submission, patience, and trust in God: but the former improve all the virtuous principles at once, add strength to the whole temper of goodness, and confirm us in universal holiness; by their natural operation, they *yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby* †; they are the very *trial of our faith, much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire* ‡. To have answered the same good purposes to our souls, to have raised us to an equal degree of improvement, sufferings from other causes must have been severer. No affliction, therefore, which you can undergo in the cause of virtue, can be the subject of just complaint; it is the subject of gratitude and joy: it saves you from a heavier affliction: without the one or the other, some trial necessary for your

* Heb. xii. 10.

† Ver. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 7.

sanctification had been wanting; and the want of it might have proved the ruin of your souls.

AT the same time, afflictions incurred by steadfast adherence to virtue, are more honourable than any others; they are relieved by more powerful supports and sweeter consolations; and they will be followed by a greater reward.— In bearing afflictions absolutely and by every means inevitable, there is little praise: but to *choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God* †, than to purchase immunity from it by any vicious compliance or blameable neglect, is the highest praise. To suffer for evil-doing, is ignominious; resolution in enduring it, is often only hardness and effrontery in sin; at the best it cannot atone for the ignominy of the crime: *What glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently* *? But *this is glory, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully* †. Poverty incurred by the strictness of integrity, has nothing abject; reproach provoked by a determined steadiness or an unfashionable delicacy of virtue, is true renown; bonds and imprisonments inflicted for unbending perseverance in what is right, are genuine liberty; death itself for the sake of God and of Christ, is a crown

† Heb. xi. 25 * 1 Pet ii. 20. † Ver. 19.

of life. *Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer; yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf* †. If you be called to suffer shame, or loss, or inconvenience, for the name of Jesus, rejoice that ye are counted worthy ||.—The wicked may be forced to suffer what it is beyond their strength to bear; their sufferings are embittered by the cutting sense of guilt; their sufferings are sent by God in his anger, for their punishment; and who knoweth the power of his anger ‡? But in discharging your duty with fidelity and steadiness, God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it *. If ye be reproached, or stript of your goods, or subjected to any pain, for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory, and of God, resteth upon you §. Therefore, says the apostle, *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong* †. In such sufferings, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day ||. The sincerity and the vigour of our virtue are ascertained; we enjoy the applauses of

† Chap. iv. 15, 16. || Acts vii. 41. † Psal. xc. 11. * 1 Cor. x. 13.
§ 1 Pet. iv. 14. † 2 Cor. xii. 10. || Chap. iv. 16.

an assured conscience; every reflection on our conduct strengthens our assurance and renews our joy; we share in the triumphs of the martyrs; we glory in confidence of the special favour of God, who can, in the very midst of our sorrows, fill us with *peace and joy which passeth all understanding* †. In other afflictions, the utmost we can do, is to be *patient*; it is only in tribulations for the sake of righteousness that we can *glory* §, and in all such we have reason to be *exceeding joyful* *.—Mitigated during their continuance by *the consolations of God* ‡, they shall be recompensed in the end with eminence of happiness. *If when you do well, and suffer for it, whether your suffering be of a heavier or lighter sort, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable to God* ||, whose it is to recompense. To embrace such sufferings, rather than act a vicious part in any instance, shews incorruptible rectitude of soul, and confirms it. It is such *affliction*, that, though *light and but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* **. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience; and let your patience under them have perfect work, that ye*

† Phil. iv. 7. § Rom. v. 3. 2. * 2 Cor. vii. 4. ‡ Job xv. 11.
 || 1 Pet. ii. 20. ** 2 Cor. iv. 17.

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may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing †. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him ‡. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake: instead of shrinking, rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven ¶.

IN short, Suffering is the lot of all men: if you had escaped the sufferings which you may at times endure for religion, you might have expected other sufferings in their room: 'To have contributed as much to your improvement, these must have been greater; but you would have had weaker supports, slenderer consolations, and a less reward. Grudge not therefore, but rejoice, if sufferings for well-doing shall fall to your share, instead of common afflictions; encounter them with alacrity; refuse to deviate from your duty in any point, though by the smallest deviation you could be certain to avoid them.

