

Thomas Boston

The Crook in the Lot

Part 1

"Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He has made crooked? "—Eccles. 7:13.

A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them; and that view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense; for it is the light of the world alone that represents them justly, discovering in them the work of God, and consequently, designs becoming the Divine perfections. When they are perceived by the eye of faith, and duly considered, we have a just view of afflicting incidents, fitted to quell the turbulent motions of corrupt affections under dismal outward appearances.

It is under this view that Solomon, in the preceding part of this chapter, advances several paradoxes, which are surprising determinations in favor of certain things, that, to the eye of sense, looking gloomy and hideous, are therefore generally reputed previous and shocking. He pronounces the day of one's death to be better than the day of his birth; namely, the day of the death of one, who, having become the friend of God through faith, has led a life to the honor of God, and service of his generation, and in this way raised to himself the good and savvy name better than precious ointment. In like manner, he pronounces the house of mourning to be

preferable to the house of feasting, sorrow to laughter, and a wise man's rebuke to a fool's song. As for that, even though the latter are indeed the more pleasant, yet the former are the more profitable. And observing with concern, how men are in hazard, not only from the world's frowns and ill-usage, oppression making a wise man mad, but also from its smiles and caresses, a gift destroying the heart. Therefore, since whatever way it goes there is danger, he pronounces the end of every worldly thing better than the beginning of it. And from the whole he justly infers, that it is better to be humble and patient than proud and impatient under afflicting dispensation; since, in the former case, we wisely submit to what is really best; in the latter, we fight against it. And he dissuades from being angry with our lot, because of the adversity found in it. He cautions against making odious comparisons of former and present times, in that point insinuating undue reflections on the providence of God: and, against that querulous and fretful disposition. He first prescribes a general remedy, namely, holy wisdom, as that which enables us to make the best of everything, and even gives life in killing circumstances; and then a particular remedy, consisting in a due application of that wisdom, towards taking a just view of the case: "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He has made crooked?"

In which words are proposed,

1. The remedy itself;
2. The suitableness of it.

1. The remedy itself is a wise eyeing of the hand of God in all we find to bear hard on us: "Consider the work of God," namely, in the crooked, rough, and disagreeable parts of your lot, the crosses you find in it. You see very well the cross itself. Yea, you turn it over and over in your mind and leisurely view it on all sides. You look to this and the other second cause of it, and so you are in a foam and a fret. But, would

you be quieted and satisfied in the matter, lift up your eyes towards heaven, see the doing of God in it, the operation of His hand. Look at that, and consider it well; eye the first cause of the crook in your lot; behold how it is the work of God, His doing.

2. Such a view of the crook in our lot is very suitable to still improper risings of heart, and quiet us under them: "For who can make that straight which God has made crooked?" As to the crook in your lot, God has made it; and it must continue while He will have it so. Should you ply your utmost force to even it, or make it straight, your attempt will be vain: it will not change for all you can do. Only He who made it can mend it, or make it straight. This consideration, this view of the matter, is a proper means at once to silence and to satisfy men, and so bring them to a dutiful submission to their Maker and Governor, under the crook in their lot.

Now, we take up the purpose of the text under these three heads.

I. Whatever crook there is in our lot, it is of God's making.

II. What God sees fit to mar, no one will be able to mend in his lot.

III. The considering of the crook in the lot as the work of God, or of His making, is a proper means to bring us to a Christian deportment under it.

I. Whatever crook there is in our lot, it is of God's making.

Here, two things are to be considered, namely, the crook itself, and God's making of it.

1. As to the crook itself, the crook in the lot, for the better understanding of it, these few things that follow are premised.

First. There is a certain train or course of events, by the providence of God, falling to every one of us during our life in this world. And that is our lot, as being allotted to us by the sovereign God, our Creator and Governor, "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. " This train of events is widely different to different persons, according to the will and pleasure of the sovereign Manage, who orders men's condition in the world in a great variety, some moving in a higher, some in a lower sphere.

Second. In that train or course of events, some fall out, cross to us, and against the grain; and these make the crook in our lot. While we are here, there will be cross events, as well as agreeable ones, in our lot and condition. Sometimes things are softly and agreeably gliding on; but, by and by, there is some incident which alters that course, grates us, and panes us, as, when we have made a wrong step we begin to limp.

