

*The Duty of all Christians to read the
Scriptures, and to use all other Sub-
ordinate Means, which Providence²
has afforded them, towards the
Knowledge of the Doctrines and
Duties of RELIGION.*

I N T W O

S E R M O N S

P R E A C H E D A T

W A R E i n H E R T F O R D S H I R E .

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VICAR of Ware and Thundridge.

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The Scriptures those lively oracles of God
wherein is contain'd our Title to Eternal
Salvation, which it is every mans duty
happily to be acquainted with, how
thankfully, how foolishly, how impiously
are they neglected? I doubt, though I am
afraid it doth not admit of a doubt
whether any book is so little known, as this
which deserves, & demands our strictest
Attention. The poor think themselves
absolv'd from Consulting it, because so much
of yr time is taken up by yr News papers
labours; & yr Rich no doubt must be
excus'd; Some because they never read
at all, & others because yr Meditations are
turn'd another way, & they are better
employ'd in perusing & praising trophies
to more modern productions, when indeed
pages for Wit, & Fidelity for Reason -
Answerable to & worthy of these most excellent
private Studies, is yr polite Conversation
yr present Age, where Noise is Mirth,
Obscenity Good Humour, & Profane Wit
Decency & Good sense which were formerly
deem'd necessary to give a grace to, and
Season Conversation, to join pleasure
& improvement together. We become Antiquaries
notions - much more it to be wish'd, what is he
drawn was imaginary, at least uncommon, but as
Experience shews, is too real & too frequent

TO THE
INHABITANTS OF WARREN

DEAR BRETHREN,

I HAVE lately put into your Hands a Sermon which I have Reason to think, has done some Good among you, tho' not so much as I could wish. Its not producing a greater Influence, this only shews how much it was wanted; but the Fruit, which it has apparently brought forth encourages me to sow again in hopes that my second Harvest will be a more plentiful one. The two Sermons, which I here recommend to your serious and repeated Perusal, were made for you, and preached to you; but Discourses from the Pulpit, tho' heard with Attention, and received with Approbation, will soon slip the Memory, unless People would immediately take more care, than they generally do, to recollect them, and consider them. The Subject of these Discourses being of very great Consequence to your Improvement in Religion and Virtue, as your faithful Monitor and Friend, I earnestly desire you to weigh them well; and, then, by God's Blessing, I will answer for your
being

being the better for them ; but if you only bestow upon them one slight and hasty Reading, they may give you an Hour's Amusement, but do you very little lasting Good. I will on other Occasions, which shall seem to require it, take this Method of bringing Instruction home to your Houses that you may have Time to think of it at your Leisure. The furtherance of your Eternal Happiness is what I have really at Heart. Indeed, the Pleasure of endeavouring to promote the Welfare of others is almost the only Pleasure that a Life of Fatigue and Disappointment and Trouble has afforded, or is ever likely to afford to,

Your Faithful,

And Affectionate

Friend and Servant,



W. WEBSTER.

P A R T I.

LUKE xvi. 8.

The Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.

IT is an usual Phrase in the Bible to call a Person the *Son* or *Child* of any thing when he partakes much of its *Nature* and *Qualities*. Such as have acquired *virtuous* Habits and *divine* Dispositions are stiled, *Children of God*, while those who partake of a *diabolical* Temper take their Name from him whom they imitate and resemble, and are called, *the Children of the Devil*. The *earthly-minded*, who make the Things of *this*

B World

World their *chief aim* and *study*, are called, the CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD; and those who, being enlightened with the Knowledge of an immortal Happiness in another Life, and profess themselves to be only in a State of *Probation* here, are distinguished by the Title of the CHILDREN OF LIGHT, because they are, or ought to be, partakers of that heavenly Frame of mind which is the genuine Product of such a Belief, and in *Scripture* is expressed by *Light*.

The *Children of this World*, who mind *earthly* Things, are said to be *wiser* than the *Children of Light*, who are supposed by their *Profession* to have their Hopes full of Immortality, to have their greatest Treasure in reversion. — *Wiser!* But in what Sense? Not *absolutely* wiser. For it cannot be consistent with *true Wisdom*, which always chuses That which is *best upon the whole*, to place our *chief Happiness* in *THIS Life*, when we have such clear and strong Proofs of a Future State of more perfect and more lasting Felicity than any thing that is *temporal* and *earthly* CAN be. — But they are *wiser in their GENERATION*; wiser for *THIS World*, than the *Children of Light* are for the *next Life*. They act more *consistently* with *their Principles*, and are more provident to secure, or obtain the possession of those Things wherein they place their *chief Happiness*, than *Christians* are to make their *heavenly Calling* and *Election* sure in that *endless* State of *perfect* Bliss which they declare their belief of.

But

But I do not intend in my following Discourse to draw the Comparison between the Conduct of two *different sorts* of Men, but between the Conduct of the *same* Men acting *differently*, and *inconsistently with themselves*; wherein I shall make it appear that in respect to the Concerns of *Religion* their Behaviour is directly opposite to all the Rules of *Prudence*, that they themselves observe in the Management of their *Temporal* Affairs. And, this I apprehend to have been our Saviour's main Drift, tho' the *Parable*, which introduces the Remark, represents the *Children of this World*, and the *Children of Light* under *distinct Characters*.

The Observation is still as true and reasonable as it was in our Saviour's Time, *human Nature* and *human Conduct* continuing much the same that they then were. Tho' the World be grown so much older, Mankind, I fear, are not much wiser than they were. The enquiry, therefore, is not likely to prove to our Credit and Satisfaction, but by the Grace of God, concurring with our honest Application of it, it may turn greatly to our future Advantage. When we are made sensible how *inconsistently*, how *absurdly* we have conducted ourselves, we cannot help being *concerned* and *ashamed*; but if our Sorrow and Shame produce their natural Effects in making us resolve to act more *wisely* and *consistently* for the future, I may say with the Apostle, *I shall not repent that I made you sorry*.

If I intended to carry the Comparison thro' every Instance of *worldly Wisdom*, it would be necessary to ennumerate all the several *Maxims* by which Men of the best Understandings conduct themselves in the prosecution of their several Schemes of Life ; but my Design is *limited* to the *grand Article* of *all* ; the *primary* and *fundamental* Point of *secular* Wisdom. Upon this only I purpose to inlarge ; and when I shall have executed my intended Plan, you will see that it is, by itself, an *entire one* ; and, I hope, you will *feel* that it is an useful one.

In whatever Circumstances of Life we consider Men, let their *Trade*, or *Profession* be what it will, it is the *leading* Principle of all, to be careful to understand the *nature* of their particular Business. For this Purpose People are put out Apprentices, in order to be instructed in the proper Methods of carrying it on to Advantage ; and when they become Masters, themselves, they are studious to improve their Knowledge in their Trade by Observation and Conversation ; and the more diligent and acute they are in getting an Insight into the best Manner of making, of buying, or selling Goods to the greatest Profit, and with the greatest Safety ; and the more artful they are in sifting others of known Skill in the same Trade, the more shrewd and notable they are always reckon'd, and the more successful they generally are in Business. Take any of those Men, who are intent upon thriving in the World, and observe whether they do

do not make it their particular Care to associate with others of the same Occupation, who have the Reputation of being the greatest Proficients in it, in order to try whether they cannot learn something from them. If there be any Person who is reckon'd to have a particular Secret, by the Means of which he excels others, see how assiduous the rest, who have any Share of Prudence, are to get acquainted with him; how officious to oblige him; how watchful to take the most favourable Opportunity to persuade him to communicate his Skill. — Or, if there were any *Book* that treated largely and most accurately of the Methods of improving any kind of Business, would not every discreet Man, in that Way of Business, procure the Book, if possible, and study it thoroughly, till he was sure he could put the Rules in Practice; and if there were any Part which he apprehended to be of Consequence that he did not understand, would he not be careful to get some Instruction from others of more Knowledge and Judgment? It is the same as to any Profession by which Men hope to rise to Wealth or Honour. Is not this the Conduct of all that have any tolerable Share of *worldly Wisdom*? And a very commendable Conduct, no doubt, it is. For, a Man that does *not* understand his Trade or Profession can never expect much Success in it, and the *better* he understands it the more successful he may reasonably expect to be; but no Knowledge can be acquir'd without using the proper Means; a Principal of which is the Experience of others who have gone before us. — Now, let us view these