BUT this is not the case: for, *thirdly*, the universality of sufferings and afflictions in the present state, is sufficient to convince us that

† Jam. i. 2, 3, 4. ‡ Ver. 12. ¶ Mat. v. 11, 12.

if we be prevailed upon to deviate from virtue, by the sufferings to which it may sometimes expose us, yet we cannot by the deviation escape affliction, or obtain security against falling into the like sufferings by other means. The question is not, Whether you shall desert your duty and be exempt from trouble, or adhere to your duty and incur trouble? This is the gross misrepresentation of your own delusive fancy: no such choice can be permitted you. The question is, Whether you shall *hold fast* your *righteousness**, and patiently endure whatever trouble it may occasion, or *let go* your righteousness and yet be forced to endure trouble? In this state of the question, can your election be attended with any difficulty? But this is the real state. Who ever passed through life without meeting a time of trouble? What age, what station, what profession, what character, what conduct, could ever prove a security against it? It is the sad birthright of fallen man. How should you alone hope to escape it, and to escape it too by declining from your duty, by renouncing your virtue?

THAT God, whose appointment the lot of human creatures is, hath in his wisdom ordained, that the same distresses should be

* Job xxvii. 6.

brought on different men, by different causes. Some are born to indigence; some are reduced to it by unavoidable calamities; some purchase it by folly or their vices; some incur it by the steadfastness of their virtue. One is brought prematurely to the grave by the pining decay of a weakly constitution; another by the violence of an acute distemper: one is cut off in his full strength by some fatal accident; another falls a victim to the poison of his vices, or the demerit of his crimes; and another encounters death in the midst of his days for the sake of God and a good conscience. There is scarcely a circumstance in the state of man, which may not prove the source of almost any of the pains and distresses to which he is obnoxious. What trouble can religion bring upon you, that may not likewise proceed from many other causes? When through dread of it, you have violated your virtue and wounded your souls with guilt, how soon may some of these other causes plunge you into that very trouble? Suppose it were one of the most grievous troubles incident to man; nevertheless it is folly to commit any sin or forbear any duty in order to avoid it, unless you could promise to defeat all the other causes which may afterwards produce it. The very hour after you have *made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience**,

* 1 Tim. i. 19.

the irresistible stroke of divine Providence, or that very act of vice by which you hoped to avert it, may hurl it down upon your heads in all its fury. You have an opportunity, for instance, of preserving your possessions or of increasing them, by dishonesty or falshood or sin : you seize the opportunity : but the thief, the oppressor, the fire, the elements, any one of a thousand common misfortunes, perhaps the very detection of your baseness, may very soon rob you of all that you expected to secure, pluck *the wages of unrighteousness* * out of your hands, and leave you nothing but the pollution which you have contracted in grasping at them. There is some person from whose favour you expect much, or whose displeasure you reckon very detrimental to your interest ; you do something wrong to gratify him : but in a few days, from the mere mutability of caprice, from a misconstruction which you have no means of preventing or correcting, nay, it may be, despising you for the meanness of your compliance with his humour or his vices, that person may withdraw his deceitful favour, become your enemy, and abandon you without pity to the agonizing reflection, that you have sold your innocence for nought. When Judas, stung with remorse,

* 2 Pet. ii. 15.

came to the *chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood, without any compassion for his anguish, without so much as thanking him for having fulfilled their darling wish, they answered him, what is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the whole price of his perfidy, and departed, and went and hanged himself* †. Instances of such disappointments of the apostate's hopes, might easily be multiplied; they are numerous both in the history of the dead, and in the experience of the living; they are alarming warnings to every one of us, that apostasy from our duty can be no refuge from the troubles which we fear in performing it.