Third. Everybody's lot in this world has some crook in it. Complainers are apt to make odious comparisons. They look about, and take a distant view of the condition of others, can discern nothing in it but what is straight, and just to one's wish; so they pronounce their neighbor's lot wholly straight. But that is a false verdict; there is no perfection here; no lot out of heaven without a crook. For, as to "all the works that are done under the sun, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight. " Who would have thought but that Haman's lot was very straight, while his family was in a flourishing condition, and he prospering in riches and honor, being prime minister of state in the Persian court, and standing high in the king's favor? Yet there was, at the saline time, a crook in his lot, which so galled him, that "all this availed him nothing. " Every one feels for himself, when he is

pinched, though others do not perceive it. Nobody's lot, in this world, is wholly crooked; there are always some straight and even parts in it. Indeed, when men's passions, having gotten up, have cast a mist over their minds, they are ready to say, all is wrong with them, nothing right. But, though in hell that tale is and ever will be true, yet it is never true in this world. For there, indeed, there is not a drop of comfort allowed; but here it always holds good, that "it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed. "

Fourth. The crook in the lot came into the world by sin: it is owing to the fall, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;" under which death the crook in the lot is comprehended, as a state of comfort or prosperity is, in Scripture style, expressed by living. Sin so bowed the hearts and minds of men, that they became crooked in respect of the holy law; and God justly so bowed their lot, that it became crooked too. And this crook in our lot inseparably follows our sinful condition, till dropping this body of sin and death, we get within heaven's gates.

These being premised, a crook in the lot speaks, in general, two things, (1.) Adversity, (2.) Continuance. Accordingly it makes the day of adversity, opposed in the day of prosperity, in the verse immediately following the text.

The crook in the lot, is, First, some one or other piece of adversity. The prosperous part of one's lot, which goes forward according to one's wish, is the straight and even part of it; the adverse part, going a contrary way, is the crooked part of it. God has intermixed these two in men's condition in this world; that, as there is some prosperity in it, making the straight line, so there is also some adversity, making the crooked. This mixture has place, not only in the lot of saints, who are told, that "in the world they shall have tribulation, " but even in the lot of all, as already observed. Secondly, it is

adversity of some continuance. We do not reckon it a crooked thing, which, though forcibly bent and bowed together, yet presently recovers its former straightness. These are twinges of the rod of adversity, which passed like a stitch on one's side, all is immediately set to right's again; one's lot may be suddenly overclouded, and the cloud vanish before he is aware. But under the crook, one having leisure to find his smart, is in some concern to get the crook made straight. So the crook in the lot is adversity, continued for a shorter or longer time.

Now there is a threefold crook in the lot incident to the children of men.

1. One made by a cross dispensation, which, however in itself passing, yet has lasting effects. Such a crook did Herod's cruelty make in the lot of the mothers in Bethlehem, who by the murderers were left "weeping for their slain children, and would not be comforted, because they were not." A slip of the foot may soon be made, which will make a man go limping ever after. "As the fishes are taken in an evil net: so are the sons of men snared in an evil time." A thing may fall out in a moment under which the party shall go halting to the grave.

2. There is a crook made by a train of cross dispensation, whether of the same or different kinds, following hard on one another, and leaving lasting effects behind them. Thus in the case of Job, while one messenger of evil tidings was yet speaking, another came. Cross events coming one on the neck of another, deep calling to deep, make a sore crook. In that case, the part is like one who recovering his sliding foot from one unfirm piece of ground, sets it on another equally unfirm, which immediately gives way under him too; or, like one who, travelling in an unknown mountainous track, after having with difficulty made his way over one mountain, is expected to see the plain country; but instead there comes in

view, time after time, a new mountain to be passed. This crook is Asaph's lot nearly to have made him give up all his religion, until he "went into the sanctuary," where this mystery of providence was unriddled to him. Solomon observes, "That there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked. " Providence taking a run against them, as if they were to be run down for good and all. Whoever they are to whose life in no part of it affords them experience of this, surely Joseph missed not of it in his young days, nor Jacob in his middle days, nor Peter in his old days, nor our Savior all His days.

3. There is a crook made by one cross dispensation, with lasting effects of it coming in the room of another removed. This crook straightened, there is another made in its place: and so there is still a crook. Lack of children had long been the crook in Rachel's lot. That was at length made even to her mind; but then she got another in its stead, hard labor in travailing to bring forth. This world is a wilderness, in which we may indeed get our station changed; but the move will be out of one wilderness to another. When one part of the lot is made even, quickly some other part of it will be crooked.