Men in another Light. Let us examine their Behaviour in respect to the great Business of *Religion*, their *Christian Profession*, and see whether they conduct themselves by the same Rules of *Prudence* and *good Sense*. I presume, it will be granted me, that a Man's Proficiency in *Religion* and *Christian Perfection* will be in Proportion to his *Knowledge* in *Religion*, and the necessary Means of Improvement in it. It is impossible for us to *do* our Duty any farther than we *understand* it; for *Practice* implies *Knowledge*, and every *End* has its particular *Means* adapted to it, without which it cannot naturally be attain'd.—What is *Religion* but the Conformity of our Wills to the Will of God? And how are we to come at the Knowledge of God's *Will*, but from his *Nature*, and from his *written Word*, explain'd by those who have had the best Opportunities of understanding it, and whose proper Business it is to instruct others. Men of *Letters*, who have had Leisure and Ability to make themselves acquainted with *Books*, and have been accustom'd to an *argumentative* Way of Thinking, may know a good deal of the *natural* and *moral* Attributes of God from his *Works*, and of the Course of his *Providence* from the *Histories* of the several Kingdoms of the World; and by enquiring into our own Natures, and seeing the Relation that we stand in to our Maker and Governour and to one another, they may discover a natural *Fitness* or *Propriety* in some Thoughts and Actions, and an *Unfitness* or *Impropriety* in others. This is one Method which *Philosophers*, *Divines*, and *Moralists* have taken in
order

order to find out the Will of God and our Duty to him, because whatever we can shew, from the *Nature of Things*, to be *fit* and *reasonable in itself*, we may, from its *natural Fitness* and *Reasonableness*, infer that it is agreeable to the Mind of an infinitely wise and good Being — But, as many of those who hear me have neither the Opportunity of reading such Authors, nor the Capacity of making the proper Use of such *speculative Writings*, I shall only insist upon those Means of Information which are in *every one's* Power, and examine whether Mankind in general be as careful to make a due Use of *them*, as they are to inform themselves of such Matters as relate to their *worldly Interest*.

The *Scriptures* are the *first* and *great* Means of Information in the Knowledge of *God* and our *Duty* — In those sacred Writings we have conveyed to us the Knowledge of the *Divine Nature* and *Will*; what he is in *himself*; what he is to *us*; and what it is that he requires from us; and all this, not in any uncertain or difficult Method of abstruse Argumentation, but by an express and plain Revelation of himself, as to what we are to *believe* and *practice*. There his Attributes are displayed, his Dispensations to Mankind set forth, his Precepts laid down for the Rule of our Actions, his Terrors denounced, and his Promises proclaimed, in order to persuade us to Obedience. Moreover, *there* we have both for our Direction and Encouragement, both to instruct and animate us, the

Examples

Examples of holy Men and Women in all Ages of the World; but, above all, we have the unerring Pattern of the spotless *Jesus*; the Blessed Author of our Religion; his Meekness under Indignities; his Patience under Sufferings; his Charity in forgiving Injuries; his unwearied Benevolence in doing Good. What an inexhaustable, what an inestimable Treasure of Knowledge must be contain'd in a Book that was dictated by the infallible Spirit of God, for such noble Purposes as the Instruction of all Mankind, in every Thing that is necessary to their Eternal Salvation! How full of Wonders and Delight! How must it raise the Attention, awaken the Curiosity, and improve the Disposition of every thoughtful Mind!

Is it possible to be conversant with the History of *God's Dispensations* without being affected by them? The many Declarations and Instances of his Anger against sinful Nations and sinful Men, but, especially, his dreadful Denunciations of Vengeance to be executed in the World to come, will be the strongest Diffusive from Vice. The general Promises of Favour to good Men and the many Instances of his Goodness to particular Saints will animate your Obedience, and raise an holy Confidence in God under the greatest Dangers and Distress. But a close and frequent Attention to the Promise of that exceeding great Reward which awaits good Men in *Heaven*, will fire your Minds with the most vigorous Resolutions and the warmest Transports of joyful Hope. With *St. Paul*
you

you will boldly fight the good Fight of Faith, and with him, too, desire to be dissolv'd, that you may enter into Glory. The Accounts of God's *Mercy* will raise the drooping Spirits of a desponding Penitent, while his *Purity* will convince the Presumptuous that *Impurity* can never dwell in his Presence. The Declarations of his *Immutability* and *Veracity* are a Security to good Men that his *Promises* shall never fail, and an unanswerable Proof to the Wicked that his *Threatnings* will most assuredly be executed.

But there is one Part of these *Sacred Books* which I would recommend to every serious *Christian* for his *most familiar Acquaintance*. The Book of *Psalms* has something in it adapted to every one's Condition; and every Thing in it is as moving and affecting as it is possible. If he celebrates the *Praises* of God, he does it in such joyful, such exalted, and such rapturous Strains, as must elevate the Heart of every Reader that has any Passions. If he makes *Confession of his Sins*, he does it in such a tender Manner as must melt the most Obdurate into Tears of Repentance and Resolutions of Amendment. In his *Thanksgivings* you may perceive how his Heart glows with *Gratitude*, how he *labours* to express the strong Sense which he feels of the Divine Goodness. When he pours forth his Complaints in his Distress, and begs the Protection of God, he expresses such a perfect Resignation and firm Reliance on him for Deliverance,

verance as is apt to make the Reader, if he has any good Dispositions, *ashamed* to harbour in his Thoughts the least Discontent, or Despondency. When you hear him *longing* and *panting* after God, *like as the Hart desireth the Water-Brooks*, how can you forbear taking up his impatient Wish for an Opportunity of attending *publick Worship*, and saying, with him, *When shall I come to appear before the Presence of God?* There is in every Picture, which this pious Painter has drawn, a peculiar *Softness*, even in those Parts which have the greatest Strength and Force of Sentiment, or Expression; which I ascribe partly to his natural Disposition and partly to his *Troubles*, which have a great Tendency towards calming and softening the Mind.—When I consider these and many more Excellencies in this inestimable Treasure of *Piety* and *Devotion*, I am not surpriz'd at what I have heard, of one of the most learned Men of his Time in *France*, who, on his Death-Bed, wish'd for *one Year more*, that he might spend it in reading the *Psalms of David*. My Brethren, we are all, at present, in Possession of the Opportunity which this unhappy great Man too long slighted, and at last in vain wish'd for. Let us *All* subscribe to his Opinion of their Value, but let none of us copy after his Neglect of them. For my own Part, I have them bound up by themselves, I carry them always in my Pocket, and resolve never to live a Day, while I am *capable* of reading, without reading some Part of them.

And

And *we*, in *these* Kingdoms, God be praised! enjoy a Blessing which is deny'd to the greatest Part of *Christendom*, the free Use of the *Scriptures* in our native Language; and, as to all *essential* Points of *Faith*, or *Practise*, faithfully translated from the Original.—I would ask, then, what might naturally be expected from Mankind in this Case, supposing them to follow the same Maxims of *Wisdom* and *Prudence*, which all *wise* and *prudent* People observe in respect to their *worldly* and *sensual* Affairs?

In the first place, would not every such Person, if capable of reading and buying the Bible, be as conversant in it as possible, and attentive to mark, particularly, those Passages that are of most Importance, to lay them up in his Memory, and to imprint them the most strongly upon his Mind, that they may always lie uppermost in his Thoughts for common Use upon every Occasion? To make them, as holy *David* did, his constant Study? To meditate upon them Day and Night.—I do not mean that he would do nothing else but read his *Bible*; but, that he would be careful and glad to take all convenient Opportunities of contracting the greatest Intimacy with the most useful and entertaining Book that ever was publish'd in the World; and, accordingly, if his Situation in Life allow'd him but *little* Leisure for reading, would he not be the more careful to employ *that little* in reading what is infinitely better *worth* read-

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ing than any other Book whatsoever? If he were as *wise* and *prudent* in his *spiritual* Affairs, as wise Men are generally in their *temporal* ones, he would be as diligent to inform himself of *religious* Truths, and the Methods of Improvement in *Christian Perfection*, as they are to understand and improve their *Trade*, or *Profession*; and, the *Bible* being infinitely the **BEST** Means of Information, as to religious Truths and Duties, he would be sure not to *fail studying it with the utmost Care and Attention*.