THAT apostasy from any point of duty will increase our trouble, is much more likely than that it can bring us immunity from trouble. The soldier who through fear of death flees from his post in battle, is forced to submit with ignominy to the very death which he might have met with honour in the field. If virtue itself, which is beloved by the God who orders all events, and is the object of his special favour and protection, cannot secure men from tribulation in this land of sorrow, is security to be expected from vice, which is odi-

† Mat xxvi. 2, 4, 5.

ous to him, which forfeits his favour, takes us out of his protection, and provokes his wrath? The whole tendency of virtue is naturally to peace and prosperity; it is only by its imperfection in the human character, and by the prevalence of vice counteracting its operation, that ever it becomes the occasion of pain or suffering. But sin is the natural parent of pain and suffering; it alone brought them into the world; it alone perpetuates them in the world. *Evil pursueth sinners**; their portion is grief upon grief, and distress upon distress, till death carry them into the place where there shall be *wailing and gnashing of teeth* †. They who through fear of suffering or loss desert from the service of God, to the service of sin, can scarcely fail to *pierce themselves through with many sorrows* ‡. Miserable are they, if they escape heavy sorrows. After having thus *fallen away*, the strongest means are necessary for *renewing them again unto repentance* ||: they must *be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction*, in order to *shew them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded, and to open their ear to discipline, that they may return from iniquity* §. It is a part of God's promise of the Messiah, if

• Prov. xiii. 21. † Matt. xiii. 42. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

|| Heb. vi. 6. § Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10.

*his children forsake my law, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes §. To escape being visited by calamities equal at least to those which you evaded by your defection, would shew you to be given up by God, unto your own hearts lust *, to be reprobated from the heritage of those that fear his name †, to be of them who draw back unto perdition ||. The greatest of the evils to which virtue can expose you, it is certain that you cannot evade by any defection from it. If you could effectually evade all other troubles, yet from death, the utmost that man can do, no defection of your duty can possibly redeem you. It is appointed unto men once to die ** : There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit in the day of death ; there is no discharge in that war ; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it ††. Death is the most formidable temptation of the kind ; and in great wisdom and great goodness God has provided, that against yielding to it, the argument is strongest : death, the apostate from integrity must notwithstanding meet ; though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that his days are as a shadow ; and cannot be prolonged for ever ‡.*

§ Psal. lxxxix. 30, 32. * Psal. lxxxxi. 12. † Psal. lxi. 5.
 || Heb. x. 39. ** Chap. ix. 27. †† Eccl. viii. 8.. ‡ Ver. 12, 13.

BUT

BUT if the very calamity for avoiding which you have cast away your virtue, shall notwithstanding come upon you, or if a greater calamity shall overwhelm you, will you then find any comfort in reflecting, that you once warded it off for a little, by forsaking the ways of God, and forfeiting his favour? or when the hour is come, and it will soon come, in which death must remove you from this world, will you be able to rejoice in the consciousness that, a few days or months before, you renounced your virtue rather than quit the world? Will you then be entitled to the same self-approbation, the same joy in the Holy Ghost, the same bright hope of eternal life, which would have supported and invigorated you if you had encountered it for the sake of righteousness? Will it not, on the contrary, be aggravated by remorse, dejection, and terror? Will it be possible, in the day of trouble or of death, to reflect without insupportable regret and anguish, that you might have continued unblemished, that you might have retained the worth of the saint, that you might have purchased the glory of the martyr, and yet have been in no worse situation than that to which you are now reduced, after having lost your innocence, your honour, and your hope? The greatest alleviation of which the sufferings incident to mortality are susceptible,

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is their being occasioned by inflexibility in what is right. In every respect *it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing* *. If ye obtain this lot, *if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye, and highly privileged above all your brethren in adversity: be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts* †.

THUS, because this world is full of troubles, we cannot avoid them by forsaking the path of virtue; there are many causes which may precipitate us into the same or greater troubles; greater we shall need for our recovery, and must undergo if we be not abandoned to final apostasy, but undergo with far more grievous vexation of spirit. The object of your deliberation, in the hour of danger for conscience sake, is not, whether it be wiser to avoid troubles, or to endure them? It is simply, which is preferable, virtue or vice, a good conscience sweetening calamities, or an evil conscience embittering them, a blessed hope taking away the sting of death, or despair filling it with venom? He is a fool who will forfeit heaven, without so much as bettering his earthly state: we are guilty of this folly,

* 1 Pet. iii. 17.

† Ver. 14, 15.

if we commit any sin in order to avoid any temporal calamity or inconvenience, if *our heart be turned back* from God, or *our steps decline from his way*, though he should even *break us in the place of dragons, and cover us with the shadow of death* *.

FOURTHLY, The troubles and calamities which are common to man, excite us resolutely to encounter such as we meet with in the performance of our duty, by stamping vanity on all outward and temporal things.