More particularly, the crook in the lot has in it four things of the nature of that which is crooked.

(1.) Disagreeableness. A crooked thing is wayward; and, being laid to a rule, answers it not, but declines from it. There is not, in anybody's lot, any such thing as a crook, in respect of the will and purposes of God. Take the most harsh and dismal dispensation in one's lot and lay it to the eternal decree, made in the depth of infinite wisdom before the world began, and it will answer it exactly, without the least deviation, "all things being worked after the counsel of His will. " Lay it to the providential will of God, in the government of the world, and there is a perfect harmony. If Paul is to be bound at

Jerusalem, and "delivered into the hands of the Gentiles," it is "the will of the Lord it should be so." Therefore the greatest crook of the lot on earth is straight in heaven. There is no disagreeableness in it there. But in every person's lot there is a crook in respect of their mind and natural inclination. The adverse dispensation lies cross to that rule, and will by no means answer it, nor harmonise with it. When Divine Providence lays the one to the other, there is a manifest disagreeableness—the man's will goes one way, and the dispensation another way—the will bends upwards, and cross events press down: so they are contrary. And there, and only there, lies the crook. It is this disagreeableness which makes the crook in the lot fit matter of trial and exercise to us in this our state of probation: in which, if you would approve yourself to God, walking by faith, not by sight, you must quiet yourself in the will and purpose of God, and not insist that it should be according to your mind.

(2) Unsightliness. Crooked things are unpleasant to the eye; and no crook in the lot seems to be joyous, but grievous, making an unsightly appearance. Therefore men need to beware of giving way to their thoughts to dwell on the crook in their lot, and of keeping it too much in view. David shows a hurtful experience of his, in that kind. "While I was musing the fire burned " Jacob acted a wiser part, called his youngest son Benjamin, the son of the right hand, whom the dying mother had named Benoni, the son of my sorrow. By this means providing that the crook in his lot should not be set afresh in his view on every occasion of mentioning the name of his son. Indeed, a Christian may safely take a steady and leisurely view of the crook in his lot in the light of the holy Word, which represents it as the discipline of the covenant. So faith will discover a hidden sightliness in it, under a very unsightly outward appearance; perceiving the suitability of it to the infinite goodness, love, and wisdom of God, and to the real and most valuable interests of the party; by which means one

comes to take pleasure, and that a most refined pleasure, in distress. But whatever the crook in the lot is to the eye of faith, it is not all pleasant to the eye of sense.

(3.) Unfitness for motion. Solomon observes the cause of the uneasy and ungraceful walking of the lame; "The legs of the lame are not equal." This uneasiness they find, who are exercised about the crook in their lot: a high spirit and a low adverse lot makes great difficulty in the Christian walk. There is nothing that gives temptation more easy access than the crook in the lot; nothing more apt to occasion out-of-the-way steps. Therefore, says the apostle, "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." They who are laboring under it are to be pitied, then, and not to be rigidly censured; though they are rare persons who learn this lesson, till taught by their own experience. It is long since Job made an observation in this case, which holds good to this day; He that is ready to slip with his feet, is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.

(4.) Aptness to catch hold and entangle, like hooks, "fish-hooks." The crook in the lot does so very readily make impression, to be ruffling and fretting one's spirit, irritating corruption, that Satan fails not to make diligent use of it for these dangerous purposes; which point once gained by the tempter, the tempted, before he is aware, finds himself entangled as in a thicket, out of which he does not know how to extricate himself. In that temptation it often proves like a crooked stick troubling a standing pool, which not only raises up the mud all over, but brings up from the bottom some very ugly thing. Thus it brought up a spice of blasphemy and atheism in Asaph's case; "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence: " as if he had said, there is nothing at all in religion, it is a vain and empty thing, that profits nothing; I was a fool to have been in care about purity and holiness, whether of heart or life. Ah! is this the

pious Asaph? How is he turned so quite unlike himself! But the crook in the lot is a handle by which the tempter makes surprising discoveries of latent corruption even in the best.

This is the nature of the crook in the lot; let us now observe what part of the lot it falls in. Three conclusions may be established upon this head.