You see, I endeavour to speak to your *Understandings*, to your *common Sense*, upon your *own allowed* Maxims of Conduct; and to shew you how inconsistently you act with your selves: How *wisely* and *prudently* in Things, comparatively, of *no Moment*; how foolishly and absurdly in the Business of *Eternal Life* and *Death*. For, my Brethren, I appeal to *your selves*. Have you been as careful to read and understand your *Bible*, to acquire *Spiritual* Knowledge, and inform your selves of your *Duty*, as to understand the Nature of your *secular* Business, and *sensual* Schemes? — Have you ever read it over *regularly* as you read over other Books? Have you read it with a degree of Attention and awful Regard suitable to the Dignity of the Author and the great Importance of the subject Matter of it? — On the contrary, are there not many of you who scarce ever look into it, at all, with any serious Purpose; some, who have not thought it worth their while per-
haps

haps ever to *get* one. — And I ask you to tell me fairly and honestly. — Is this Conduct of a Piece with your Behaviour in common Life? Is it not altogether absurd and senseless? I am now speaking to *every* one who is capable of *reading*, even tho' they be employed all the Week in getting their daily Bread; for every one is, or ought to be, at leisure to spend some part of his Time in reading it. And if Men had a just Notion of the great Value and Excellency of their *Bible*, they would *steal* all possible Opportunities of reading small Portions of it. They would not only be convinced that it is their Duty and Interest to do it, but the *Pleasure* which they would take in reading it, (if they could but persuade themselves to read it habitually and frequently) would be a sufficient Inducement. Inasmuch that the Psalmist makes a Taste and Relish for the *holy Scriptures*, a sure Token by which we may know a *good* Man. The Words of a learned Prelate, (Bishop *Atterbury*) of our Church on this Subject are so very apt and fine, I shall give you them — says he, “ Another
 “ Token of our *Sincerity* in Religion is,
 “ when we delight to read and have a
 “ relish of the Scriptures; when we find
 “ somewhat more in *them* than in mere
 “ *human* Writings, and are apt to settle
 “ into a pious Composure of Mind while
 “ we are perusing them; when we come
 “ to them with Satisfaction and Eagerness,
 “ and are uneasy under any long discon-
 “ tinuance of our Conversation with them.
 “ — 'Tis

“ — ’Tis true, it may sometimes happen
 “ that a Person of a sound and sincere Piety
 “ shall read the Holy Scripture without
 “ being much warmed, or affected by them.
 “ He may be under an Indisposition and
 “ Languor of Mind ; the Business, or Plea-
 “ sures of Life and worldly Objects may
 “ now and then take Possession of his
 “ Heart, and shut the Door against Scrip-
 “ tural Impressions ; but then this is not a
 “ *common* Case ; he is for the *most part* well
 “ disposed towards this divine Employ-
 “ ment. But, if a Man can frequently pe-
 “ ruse the Scriptures without any Degree
 “ of sensible Emotion and Concern, with-
 “ out being touch’d by the Matter of them,
 “ or awed by the Majestick Manner of
 “ Expression, which distinguishes them from
 “ all other Writings, this is as sure an In-
 “ dication of a sick Soul, as a Palate which
 “ does not relish the most favourable Meats,
 “ is of a diseased Body.” — Thus far this
 pious and learned Preacher.) Wherefore,
 if you really have any Honour and Ve-
 neration for your Maker you will pay a
 due Regard to his holy Word ; as much
 more Regard to it, than to any other Wri-
 tings, as it is of greater Authority, being
 the Word of infinite Wisdom, spoken to us
 by the Creator and Governour and Judge of
 the whole World ; as containing Matters not
 only excellent in themselves, like many fine
 Compositions of *Human* Invention, but of the
 last Moment to our Happiness ; to our Hap-
 piness, not only *here*, but *hereafter* ; to *end-*
less Ages. If all these Circumstances do not
 claim

claim the highest Veneration and the closest Attention from us, *nothing can*. And, since you *do* believe the *Divine Inspiration* of the Scriptures, do not act so absurd and *stupid* a Part as to slight them; and slight them you *do*, if you neglect to read them and meditate upon them. If you have a sincere Desire of growing in Grace, and making a Progress in *Christian* Perfection, be studious to use this great Means of Improvement; which is so necessary a one that if you wilfully omit to use it, you cannot expect that you shall make any considerable Advances in Piety and Virtue; and so efficacious a one that whoever makes himself intimately acquainted with the Word of God will in Proportion to the *Degree* of his Intimacy with it, grow every Day a better Man. If at the Day of Judgment you would enter into Life, the *Bible* is the *Charter* which must give you a *Title* to it: The *Bible* is the *infallible Guide* that must direct you into the right Way that leadeth thither: The *Bible* is the *sweet Companion* that will make your Journey comfortable and agreeable. You profess to believe these Things, and let your Conduct be agreeable to your Professions. Imitate the Wisdom of the Children of this World, and be as industrious to draw Heavenly Knowledge out of this Divine Fountain, as *they* are to acquire a thorough Insight into the nature of worldly Affairs, and the right Method of carrying them on.

But *without* considering the *Bible* as the *Rule* of our *Faith and Practice*, but only as a Composition containing Matters of

Improvement and *Entertainment*, it might recommend itself to the Attention and Admiration of Persons of the most accurate Judgment and the most elegant Taste. It is the most *ancient* Book in the World. No other Book contains such a *Variety* of Matter. There are the noblest Sentiments, the most elevated Thoughts, the most admirable Maxims of *human Prudence*, and the best Directions for the making our selves happy in *this* Life. Its *Beauties* are equal to its *Usefulness*. The *Manner*, as well as the *Matter*, speaks it to be above *human* Invention. There is, throughout the whole, such an inimitable *Simplicity*, that let a Person read it ever so often, the oftener he reads it the more he will admire it, and read it with the more Pleasure: There are the most glowing *poetical Images*, the most lively *Descriptions*, the most apt and delicate *Similies*, the most affecting Strokes of *Oratory*, every thing that is admired in other Writings, and in much greater Perfection. A Man must carry the strongest Prepossessions, as well as *Infidelity* with him, if he can read over the Books of *Job*, of *David*, of *Isaiab*, or *St. Paul*, without Admiration and Delight; without having his Heart warmed, his Passions enflamed, his Mind raised above itself. I will venture to say, if the *Bible* were the Work of any Person but their *Maker*, and related to any thing else than *Religion*, it would be read and admired by the scornfullest Wits as the most excellent and beautiful Composition in the Universe. But what, my Brethren, can I say to *those* (and many

many such there are) who profess their Belief of its *Divine Inspiration*, and its *Infinite Importance* to their Happiness, and yet neglect the reading it with a suitable Attention and Frequency? The *Infidels* only shew great want of Taste in this Instance, arising from their *Prejudices*; but such *Believers* act with as little *Sense* as the People in *Bedlam*. In the Name of *Common Sense* let them either *disown* their *Faith*, or act more consistently with it. It is a sufficient Reproach to the *Infidels* that their *Infidelity* should so far blind the Understandings of Men, pretending to a superior Degree of *Impartiality* and *Freedom* of Thought, that they cannot discern the greatest Beauties; but a *Believer* without a *Relish*, without the greatest *Admiration*, without the *highest Veneration* for his *Bible*, by which he expects to be *saved*; a *Believer*, who does not *eagerly desire*, who does not *greedily enjoy* so great a *Blessing* and *Comfort*, so *necessary* a *Means* of *Happiness*; he is — so astonishing a *Monster* of *Folly* and *Madness*, that I can only express my *Admiration*; and beg of God, by his Grace, to cure all such *disordered* Minds. What I have to say farther must be deferred to the next Opportunity. *To God the Father, &c.*

P.S. As this Sermon may chance to fall into the Hands of some Persons of *Learning*, I take the Liberty to suggest an Observation that respects *them*. The *Generality* of Mankind have neither Leisure, nor Capacity for the Perusal of *Commentators* and *other* Studies that may be subservient to the Knowledge of the

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Scriptures.