THOUGH health, riches, honours, power, or sensual pleasures were in their nature capable of yielding full enjoyment to man, they could not yield it to him in the present state, because it abounds with troubles, any one of which will blast them and render them insipid. Whatever satisfaction mortal man may derive from them, it cannot be pure, it must be mixt with much alloy. Should wealth and dignities, in the greatest profusion, drop into his bosom, the stroke of disease will deprive them of all their power to gratify him : *all his days he eateth in darkness and much sorrow* †. Should his health be sound, he may languish in poverty or pine with hunger ; all his efforts

* Psal. xliv. 18, 19.

† Eccl. v. 17.

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for prosperity may prove abortive; he may attain prosperity, and find it a torment to his soul; and from the height of prosperity a moment may tumble him down into deep adversity. *Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow †?* Every external joy is incomplete, for it is always impaired by some concomitant circumstance of uneasiness: it is transitory and precarious, for it is quickly obliterated by some succeeding sorrow; it can last only till death, and then it ceaseth for ever. Every one of the manifold troubles of human life is a voice from God, proclaiming to mankind, that nothing earthly can be the happiness of man. His happiness must be what is unaffailable by calamity, and unextinguishable by death. It is only in religion, therefore, that he can find his happiness. In every situation he can adhere to religion, if he will; and if he adhere to it, nothing can deprive him of it. We cannot obtain whatever we may wish for; but we can dutifully welcome whatever God sends upon us. We cannot ward off every trouble; but we can take care not to multiply or aggravate our troubles by our own wickedness. We cannot avoid death; but we can prepare

† Eccl. vi. 11, 12.

ourselves to die like Christians. We cannot prevent disagreeable and painful consequences arising from some of our actions ; but we can prevent our actions from being other than they ought to be. By the divine assistance, of which the gospel assures us, virtue is always in our own power : through the vanity of the world, all things earthly and temporal are in the power of innumerable accidents. To sacrifice our virtue for present ease or security, to act viciously for fear of temporal loss or inconvenience, to depart from our duty in order to avoid the trouble which, in a particular instance, it threatens to bring upon us, were to exchange substantial happiness for an unsatisfying trifle, a permanent possession for a precarious and transient phantom ; it were to prefer what will be quickly buried in the dust, to what will enter into heaven, and flourish through the ages of eternity ; it were, in flying from a slight and momentary hurt, to rush into everlasting destruction. If by committing sin, if by swerving from steady virtue, you could be certain to extricate yourselves from the fear of suffering, yet the choice would be disadvantageous, pernicious, and ruinous.

IN every light, therefore, it is a powerful argument for constancy in religion, that it can expose us to no loss, hardship, or affliction,

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but such as is common to man. In all these ways, the universality of sorrow and suffering in the present state, may excite us to meet with fortitude, and to bear with patience, whatever we shall incur by a firm and conscientious adherence to our duty. It can be only such as multitudes endure in the ordinary course of human life: to shun it by throwing away your virtue, would be an unmanly weakness. It is allotted you in the place of some other affliction, which, to have been as effectual for your sanctification, must have been severer; you should rejoice in it, instead of entertaining a thought of averting it by sin. If you should sin, you cannot expect to avert it for ever; there are many causes which may still subject you to it; and whenever they do, it will be dreadfully embittered by the remembrance of your having once committed sin on purpose to elude it. But though you could effectually avert trouble by forsaking virtue, it were folly to forsake it; it were to barter your true happiness for mere vanity. *Wherefore let every man take heed lest he fall* *, for in standing fast no tribulation can come upon you but such as is common in the world. If it be the will of God, that you *must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God* †, it is likewise

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

† Acts xiv. 22.

through much tribulation that the wicked shall enter into the kingdom of Satan. Which is the better part, judge ye.