First. It may fall in any part of the lot; there is no exempted one in the case: for, sin being found in every part, the crook may take place in any part. Being "all as an unclean thing, we all fade as a leaf: " The main stream of sin, which the crook readily follows, runs in very different channels in the case of different persons. And in regard of the various dispositions of the minds of men, that will prove a sinking weight to one, which another would go very lightly under.

Secondly. It may at once fall into many parts of the lot, the Lord calling, as in a solemn day, one's terrors round about. Sometimes God makes one notable crook in a man's lot; but its name may be Gad, being but the forerunner of a troop which comes. Then the crooks are multiplied, so that the party is made to halt on each side. While one stream, let in from one quarter, is running full against him, another is let in on him from another quarter, till in the end the waters break in on every hand.

Thirdly. It often falls in the tender part; I mean, that part of the lot in which one is least able to bear it, or at least thinks he is so. "It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it. But it was you, a man my equal, my guide, and my acquaintance." If there is any one part of the lot which of all others one is disposed to nestle in, the thorn will readily be laid there, especially if he belongs to God; in that thing in which he is least of all able to be touched, he will be sure to be pressed. There the trial will be taken of him; for there is the

grand competition with Christ. "I take from them the desires of their eyes, and that upon which they set their minds. " Since the crook in the lot is the special trial appointed for every one, it is altogether reasonable, and becoming the wisdom of God, that it fall on that which of an things most rivals him.

But more particularly, the crook may be observed to fall in these four parts of the lot.

First, in the natural part, affecting persons considered as of the make allotted for them by the great God that formed an things. The parents of mankind, Adam and Eve, were formed together sound and entire, without the least blemish, whether in soul or body; but in the formation of their posterity, there often appears a notable variation from the original. Bodily defects, superfluities, deformities, infirmities, natural or accidental, make the crook in the lot of some. They have something unsightly or grievous about them. Crooks of this kind, more or less observable, are very common and ordinary; and the best are not exempted from them; and it is purely owing to sovereign pleasure they are not more numerous. Tender eyes made the crook in the lot of Leah. Rachel's beauty was balanced with barrenness, the crook in her lot. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, was it should seem, no personable man, but a mean outward appearance, for which fools were apt to condemn him. Timothy was of a weak and sickly frame. And there is a yet far more considerable crook in the lot of the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the dumb. Some are weak to a degree in their intellects; and it is the crook in the lot of several bright souls to be overcast with clouds, notably bemisted and darkened, from the crazy bodies they are lodged in. An eminent instance of which we have in the grave, wise, and patient Job, "going mourning without the sun; yea, standing up and crying in the congregation. "

Secondly, it may fall in the honorary part. There is an honor due to all men, the small as well as the great, and that upon the ground of the original constitution of human nature, as it was framed in the image of God. But in the sovereign disposal of holy Providence, the crook in the lot of some fans here; they are neglected and slighted; their credit is still kept low; they go through the world under a cloud, being put into an ill name, their reputation sunk.

This sometimes is the natural consequence of their own foolish and sinful conduct; as in the case of Dinah, who, by her gadding abroad to satisfy her youthful curiosity, regardless of, and therefore not waiting for, a providential call, brought a lasting stain on her honor. But where the Lord intends a crook of this kind in one's lot, innocence will not be able to ward it off in an ill-natured world; neither will true merit be able to make head against it, to make one's lot stand straight in that part. Thus David represents his case. "They that saw me without, fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind. I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many. "

Thirdly, it may fall in the vocational part. Whatever is a man's calling or station in the world, be it sacred or civil, the crook in their lot may take it's place in it. Isaiah was an eminent prophet, but most unsuccessful. Jeremiah met with such a train of discouragements and ill usage in the exercise of his sacred function, that he was very near giving it up, saying, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his none. " The Psalmist observes this crook often to be made in the lot of some men very industrious in their civil business, who sow in the fields; and at times "God blesses them - and does not allow their cattle to decrease. But again, they are minished and brought low, through oppression, affliction and sorrow. " Such a crook was made in Job's lot after he had long stood even. Some manage their employments with all care and diligence; the husbandman carefully laboring his ground; the