Scriptures. *Deep* and *critical* Points are not their Concern, because they lie out of their reach. Matters more obvious to common Apprehensions, and of general use, are the Things, and the only Things which it is their Duty to understand. Not that I mean to lay it down for a Maxim that none but *Scholars* should ever look into *Comments*, or *Paraphrases*. No body can understand the Bible too well, because the better Men understand it, the more they may improve by it, and receive the more Pleasure from it ; and there are many Books upon the *Bible* which Persons of good natural Sense may make a good Use of without the help of a *liberal* Education. Such as have been bred up to *Letters*, if they have a *religious* Turn of Mind, will out of Inclination be inquisitive — and as to those whose particular Employment it is to explain it to others, there can be no doubt about their Obligation to study it *critically*, and to search as far as they can into those Parts which are of the most difficult Interpretation, and the hardest to be understood. — But (with great Deference and Respect I make the Observation) a Man may bestow much Time and Pains in the study of the Scriptures, as a *Scholar*, with an Intent to understand the Meaning of the Text, and to find out the Matter contained therein ; yet unless he uses himself to read it daily as a *private Christian*, with a View to those *ordinary practical* Uses, which belong to them in common with the rest of the World, he may fill his Head with *intellectual* Knowledge, without improving his *Heart*, or becoming a *better Man*. I hope, I shall be excused the Freedom

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if I take Notice that this Remark more particularly concerns *young Clergymen*, who by this Method would acquire a greater Readiness and Facility in *preaching*, and be furnished with proper Matter. By this Habit the Scripture Language, which is the most affecting, would become natural to them; and their Discourses would breathe an air of *Piety* that would help more towards the Spiritual Improvement of their Hearers than the greatest Embellishments of Composition. A familiar Acquaintance with the *Bible* not only makes the most *pious Christians*, but the most *instructive* and *edifying Preachers*. And if they were to make a *Common Place* for themselves, it would be of much more Service to them than the most accurate one already made to their Hands. Nay, if *every one* were to try to make *Extracts*, ranged under *proper Heads*, they would find their Account in it. They would read with more Attention; their Knowledge would be more distinct; every thing would be imprinted the more strongly on the Mind, and be more ready for Use.

P A R T II.

LUKE xvi. 8.

The Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.

IN my former Discourse I observ'd to you, that the *leading* Maxim among *wise* and *prudent* Men in every *Profession* and *Business* of Life is, to be careful, in the first Place, thoroughly to understand their particular Calling and the Methods of carrying it on to the best Advantage; and, consequently, that if Men were as *wise* and *prudent* in respect to *Religion* and *another World*, they would be as careful to use all the Means, which Providence has put
into

into their Power, of informing themselves of the *Nature* of their *Christian Profession*, and the *Methods* of Improvement in *Christian Perfection*, in order to *secure* and *encrease* their *future Happiness*.—And the holy *Scriptures* being the great *Fountain* of *Divine Knowledge*, the *Rule* both of our *Faith* and *Practice*, I told you, (and common Sense tells you the same Thing) that the first *Point* of *Heavenly Wisdom* is, to be as conversant as we can with the *Bible*, and to read it always with the utmost *Regard* and *Attention*, as it is the *Word* of our *God*, and the most excellent and useful *Book* that ever was publish'd ; but that shameful *Experience* shews a most strange *Contempt* for it amongst some *People* and *Neglect* of it in others, who profess themselves *Christians* and *Believers* of its *Divine Inspiration* ; the latter, seldom looking into it ; and the former, reading it only in order to raise *Objections*, and turn it into *Ridicule*. The *Abuse* of so inestimable a *Blessing* gives us too much *Reason* to apprehend that *God*, in just *Punishment* of our *Ingratitude* and *Folly*, may remove our *Candlestick* again from us ; and the present *State* of *Europe* looks as if he intended soon to do so, by subjecting us to the *Power* of those who will lock up the *Scriptures*, and not suffer the *Laitie* to have the *Use* of them.

But, tho' the *Bible* be the *Rule* both of *Faith* and *Practice*, yet *God's Providence* hath provided other subordinate *Means* of *Information* in *Christian Knowledge*. A *Rule* may be a very sufficient one, and yet some *Instruction* may be required in order to know how to apply it rightly. In the *Scripture* are con-
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tained all the religious Truths which we are required to believe; but then in order to understand the true and full Meaning of them some Assistance may be necessary, as well as to understand the Sense of any other Author. Indeed, as the Scriptures are intended for the Use of all Sorts of Capacities, it is reasonable to suppose that the Wisdom and Goodness of God has so adapted it that it shall be in the Power of every *Christian* of common Understanding to inform himself of every thing that is necessary for him to know as a *Condition of Salvation*. But this Point I think has been, even by the most able Advocates on the *Protestant* side, carried too far. For, it is not necessary that all essential Truths should be so *very* plain and obvious to every Capacity as that every one shall be able to see them without any *Assistance from others*. A Truth is sufficiently plain when it is capable of being made so by any Means that are in our Power to get; and if God's Providence has provided Helps for that Purpose, he may as well require us to make use of them, as he can oblige us to the Use of our own Understandings; and we may be equally liable to Punishment for the Neglect of the one, as for the Neglect of the other. — Besides, it is not possible to settle a Measure of Knowledge that shall suit every one, for different Degrees of *Christian* Knowledge are requir'd of different Persons according to their different Abilities and Opportunities. Though God will not require any one to know more than he is able to attain the Knowledge of, yet he may require of him as *much Christian* Knowledge as lies within
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within the Reach of his Capacity ; and there is good Reason why God *should* require thus much. When God made a *Revelation* of his Nature and Will, it was with an Intent that Men should *understand* it, because it is no farther a *Revelation* than it is *understood* ; and, as the Scriptures were intended for the Use of *all* Mankind, *all* Mankind are oblig'd to understand them as well as their Condition will permit them to do.

But, there is a farther Reason why it *must* be the Will of God that *ALL Christians* should study the *Scriptures* as much as they can, consistently with their Circumstances ; and this Reason is taken from the *End* and *Design* of publishing them. They are intended for the *Good* of Mankind ; and can that Intention be answered any other way than by enlightening our Minds with the Knowledge of such things as are therein contained ? From whence it follows undeniably and obviously that the *more* our Minds are enlightened by them —, *i. e.* the more we know of them, the more effectually is the Intention of their Publication answered, because Mankind are thereby the more *edified* and *improved* — As for Instance, take any *doctrinal* Point, any Article of our *Faith*, the more fully any one understands it and the more clearly he sees the Meaning of those Texts which prove the Truth of it and the more comprehensive View he has of the practical Uses that may be drawn from it, the more firmly he will believe it, and his Belief of it will the better answer the Ends of his Faith — Thus, as to *practical* Matters. Can you deny that every one will be the better enabled

Obliged to discharge his Duty punctually and faithfully, the better he understands the Nature and Extent of the several *Precepts* in the *Bible* which contains them? And if you admit This to be true, which it is impossible for you to reject, is not the Consequence as clear as the Sun; *viz.* That every one is as much oblig'd to use all possible Means rightly and fully to understand those *practical* Parts of Scripture, as he is oblig'd to do his Duty? — So, likewise, it is with Regard to the *Motives* which God in his holy Word offers to Mankind for the Inforcement of his Commands, the Rewards and Punishments annex'd to the Observance or Non-Observance of them, their Influence upon our Practice will be in Proportion to the Clearness and Fulness of our Conception of their Nature; and the better we understand those Passages of Scripture where they are reveal'd to us, the clearer and fuller Conception we shall have of them; and the oftener we read them, and meditate on them, the more strongly we shall imprint them on our Minds.

I hope I have convinc'd you that *ALL Christians* are oblig'd to study the Scriptures *as much*, and to understand them *as well*, as their several Capacities and Opportunities will admit of. But it is impossible to determine exactly how much Time every one is oblig'd to spend in this divine Search, and what Degree of Knowledge of this Kind every one is oblig'd to acquire, because the several Capacities and Opportunities of Information cannot be so minutely settled. However, I shall give

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you some general Rules, that, by God's Grace concurring with an honest Attention, may be a Direction to your Conscience in this weighty Affair.

1. First of all, then, I think it the Duty of every one who professes to believe the *Scriptures* to be the *Word of God*, attentively to read some Portion of them every *Sunday* at least, because *secular* Business being absolutely forbid on that Day, no Man can plead his Employment, or common Diversions in Excuse for not attending upon God and the Business of Religion, at a Time which is by God himself devoted to those Purposes. And if the *Sunday* be set apart for the Honour of God, and *religious Uses*, surely some Part of it ought to be employ'd in consulting his *holy Word*, which contains his *Will* to his Creatures, *i. e.* every Thing that is necessary for us to know and practice in order to obtain his Favour and secure to our selves Eternal Life. This is Part of the Homage which is due to God, and a great Means of forwarding those religious Concerns for which the *Sunday* was separated from ordinary Uses; and therefore no Man who pretends to any Religion, and believes the *Divine Authority* of his Bible, can, consistently with such Belief, spend that *whole* Day without reading some Part of the *Bible*, the reading of which naturally makes up a Part of the Duty of the Day.