MANY are the arguments which enforce constancy in holiness in spite of all the consequences that can possibly attend it. The argument on which I have now insisted, is alone sufficient to determine those who will consider. If any thing seem necessary for adding to its force, allow me only to remind you of what bears a close relation to it, That the best men in all ages, far from being exempt from troubles, have endured many and grievous troubles, and often endured them for conscience sake. In suffering, you are but partakers with all mankind: in suffering for virtue and religion, you shall be but partakers with all the saints. As *the whole creation groaneth under the vanity to which it is subjected, so ourselves also, says the apostle, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves* *. Consider the days of old, the years of ancient times †. Take, my brethren, the apostles, take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience ‡. Ye have heard of the patience of Job ||: ye have heard of the innumerable company of

* Rom. viii. 20. 22, 23.
|| Ver. 11.

† Psal. lxxvii. 5.

‡ Jam. v. 10.

martyrs;

martyrs; *they were tortured, not accepting deliverance; they had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned; they were sawn asunder; they were slain with the sword; they wandered about, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy**. But none of these things moved them, neither counted they their life dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy †. The worst that can befall you in adhering steadfastly to your duty, will not exceed what far better men have suffered. All that has befallen you, comes infinitely short of it. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin ‡.* No: all that you can plead in excuse of your past inconstancy in virtue, is loss so trivial, inconvenience so slight, uneasiness so insignificant, that it deserves not to be named with the least of their sufferings. It is shameful to complain of it; it is disgraceful, for the sake of it, to have made one step awry from the ways of God. Should you be put to a much severer trial, should you even be *tried with the fiery trial, think it not strange, as though some strange thing happened unto you ||.* It hath happened unto ten thousands of the saints. Let their sufferings and their intrepid perseverance banish your fears, confirm your resolution,

* Heb. xi. 35---38. † Acts xx. 24. ‡ Heb. xii. 4. || 1 Pet. iv. 12.

and encourage your steadfastness. It is *through faith and patience*, that they now inherit the promises *: *Be ye also patient, and stablish your hearts †; be ye followers of them, and ye shall obtain the same inheritance.*—You have even a greater example than that of the faints. *Christ himself also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps ‡.* Though he was the Son of God, though he was perfectly holy, his sufferings, while he dwelt in this mortal state, surpassed all that ever befell a son of man, surpassed what any son of man could bear. They were appointed by God for accomplishing the most stupendous purpose, the redemption of the world; but they were immediately occasioned by his inflexible adherence to truth and righteousness. Can you expect to meet with no hardship, no inconvenience in pursuing the same conduct? Or will you grudge to meet it? *The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. Fear not therefore ||: but rejoice in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings. For if ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. If the sufferings of Christ even abound in us, our consolation also shall abound by Christ. When his glory shall be revealed, we shall be glad also with exceeding joy §.* It is a

* Heb. vi. 12. † Jam. v. 8. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 21. || Mat. x. 24. 26. § 1 Pet. iv. 13. 2 Cor. i. 5. 7.

faithful saying. For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: but if we deny him, he also will deny us *. I conclude with the apostle's address, *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds* †.

Now the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you: To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen ‡.

* 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. † Heb. xii. 1, 2, 3. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 10, 11.

E R R A T A.

Page 55, l. ult. *for* intention, *read* intension. P. 61, l. 12, *read* room, l. 22, *put a comma after* examination. P. 74, l. 2, *for* of them all, *read* them all. P. 79, l. 26, *read* worms of; l. 29, *for* cvii. *read* cii. P. 80, l. 8, *del.* in. P. 91, l. 8, *for* conduct, *read* content. P. 106, l. 12, *for* them it, *read* them in it. P. 130, l. 27, *after* Rom. iv. 3. *insert* Gal. iii. *after* Gen *del.* Gal. P. 157, l. 2, *read* would it not. P. 162, l. 1, *for* more, *read* worse. P. 169, l. 4, *read* their folly. P. 232, l. ult. *for* weakneis, *read* meeknefs. P. 234, l. 16, *read* their tempers. P. 258, l. 15, *for* foundation, *read* fountain. P. 269, l. 2; *for* in a, *read* in thy. P. 271, l. 2, *for* to, *read* in. P. 273, l. 25, *for* greatest, *read* chief. P. 301, l. 6, *read* its necessity. P. 304, l. 21, *for* and, *read* not. P. 305, l. 1, *read* can practise. P. 309, l. 12, *for* thoughts, *read* thought. P. 321, l. 2. *read* only prohibits. P. 370, l. 8, *for* most, *read* more.