sheep-master, "diligent to know the state of his flocks, and looking well to his herds;" the tradesman early and late at his business; the merchant diligently plying his, watching and falling in with the most fair and promising opportunities; but there is such a crook in that part of their lot, as all they are able to do can by no means make even. For why? The most proper means used for compassing an end are insignificant without a word of Divine appointment, commanding their success. "Who is he that says, and it comes to pass, when the Lord does not command it? " People ply their business with skill and industry, but the wind turns in their face. Providence crosses their enterprises, disconcerts their measures, frustrates their hopes and expectations, renders their endeavors unsuccessful, and so puts and keeps them still in straitened circumstances. "So the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise." Providence interposing, crooks the measures which human prudence and industry had laid straight towards the respective ends; so the swift lose the race, and the strong the battle, and the wise miss of bread; while in the mean time, some one of other providential incident, supplying the defect of human wisdom, conduct, and ability, the slow gain the race and carry the prize; the weak win the battle and enrich themselves with the spoil; and bread falls into the lap of the fool.

Lastly, it may fall in the relational part. Relations are the joints of society; and there the crook in the lot may take place, one's smartest pain being often felt in these joints. They are in their nature the springs of man's comfort; yet, they often turn the greatest bitterness to him. Sometimes this crook is occasioned by the loss of relation. Thus a crook was made in the lot of Jacob, by means of the death of Rachel, his beloved wife, and the loss of Joseph, his son and darling, which had like to have made him go halting to the grave. Job laments this crook in his lot, "You have made desolate all my company; " meaning his dear children, every one of whom he

had laid in the grave, not so much as one son or daughter left him. Again, sometimes it is made through the afflicting hand of God lying heavy on them: which, in virtue of their relation, recoils on the party, as is feelingly expressed by that believing woman, "Have mercy on me, O Lord; my daughter is grievously vexed." Ephraim felt the smart of family afflictions, "when he called his son's name Beriah, because it went evil with his house. " Since all is not only vanity, but vexation of spirit, it can hardly miss but the more of these springs of comfort are opened to a man, he must at one time or other find he has but the more sources of sorrows to gush out and spring in on him; the sorrow always proportioned to the comfort found in them, or expected from them. And, finally, the crook is sometimes made here by their proving uncomfortable through the disagreeableness of their temper and disposition. There was a crook in Job's lot, by means of an undutiful, ill-natured wife. In Abigail's by means of a surly, ill-tempered husband. In Eli's through the perverseness and obstinacy of his children. In Jonathan's through the furious temper of his father. So do men oftentimes find their greatest cross where they expected their greatest comfort. Sin has unhinged the whole creation, and made every relation susceptible of the crook. In the family are found masters hard and unjust, servants froward and unfaithful; in a neighbourhood, men selfish and uneasy; in the church, ministers unedifying, and offensive in their walk, and people contemptuous and disorderly, a burden to the spirits of ministers; in the state, magistrates oppressive, and discountenancers of that which is good, and subjects turbulent and seditious. All these cause crooks in the lot of their relatives. And thus far of the crook itself.

II. Having seen the crook itself, we are in the next place to consider of God's making it. And here is to be shown, 1. That it is of God's making. 2. How it is of his making. 3. Why he makes it.

First. That the crook in the lot, whatever it is, is of God's making appears from these three considerations.

First, It cannot be questioned but the crook in the lot, considered as a crook, is a penal evil, whatever it is for the matter of it; that is, whether the thing in itself, its immediate cause and occasion, are sinful or not, it is certainly a punishment of affliction. Now, as it may be, as such, holily and justly brought on us, by our Sovereign Lord and Judge, so he expressly claims the doing or making of it. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?" Wherefore, since there can be no penal evil but of God's making, and the crook in the lot is such an evil, it is necessarily concluded to be of God's making.

Secondly, it is evident, from the Scripture doctrines of divine providence, that God brings about every man's lot, and all the parts of it. He sits at the helm of human affairs, and turns them about in whatever way he lists. "Whatever the Lord pleased, that He did in heaven and in earth, in the seas and all deep places. " There is not anything whatever befalls us without his overruling hand. The same providence that brought us out of the womb, brings us to, and fixes us in the condition and place allotted for us, by him who "has determined the times and the bounds of our habitation. " It overrules the smallest and most casual things about us, such as "hairs of our head being all numbered;" a "lot cast into the lap. " Yea, the free acts of our will, by which we choose for ourselves: for even "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as rivers of water. "And the whole steps we make, and which others make in reference to us; for "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walks to direct his steps. " And this, whether these steps causing the crook are deliberate and sinful ones, such as Joseph s brothers selling him into Egypt; or whether they are undesigned, such as manslaughter purely

casual, as when one hewing wood kills his neighbor with "the head of the axe slipping from the helve. " For there is a holy and wise providence that governs the sinful and the heedless actions of men, as a rider does a lame horse, of whose halting, not he, but the horse's lameness is the true and proper cause; wherefore in the former of these cases, God is said to have sent Joseph into Egypt, and in the latter, to deliver one into his neighbor's hand.