2. But, as the frequent reading the holy *Scriptures* is so necessary a Means of Improvement in *Christian Knowledge* and *Christian*
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Perfection, I would recommend it as a *general Rule*, to *every* one who can find Time to do it, to read some Portion of them *every* Day of their Lives, if it were only *one single* Chapter; and I will venture to say, there are very few but *might* find Time; when they are *at home*, more than enough for the reading so small a Part. Do but recollect your selves, and I am satisfied, most of you may remember many little Intervals of Leisure from necessary Business, either in the Morning, or at Noon, or in the Evening, which you might and would have employ'd in the Search after Divine Knowledge, if you had been as Intent upon understanding your *Religion* and knowing your *Duty* to God, as you are to understand and improve your *Trade*, or to enjoy your *Diversions*. And, believe me, you cannot, without Experience, *conceive* what an Effect this regular Habit of conversing with the Word of God would have towards keeping up an *habitual* Sense of God in your Thoughts; for, how can we possibly *forget* him while we are so constantly hearing him speak to us? This great Advantage you would certainly reap from it, besides the many others which I have mention'd already.

Before I quit this Head I shall take Notice of a most shameful Practice which is in Use in this Place. *Shopkeepers* send out Goods in Pieces of an *old Bible*. What an infamously prophane Use is this of the most Sacred Thing in the World! What a daring Indignity to the Divine Author of it! Would any serious *Christian* wash his Hands in the Water consecrated

crated for *Baptism*? How then can he think his *Bible*, the *Word of God*, the *Word of Eternal Life*, a proper Vehicle for *Coffee* and *Tobacco*? Whenever a *Bible* becomes too imperfect for its proper Use, it should be decently destroy'd; as the Water, us'd in *Baptism*, is directed to be thrown away that it may not be put to any *common* Use. Since I *preach'd* my Sermon I have been inform'd that some, who are guilty of this monstrous Piece of *Impiety*, have made a Jest of it. Of *these* I can only say, that they are as destitute of *common Sense* and *Modesty*, as they are of *Religion*. To *them* I can say nothing that will avail any thing. But, I hope, their *Customers* will use a more successful Argument, by not dealing with them while they openly affront their *Maker*, and prophane his Sacred *Word*. I am credibly inform'd that the *Turks* pay so religious a Regard to the *Alcoran*, as believing it to be the Word of God, that if any one finds a Piece of it, the *Government* will not suffer him so much as to *destroy* it, but obliges him to paste it up in some Part of his House; where by being read it may be of Use. But if any one were detected there in putting it to such *common* and *vulgar* Uses as are made of the *Bible* in these Kingdoms, we may be sure, he would be punish'd in the *severest* manner. But *here* the vilest *Abuse* and *Prophanation* of it not only goes *unpunish'd*, but *unobserv'd*; not only without raising the *highest Indignation*, but without giving the *least Offence*. But let us be *shamed* into an *external* (for there is no such Thing in reality as separating them) as well as an *internal* Esteem for God's Word, by the Practice

Practice of these *Turks*; and let every one of us, in our private Capacities, discountenance every kind of Indignity offered to it, by all the Displeasure that we can *express*, or shew by our *Behaviur*.

3. Well but, there is something more than all this required of you, in order to the Knowledge and Practice of your Duty. You must not only be constant and frequent in reading the *Scriptures*, which most undoubtedly contain in them every thing relating to Religion that is necessary for you to know, but you must use all possible *Helps* towards a *better understanding* them, and a more thorough Knowledge of the Doctrines and Duties that are therein contained; and, therefore, I shall now proceed to consider what Helps and Assistances the Providence of God has provided for you.

As there is an Order of Men set apart for these Purposes; to instruct, to exhort, to admonish and to reprove you; it is both your Duty and Interest to attend to their Instructions and Exhortations from the *Pulpit*; to hearken to their Admonitions and Reproofs; and *privately* to advise with them in Cases of Doubt and Difficulty.

I say, first, it is the indispensable Duty of every *Christian* constantly to attend upon those Sermons which, by the Appointment of God, are delivered from the *Pulpit*; for no body, that thinks at all, can imagine that God has provided an Order of Men to read Lectures in Divinity and Morality to the *Walls* and *Seats*. If it be the Duty of the *Clergy* constantly to preach,
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it must be the Duty of the *People* to go as constantly to *hear* them; unless you will suppose that infinite Wisdom has done so weak and idle a Thing as to provide such publick Lectures to no manner of Purpose; and of what Use *can* they be if they are not *attended*? The *very Appointment*, therefore, of this Method of publick Instruction implies an *universal* Obligation upon *Christians* to give their Attendance, there being no Exception made in favour of any that may be conceited enough to fancy that they stand in no need of Instruction, or because they can read a Sermon at home. Neither was it consistent with the Design of such an Appointment to exempt any from the general Obligation, because that would naturally have made it useless, unless to those illiterate People who cannot *read*; and it is a great Chance but many of *them*, too, thro' *Ignorance*, the Mother of *self-conceit*, would be as forward, as the most knowing, to despise Instruction. But, as I said, the Providence of God has thought fit to *appoint* publick Preaching, and, I presume, it will be allowed that he is a much better Judge what Method of Instruction is fittest for you; and as he is a better *Judge* of the fittest Means, so he has *Authority* to prescribe to you such Means as his unlimited Wisdom *thinks* fittest for you. As *we* are authorized by a Divine Commission to teach you in the best manner that we can, it is the Duty of all those who are committed to our Care to come and hear us. For, tho' I am very sensible that the People might often read a much more elaborate Discourse in *private*,

vate, yet That will not justify the Neglect of a publick and positive Institution ; neither have you reason to expect so much *real Benefit*, in the way of true Christian Edification, (tho' you may receive more *entertainment*) from the most admirable Discourse that ever was composed, if you read it at a Time when God has commanded your Attendance at Church, as you may reasonably hope for when you hear but an *ordinary* Sermon with an honest Mind and in Obedience to his Directions. For, however we may be pleased, or affected with a fine Composition, it is an undeniable Doctrine of *Christianity* that the *Grace of God* is necessary to a *profitable* reading or hearing ; and pray, now, who has the most Reason to expect God's Grace to give a Blessing to what he reads, or hears ? The humble modest Man who is willing to be instructed in the manner which God has appointed, or the self-conceited and refractory who think themselves wiser than their Maker, and refuse to be governed by his Laws ?

But, *besides* that we have Reason to believe that God by his Grace will give an *extraordinary* Blessing to those publick Instructions which you attend at *his Command*, and in *his House*, the *Place where his Honour dwelleth* ; I say, *besides* this great Advantage, arising in a *super-natural* way, if we consider them only in their *ordinary Operations* they may be made more profitable to the Hearers than much better Discourses *read in the Closet* ; and that for these plain Reasons.

I. When People read Discourses in their *Closet* they take care to read such as are most agreeable to their *Inclinations* and *Taste*, rather than what are best suited to their *Spiritual Wants*; such as *please* them most, rather than such as will do them *most Good*. — In the first Place, Men are generally ignorant of their *Spiritual State* and *Condition* thro' self-love, and for want of having attended to it; and are not proper Judges what *Doctrines* are most proper for their *Case*, what *Sins* they are most guilty of, what *Errors* are most predominant among them; and, consequently, in the Choice of those *Subjects* which they read upon in *private*, they may miss those which are *fittest* for them.

II. Or, if they *were* better Judges, than People generally are, of themselves, they would not be likely to be fond of such Discourses as upbraid them with their *Errors* and *Vices*, put them out of Love with themselves, and set them upon the painful Task of parting with favourite *Opinions*, and darling *Habits*. *Prophecy unto us smooth Things, prophecy Deceits*, This is the sort of *Preaching* that is most acceptable in *our Days*, as it was in *former Times*; and when Men are to chuse their *own Doctrine*, the *Palate*, and not the *Constitution*, will be ofteneft consulted.

III. But, if we suppose Men *ever* so just to themselves in the Choice of their *Subjects*, it is next to impossible that Discourses, intended for *general Use*, should in ALL Respects be so well

well fitted to the Condition of a *particular* Congregation, as Sermons from the *Pulpit* may be. For, if the Preacher be a Person of Experience and Sagacity, he will find out the *Errors*, the *Faults*, the *Tempers* and *Dispositions* of his Congregation; and will study how to adapt his *Matter* and *Manner* to them; and by so doing he will often preach Sermons that will be more useful to *them* than many others would be, that are written with more Accuracy and Elegancy by a better Composer.

IV. Then, again, Sermons *delivered* have this particular and considerable Advantage over Sermons in *print*, that if the Preacher understands any thing of *Elocution*, he will make his *Hearers* more *attentive* than common *Readers* are, and point out to them the Strefs and Force of the Argument by a proper *Emphasis*; and if he has any Energy in his Constitution, any sincere Concern in his *Heart* for the Honour of Religion and the Welfare of his People, he will speak, where the Case requires it, with an affectionate Warmth and Tendernefs that will inforce what he says upon the *Passions* of his Audience.

V. The last Circumstance which I shall mention on this Head, is, the Effect which *personal* Knowledge and Esteem will have in giving a particular Influence to Instructions from the *Pulpit*; and I shall esteem it as a singular Happiness to myself, if my sincere Affection for you and Intention

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to promote your eternal Welfare can give my Instructions any Advantage in *your* Opinion to make amends for their *own* Defects.

There is one Particular more under this Head which I shall mention, tho' in itself, it be too trifling to deserve Notice. Some think themselves quite excusable if they go to *Church* one part of the Day, observing, that *one Sermon in a Day is as much as they can carry away*. But let me ask them one Question. — Will they carry away a Syllable the less of one Sermon by the Means of hearing another. Not a jot, I dare say. And if so, then I must tell them, that they may hear several Things in the second Sermon that may be of Service to them.

But granting the Objection to have something in it. What can they say to the Neglect of *publick Prayer*? Surely they do not think that *twice* in a Day is too often for the publick worshipping of that God who is every Moment of our Lives our Support, to whom we owe every thing that we enjoy, and from whom alone we must receive every Thing that we hope for.

I thought it might be of Use to shew you the particular Usefulness of these *publick Instructions*, in order to remove an Objection that is often made against the Necessity of going to *Church*, and to induce you to attend them with the more Cheerfulness and Candour; but the *positive Institution*,
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with the Grace of God attending it, is, *alone*, a sufficient Answer to all Pretences whatsoever respecting the Capacities either of the *Hearer*, or the *Preacher*.

But the *Clergy* may be farther useful to the *People* by *private*, as well as *publick* Instruction, and it is the Duty of the *People* to apply to them for it. It is impossible for a *Sermon* to descend to the *particular* and *minute* *Circumstances* of every *particular* *Person*, though it may be adapted to the *Congregation* in *general*. Sincerely conscientious Persons will often be in *doubt* concerning Points of Duty; and where Men are so constantly at perfect Ease in their Mind about the Discharge of it, never distrustful of their own Judgment, never advising with some discreet Friend in order to have their own Opinion confirm'd, or confuted, this is a certain Sign of great *Ignorance*, or *Insensibility* and *Unconcernedness* about Religion. I shall instance, particularly, in one Case, because it is a common one. Men who frequent all the other Parts of *Christian* Worship, shall live for *Years* together, if not for their *whole* *Lives*, without ever partaking of the *Lord's* *Supper*, or ever advising with any body about it. Now, can there be a more flagrant Fact, than this, to shew how much *the* *Children* of *this* *World* are in *their* *Generation* wiser than *the* *Children* of *Light*? The former, if they be Persons of any Share of *Discretion*, are forward enough to consult *Physicians* and *Lawyers*, and will give *monstrous* Fees to retain one of singular Eminence in Cases that

Affect their *Life* and *Property*, while the *latter*, in a Matter of much more Importance, never concern themselves to take any Advice at all, though they might have it without any Expence.

Perhaps they will reply, that they want no Advice, because they sufficiently understand their Duty in this Case.

If it were so, it would be so much the worse, because *the Servant who knows his Master's Will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many Stripes.*—But, they are as ignorant of their own Hearts, as they are of the Nature of this Duty. Their Case, indeed, is bad enough, because they live habitually in a *criminal Ignorance*, as every one does who habitually neglects the Means of better Information; but *Charity* and *common Sense* oblige me to think that they do not live in the *Habit* of such a *presumptuous* Offence as that of *knowingly and wilfully* neglecting an *indispensable* Command of God.—No Man can be so ignorant of the *Christian Terms of Salvation* as not to know that such a one lives in a State of *Damnation*.—This is a dreadful Word, but it is a true one.—But the People of whom I am now speaking shew (by the Regard which they pay to other Parts of their Duty,) that they are not in such a *hardened Condition*. And, therefore, whatever they think of themselves, I can *assure* them that they entertain some mistaken Notions concerning the Duty of receiving the Sacrament, the Qualifications for a due Reception

ception of it, or the particular Obligations which they imagine that the receiving it will lay them under ; and it highly concerns them to rectify their mistaken Opinions ; for, an obstinate Perseverance in the Neglect of acquiring proper Information, after sufficient Warning given, will bring them into the desperate Condition of *presumptuous Sinners*.

There are various Cases, even in the *relative* Duties, where *private* Advice may be wanting in order to direct the Conscience aright ; and the Reason why it is not oftener asked *must* be, the want of a tender and quick Sense of Duty, which would naturally make Men more diffident and inquisitive. You know, by Experience, that an anxious Concern for *your worldly* Interest produces that Effect, and so it would in *Religion*, if you were equally sollicitous about your *Eternal Salvation*.

The Providence of God has been graciously pleased to bless these Nations to which we belong with still farther Means of Information, besides the Instructions which they may (if they be wise) receive *publicly* at Church, and *privately* at Home from the Clergy ; and as every Man is indispensably required to use all possible Helps towards the Knowledge of God and his Duty, you are all obliged, *as far as your Capacities and Conditions in Life will permit*, to make use of those which I am going to mention.

It cannot be made a Question, whether *written* Discourses may not be of some Use towards a better and more profitable reading the *Scriptures*, a more thorough Knowledge of the *Christian* Doctrines, and a more faithful Discharge of your Duty, *i. e.* for the better informing the Judgment, direction of the Conduct, and influencing the Will. Now, as you not only enjoy the Blessing of having the free Use of the *Scriptures*, which in *Popish* Countries the *Laity* are deprived of, so there is no Nation in the *Christian* World that abounds with such Variety of excellent *Comments* and *Paraphrases* upon the *Scriptures*, admirable *Sermons*, and Discourses upon all Points of Doctrine and Duty, and lesser Treatises calculated for the lower Sort of People, at such an easy Price that most of you may be able to purchase them; and, whoever has a sincere Desire after *Christian* Knowledge, and a sincere Intention of improving in *Christian* Perfection, (as every good *Christian* must have) if he can afford it, he will most certainly furnish himself with some Books of that Kind, such as are suited to his Capacity; and will read them as often as he can find Leisure from the other Duties of Life. I only ask any one, whether, if these Books were written for the Direction of Mankind in the Prosecution of their *Trades* and getting *Money*, or any other *worldly* or *sensual* Good, you would not strive hard, abridge your selves of many other Expences, rather than not purchase
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some of them ; and whether you would not be curious to inform your selves which of them would best suit your Purposes ; and if you did not, whether you would be allowed to have any tolerable Share of Wisdom in your Way. This, I say, is the Conduct of all *worldly wise* People, and but of very few in comparison, in their *Religious Affairs*.

I believe the *Clergy* are but rarely, I am sure, I scarce ever was, consulted on this Occasion. Yet, such Directions might often be of great Use, and would frequently be desired, if Men were as *religiously*, as they are *worldly wise*.

As to those who are not able to purchase any Books, tho' of the lowest Price, I am sorry that it is not as much in my Power, as it is in my Inclination, to supply them at my own Expence. It is a very great Misfortune that, in large Towns, all over the Kingdom, the *Great Tythe* being *alienated*, the *Vicar's* Income from his Living will not enable him to do those Things, for the Interest of Religion and the Salvation of his People, which are more wanted in those populous Places than in smaller Villages where the Minister's Revenue is larger. But this Subject I intend soon to take a much properer Occasion to inlarge upon. At present, I mention it only by way of Excuse for my self, and as a reasonable Pretextence for applying to such of you as can afford

ford something towards a Fund for *pious* and *charitable* Purposes. Tho' I cannot do all, I will do as much as any one, in proportion to my Ability. What I propose is, that we may *gradually* supply the poorer Families, where there is any one that can read, with *Bibles* and *Common Prayer Books*; with little Treatises upon the *Catechism*, the *Sacrament*, or any other Subject that the Place may be thought more particularly to require. I said, *gradually*. I would not discourage you by proposing to do too much at a time. The *Bible* is the *most necessary* Thing, and ought to take Place of all others in our Regard, as much as it does in its Uses. And, if every one, who pays to the *Rates*, would give the smallest matter towards it, in proportion to his Station and Circumstances; or, if only those of the *middle*, and *upper* Rank would contribute; it could not be long before this Part of my Scheme might be accomplished. And, give me Leave to tell you, that if you consider your immense Obligations to God, for all the Blessings that you either enjoy, or expect, here, or hereafter, you will gladly do any thing, in your Power, to promote his Honour. Or, if you have any compassionate Sense of the *Wants* of your *Fellow Christians*, you will think the Supply of their *Spiritual* Wants the greatest Instance of it, that can be shewn towards them. And, tho' I am very unwilling to suppose that any Considerations respecting your *Temporal* Interest should weigh with you when the other more momentous ones

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prove light in the Balance, I cannot forbear making another plain Observation. — The proper Behaviour of these lower Sort of People in their mean Station is of great Consequence to the good Order, Peace, and Comfort of the Society where they inhabit. And, therefore, by instilling Principles of *Religion* into them, and giving them a Sense of *Duty*, you are providing for your own *Quiet* and *Security*.