Lastly, God has, by an eternal decree, immovable as mountains of brass appointed the whole of every one's lot, the crooked part of it, as well as the straight. By the same eternal decree, by which the high and low parts of the earth, the mountains and the valleys, were appointed, are the heights and the depths, the prosperity and adversity, in the lot of the inhabitants of there determined; and they are brought about, in time, in a perfect agreeableness there.

The mystery of providence, in the government of the world, is, in all the parts of it, the building reared up of God, in exact conformity to the plan in his decree, "who works all things after the counsel of his own will. " So that there is never a crook in one's lot but may be run up to this original. Of this Job piously sets us an example in his own case: "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desires, even that he does. For he performs the thing that is appointed for me; and many such things are with him. "

Second. That we may see how the crook in the lot is of God's making, we must distinguish between pure sinless crooks and impure sinful ones.

First, there are pure and sinless crooks; which are mere afflictions, cleanly crosses, grievous indeed, but not defiling. Such was Lazarus's poverty, Rachel's barrenness, Leah's tender eyes, the blindness of the man who had been so from

his birth. Now, the crooks of this kind are of God's making, by the efficacy of his power directly bringing them to pass and causing them to be. He is the maker of the poor. "Whoso mocks the poor, reproaches his Maker; " that is, reproaches God who made him poor, according to that, "The Lord makes poor. " It is he that has the key of the womb, and as he sees meet shuts it, or opens it. And it is "He that forms the eyes. " And the man was "born blind, that the works of God should be made manifest in him. " Therefore he says to Moses, "who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? " Such crooks in the lot are of God's making in the most ample sense, and in their full comprehension, being the direct effects of his agency, as well as the heavens and the earth.

Secondly, There are impure sinful crooks, which, in their own nature, are sins as well as afflictions, defiling as well as grievous. Such was the crook made in David's lot, through his family disorders, the defiling of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the rebellion of Absalom, all of them unnatural. Of the same kind was that made in Job's lot, by the Sabeans and Chaldeans taking away his substance and slaying his servants. As these were the afflictions of David and Job respectively, so they were the sins of the actors, the unhappy instruments of it. Thus one and the same thing may be to one a heinous sin, defiling and laying him under guilt, and to another an affliction laying him under suffering only. Now, the crooks of this kind are not of God's making, in the same latitude as those of the former; for He neither puts evil in the heart of any, nor stirs up to it. "He cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man. " But they are of his making, by his holy permission of them, powerful bounding of them, and wise overruling of them to some good end.

1st. He holily permits them, suffering men "to walk in their own ways." Though He is not the author of those sinful crooks,

causing them to be, by the efficacy of His power; yet, if He did not permit them, willing not to hinder them, they could not be at all; for "He shuts and no man opens. " But He justly withholds His grace which the sinner does not desire, takes off the restraint under which he is uneasy, and since the sinner will be gone, lays the reins on his neck, and leaves him to swing of his lust. "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone. " "Israel would none of Me: so I gave them up to their own heart's lusts. " In which unhappy situation the sinful crook does, from the sinner's own proper motion, naturally and infallibly follow; even as water runs down a hill, wherever there is a gap left open before it. So in these circumstances, "Israel walked in their own counsels. " And thus this kind of crook is of God's making, as a just judge, punishing the sufferer by it. This view of the matter silenced David under Shimei's cursings; "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him. "