That I may give you all manner of Encouragement to come into my Proposal, I must inform you of one Circumstance which makes it the more easy to be put in Execution. There is an *incorporated Society*, for *propagating Christian Knowledge*, which sells, to their *Members*, such Books as are proper to be circulated in Parishes at half Price; and, as I have the Honour of being one of that Body, by that Means whatever you contribute to the Purposes above mentioned, will go twice as far as, otherwise, it would do — and this Advantage the Vicar of any other *Market Town*, by getting himself recommended to a Place in that Society, might obtain for the Good of his Parishioners — and, farther, I must observe, that round *London*, especially, they might apply to some of the neighbouring Gentlemen for their Assistance. — If such Methods as these were made use of, (and what should prevent it, but want of true *Christian Zeal*, and true *Christian Charity*?) there would soon be a vast Change made in the Morals of the Nation.

That the Designs of the Society may be the better known, and answered, I shall subjoin to my Sermon their printed Account of it.

Now to God the Father, &c. Amen,

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F O R P R O M O T I N G

C H R I S T I A N K N O W L E D G E.

THE *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* having been many Years engaged in carrying on such Designs as they judged might promote the Interests of true Religion, and the Honour of Almighty GOD, and which by his Blessing have in a great Measure answer'd those Ends; but finding that such their Designs are not so generally known as they could wish, and consequently not so much encouraged as they presume they would be when further known; they therefore publish this Account of them: and have also resolved to communicate to the Publick, from year to year, their Proceedings, and the State of their Affairs.

The Society consist partly of *Subscribing* or *Residing*, and partly of *Corresponding* Members. The former give their Advice and Attendance, with such certain Annual Contributions as every one thinks proper: The latter are such Persons in *Great Britain* and *Ireland*, and other Protestant Countries, as are chosen to correspond with the Society,

‘ on purpose to acquaint them, from time to
 ‘ time, with the State of Religion in their
 ‘ Neighbourhood; to suggest such Methods
 ‘ of doing Good as occur to them; to distri-
 ‘ bute Bibles, with such Religious as well as
 ‘ useful Books, as are from time to time ap-
 ‘ prov’d of, and recommended by the Society,
 ‘ and to remit occasional Benefactions, which
 ‘ they themselves are pleas’d to contribute, or
 ‘ collect from well-dispos’d Christians.

Anno 1698.

The Original
of the Society.

‘ But for the better understanding the Na-
 ‘ ture and Designs of this Society, it is thought
 ‘ convenient to premise a short Narrative of
 ‘ its Rise and Progress. — It was about the
 ‘ latter End of the Year 1698, that a few Ge-
 ‘ tlemen form’d themselves into a *Voluntary*
 ‘ *Society*, under the Title above-mention’d:
 ‘ and as such they, with Unanimity and Zeal,
 ‘ went on together in promoting the real and
 ‘ practical Knowledge of true Religion, by
 ‘ such Methods as appear’d to them, from time
 ‘ to time, to be most conducive to that End,
 ‘ till towards the Conclusion of the Year 1701;
 ‘ when, at their Instance, a Charter was ob-
 ‘ tained from King WILLIAM III. whereby
 ‘ all the then Subscribing Members of this So-
 ‘ ciety, with other Persons of Distinction in
 ‘ Church and State, were Incorporated for the
 ‘ better carrying on that Branch of their De-
 ‘ signs which related to the *Plantations, Colo-*
 ‘ *nies, and Factories beyond the Seas, belonging*
 ‘ *to the Kingdom of England*; from which time
 ‘ that excellent Work has, by the Divine Bless-
 ‘ ing been very successfully conducted by that
 ‘ Corporation.

1701.

Of the *Incor-*
porated Society
for *Propaga-*
tion of the
Gospel in Fo-
reign Parts.

‘ But their Charter being limited to *foreign*
 ‘ *Parts*, and the Business of that Corporation
 ‘ being

being hitherto confin'd to the British Planta- The Incorporated Society
 tions in *America*; most of the Original Mem- being limited
 bers of our *Voluntary Society*, still continued to the *British*
 to carry on, in that Capacity, their more *Plantations*,
 extensive Designs for advancing the Honour the Original
 of G. O. D; and the Good of Mankind by Members con-
 promoting Christian Knowledge, both at tinue as a *Vo-*
 Home and in other Parts of the World, by *luntary Society*.
 the best Methods that should offer. They
 are therefore a Society distinct from the *Cor-*
 poration, and known by the Name of *the So-*
 ciety for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Their Principal Methods were the same
 as they had been before. The FIRST, to
 procure and encourage the erecting of CHA- Charity-
 RITY-SCHOOLS, in all Parts of the King- Schools
 dom; and that those Schools might answer erected.
 the true Purposes for which they were erect-
 ed, the Society has not been wanting in their
 Correspondence with such of their Members,
 (as have been concern'd in their Support and
 Management) to recommend at all Times,
 that, together with Religious and Useful
 Instructions, Care should be taken, and all
 proper Means used to inure the Children of
 the Poor to Industry and Labour, so that
 they may become good Christians and good
 Subjects: and be willing, as well as fit to be
 employed, not only in Trades or Services,
 but also in Husbandry or any other Business,
 that shall be thought of most Use and Bene-
 fit to the Publick. With these Views the
 Society printed and dispersed such a Set of
 Rules for the good Order and Government
 of these Schools, as had been approv'd of
 by the Archbishops and Bishops, who direct-
 ed,

ed, that the same should be observed within their respective Dioceses.

*Bibles,
Prayer-books,
&c. dispersed.*

Another Method was to disperse, both at Home and Abroad, Bibles, Prayer-Books, and divers sorts of Religious Tracts; and accordingly they have, by the Assistance of their Members, dispers'd several Hundred Thousands of them, in such manner and in such Places, as they have reason to hope has tended to the great Increase of the Knowledge and Practice of our Holy Religion. These Books and Tracts, are to be had by their own Members on the following Terms: Such as are Bound, at the prime Cost in Sheets; what are not Bound, at half the prime Cost; the *Society* defraying the Expence of the other Half, as also that of Binding, in the former Article, out of their own Fund.

These are the General Designs of this Society: and tho' their certain Income towards supporting them be but small, yet they have hitherto been enabled by their own Annual Subscriptions, and the Legacies or other casual Benefactions of well-disposed Persons, to raise a Fund sufficient to carry them on successfully from year to year, at a very considerable Expence: and they still trust to the Blessing of GOD, and the Zeal of their Members, that such good Works shall never fail to prosper in their Hands, for want of Liberal Supplies from Charitable Christians.

Beside these General Designs, the *Society* undertook in the Year 1710, the Management of such Charities as were, or should be put into their Hands, for the Support and

En-

Enlargement of the PROTESTANT MISSION, then maintained by the King of Denmark at Tranquebar in the EAST-INDIES, for the Conversion of the Heathen in those Parts. Accordingly they, from time to time, assisted the Missionaries there with Money, a Printing-Press, Paper, and other Necessaries (as they were enabled) till the Year 1728, when, upon a Proposal made by the Reverend Mr. Schultze, one of the Danish Missionaries, to remove to Fort St. George, and there begin a new Mission, for the Conversion of the Heathen at Madras, the Society engaged for the Support of the same, tho' at an Expence that did then far exceed their Ability, trusting to the Goodness and Blessing of Almighty GOD: which Expence has been since greatly increased by the Addition of two Missionaries; and will be more by such extraordinary Charges, as must necessarily attend the Enlargement of the Mission to Cudulore near Fort St. David, (another English Settlement) which has been since made by the Society. However the Society chearfully rely upon the same Wise and Gracious Providence, which has hitherto wonderfully prospered this, and all other their Undertakings, to raise up such a true Christian Spirit, as will abundantly supply whatever Money shall be wanting to carry on so Pious and Glorious a Design, as that of enlarging the Kingdom of Jesus Christ upon Earth.

Protestant
Mission to
East-India,
at Tranquebar.

At Madras.

At Cudulore.

In the Year 1720, the Society extended their Regard to the Greek Church in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt. To this End they published Proposals for

1720.

New Testaments, Psalter, Catechisms, and Abridgment of the History of the Bible, printed in Arabick.

for Printing here, with a new Set of Types,
 the *New Testament*, and *Psalter*, in *Arabick*:
 and were enabled, by the Blessing of God,
 on the Recommendation of the Bishops,
 joined to the Charity and Zeal of their own
 Members, to procure an Edition of above
 6000 *Psalters*, and 10000 *New Testaments*,
 as also of 5000 *Catechetical Instructions*, with
 an *Abridgment of the History of the Bible* an-
 nexed; at so large an Expence as the Sum
 of 2976 *l.* 1 *s.* 6 *d.* $\frac{1}{2}$. to which His late Ma-
 jesty was a bountiful Contributor, by a gra-
 cious Benefaction of *Five Hundred Pounds*;
 5638 *Psalters*, 2652 *New Testaments*, and
 2190 *Catechetical Instructions*, with the *A-*
bridgment aforesaid, have been already sent
 to those Parts; or into *Persia*, by means of
 their Correspondents in *Russia*, which were
 most thankfully received; and the rest are
 reserved to be sent as Occasion shall offer.

1725.
Work-houses
recommended.

The Society having had the Pleasure to
 see the Success of the Endeavours used in
 many Towns and Villages, for employing
 the Poor and their Children, by setting up
WORKHOUSES; they (that nothing might
 be wanting to encourage the Prosecution of so
 useful a Design) did in the Year 1725, cause
 a Collection of the best Accounts of such
Work-houses to be published; which was re-
 printed, with very large Additions, in 1733.
 and is now dispersed upon the usual Terms
 of the Society, in order to recommend so
 good a Design throughout the Kingdom: and
 that in them particular Regard should be had
 to such an Education of Children, as might,
 by making them good Christians, be the
 most

most effectual Means to make them useful to their Country, truly happy in the Life that now is, and in that which is to come.

In the Beginning of the Year 1732. the Society, when they heard the melancholy Account of the Sufferings of the Protestants in *Saltzburg*, (having first obtained His Majesty's Leave) resolved upon doing all that lay in their Power to raise Collections for their persecuted Brethren. To this End, in June the same Year, they published, *An Account of the Sufferings of the persecuted Protestants in the Archbishoprick of Saltzburg, &c.* and afterwards published *A farther Account of their Sufferings, &c.* with an *Extract of the Journals of M. Von Reck, the Commissary of the first Transport of Saltzburgers to Georgia; and of the Ministers that accompanied them thither, 1733.* These Accounts being enforced by the generous Example of many Noble and Honourable Persons, as also by liberal Contributions, and earnest Exhortations from the Right Reverend the Bishops, and their Clergy; had, thro' God's Blessing, so good an Effect upon the Minds of charitable and well-disposed Christians of every Rank and Denomination, that the Society (besides making many large Remittances to *Germany*) have been enabled to send over to the *English Colony in Georgia*, in the Years 1733, 1734, and 1735, three Transports, consisting of more than one hundred and fifty Protestant Emigrants from *Saltzburg*; who with two Missionaries and a School-Master, are settled by themselves at *Ebenezer*; where Lands are assigned to them by the Trustees for establishing the said Colony.

1732.

Saltzburg
Exiles re-
lieved.

‘ The great Expence of these Transports, and
 ‘ the many extraordinary Charges that have been
 ‘ necessary for the Support and Encouragement
 ‘ of this infant Settlement; together with 100
 ‘ a Year as a Salary for their two Missionaries
 ‘ and Schoolmaster, have so far reduced the Char-
 ‘ rities belonging to this Branch of the Society
 ‘ Designs, that they have not now remaining
 ‘ their Hands above the Sum of 50*l.* 9*s.* 5*d.*
 ‘ excepting 2500 *l.* New South-Sea Annuities
 ‘ which have been purchased as a standing Fund
 ‘ for paying the aforesaid annual Salary to the
 ‘ Missionaries and Schoolmaster, till some cer-
 ‘ tain and settled Provision can be made for
 ‘ them in *Georgia*. But for Particulars the So-
 ‘ ciety refer themselves to their Books of Re-
 ‘ ceipts and Disbursements on this Account
 ‘ which may be inspected *gratis* by any Person
 ‘ calling on their Secretary, at their House
 ‘ *Bartlet’s Buildings, London*; of which, two E-
 ‘ tracts have been already published, and dis-
 ‘ persed among the Benefactors to this excellent
 ‘ Charity, with the Thanks of the Society, and
 ‘ their Prayers that God would eternally reward
 ‘ so great and seasonable an Instance of Christian
 ‘ Beneficence, as has been ministered on this Oc-
 ‘ casion to persecuted *Protestants*, when driven
 ‘ out of their native Country, under the most
 ‘ pitiable Circumstances of Distress.

‘ These are the several Designs, wherein the
 ‘ Society are at present engaged; the *particular*
 ‘ State whereof being published every Year, no-
 ‘ thing more need be added to this *general Ac-*
 ‘ count of them, than what has been already
 ‘ said upon each Branch of them; excepting the
 ‘ mention of two very considerable and standing
 ‘ Benefactions.

Two standing
Benefactions.

1. The one is a most generous *Legacy of Four Thousand Pounds*, which was left to them by Mrs. *Elizabeth Palmer* in 1728, and is still preserved entire in the *Publick Funds*; the Interest of it only being from year to year applied to such Branches of their Designs as most need it.

Mrs. *Palmer's*
Legacy of
4000 l. in
1728.

2. The other is a free Gift by a Gentleman of *Kent*, now living, but desiring to be unknown, who did, in the Year 1734, in Consideration of the Zeal and good Designs of this Society, convey to Five Members of it, their Heirs and Assigns for ever, by Lease and Release, Ten Acres of Land in *Romney-Marsh* in *Kent*, and also transferr'd to the same Persons 1050 l. New *South-Sea Annuities*, to be vested, as soon as may be, in a Purchase of Freehold Land, the better to perpetuate the Trusts declared by another Deed, executed by the said Benefactor, which are to defray the Expence of distributing Bibles, New Testaments, and other Religious Books, as the Society shall direct, and to pay him an Annuity of Forty Pounds during his Life: and after his Death, likewise an Annuity of Fifteen Pounds for Life, on certain Conditions, to one of his Relations.

The Gifts of
a Gentleman
of *Kent*.
1734.

The same Gentleman did also, in the Year 1737, execute another Deed to the Five Members abovementioned, for conveying to them, their Heirs and Assigns for ever, Eighty Pounds New *South-Sea Annuities*; the Dividends whereof are to be laid out from time to time (at the Direction of the Society) in Books for propagating the Christian Religion in the *East-Indies*, or other Parts of the World; which *Annuity Stock* is also to be vested, as soon as may be, in a Purchase of *Freehold* Land, the better to perpetuate the Trust.

1737.

The

The proper FORM, by which any Benefaction may be given to the Designs of the Society, to prevent any Doubt or Mistake, is as follows:

I T E M, I A. B. do hereby give and bequeath unto C. D. of *Willesden* and E. F. of *Willesden* the Sum of *£ 100* upon Trust, and to the Intent that they, or either of them, do pay the same to the Treasurer or Treasurers for the Time being, of a Voluntary Society, commonly called, or known by the Name of, The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which first met about the latter end of the Year 1698, and now do, or lately did hold their Weekly Meetings at their House in Bartlett's Buildings, Holborn: Which said Sum of

I desire may be applied towards carrying on the charitable Designs of the said Society.

N. B. If the Benefactor is pleased to restrain his Charity to any particular Branch of the Society's Designs, he may add, either in *Great-Britain, Palestine, or the East-Indies.*

The TREASURERS of this Society.

The Reverend Dr. Denne, Archdeacon of Rochester, and Rector of St. Mary Lambeth, is Treasurer for all Benefactions to the Designs of the Society in general, and to the Arabick Impressions of the New Testament and Psalter.

William Tillard, Esq; in Spital Square, is Treasurer for all Quarterly Subscriptions, and also for all Remittances for Packets of Books sent to any Members.

Benjamin Hoare, Esq; in Fleetstreet, is Treasurer for all Benefactions to the Protestant Mission in the East-Indies.

Letters may be directed to H. Newman, their Secretary, in Bartlett's Buildings, Holborn.