2ndly. He powerfully bounds them. "The remainder of wrath" (that is, the creature's wrath) "you shall restrain. " Did not God bound these crooks, however sore they are in any one's case, they would be yet sorer. But He says to the sinful instrument, as He said to the sea, "Until this time you shall come, but no further; and here your proud waves shall be stayed. " He lays a restraining band on him, that he cannot go one step farther, in the way his impetuous lust drives, than he sees meet to permit. Thus it comes to pass, that the crook of this kind is neither more nor less, but just as great as He by His powerful bounding makes it to be. An eminent instance of this we have in the case of Job, whose lot was crooked through a peculiar agency of the devil; but even to that grand sinner God set a bound in the case: "The Lord said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him. " Now, Satan went the full length of the bound, leaving nothing within the compass of it untouched, which he saw could make for his purpose. But he could by no means move one step

beyond it to carry his point, which he could not gain within it. And therefore, to make the trial greater, and the crook sorer, nothing remains but that the bound set should be removed, and the sphere of his agency enlarged; for which cause he says, "But touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face;" and it being removed accordingly, but withal a new one set, "Behold, he is in your hand, but save his life;" the crook was carried to the utmost that the new bound would permit, in a consistency with his design of bringing Job to blaspheme; "Satan smote him with sore boils, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. " And had it not been for this bound, securing Job's life, he, after finding this attempt unsuccessful too, had doubtless despatched him at once.

3rdly. He wisely overrules them to some good purpose, becoming the Divine perfections. While the sinful instrument has an ill design in the crook caused by him, God directs it to a holy and good end. In the disorders of David's family Amnon's design was to gratify a brutish lust; Absalom's to glut himself with revenge, and to satisfy his pride and ambition; but God meant by that means to punish David for his sin in the matter of Uriah. In the crook made in Job's lot, by Satan, and the Sabeans and Chaldeans, his instruments, Satan's design was to cause Job to blaspheme, and theirs to gratify their covetousness; but God had another design in this way becoming Himself, namely, to manifest Job's sincerity and uprightness. Did he not wisely and powerfully overrule those crooks made in men's lot, no good could come out of them, but He always overrules them so as to fulfil His own holy purposes in this way (howbeit the sinner means not so); for His designs cannot miscarry, His "counsel shall stand." So the sinful crook is, by the overruling hand of God, turned about to His own glory and His people's good in the end. According to the word, "The Lord has made all things for Himself. " "All things work together for the good to them that love God. " Thus Haman's plot for the destruction of the Jews "was turned

to the contrary. " And the crook made in Joseph's lot, by his own brothers selling him into Egypt, though it was on their part most sinful, and of a most mischievous design; yet, as it was of God's making, by his holy permission, powerful bounding, and wisely overruling it, had an issue well becoming the Divine wisdom and goodness; both of which Joseph notices to them: "As for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it to good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to keep many people alive. "

III. It remains to inquire why God makes a crook in one's lot? And this is to be cleared by discovering the design of that dispensation: a matter which it concerns every one to know, and carefully to notice, in order to a Christian improvement of the crook in their lot. The design of it seems to be chiefly sevenfold.

First, the trial of one's state, whether one is in the state of grace or not? Whether a sincere Christian, or a hypocrite? Though every affliction is trying, yet here I conceive lies the main providential trial a man is brought into, with reference to his state; forasmuch as the crook in the lot being a matter of continued course, one has occasion to open and show himself again and again in the same thing; from where it comes to pass, that it ministers ground for a decision in that momentous point. It was plainly on this foundation that the trial of Job's state was put. The question was, whether Job was an upright and sincere servant of God, as God himself testified of him: or but a mercenary one, a hypocrite, as Satan alleged against him? And the trial of this was put on the crook to be made in his lot. Accordingly, that which all his friends, save Elihu, the last speaker, did, in their reasonings with him under his trial, aim at, was to prove him a hypocrite; Satan thus making use of these good men for gaining his point. As God made trial of Israel in the wilderness, for the land of Canaan, by a trial of afflicting dispensations, which Caleb and Joshua bearing

strenuously, were declared suitable to enter the promised land, as having followed the Lord fully; while others being tried out with them, their carcasses fell in the wilderness; so He makes trial of men for heaven, by the crook in their lot. If one can stand that test, he is manifested to be a saint, a sincere servant of God, as Job was proved to be; if not, he is but a hypocrite; he cannot stand the test of the crook in his lot, but goes away like dross in God's furnace. A melancholy instance of which we have in that man of honor and wealth, who, with high pretences of religion, arising from a principle of moral seriousness, addressed himself to our Savior, to know "what he should do that he might inherit eternal life. " Our Savior, to discover the man to himself, makes a crook in his lot, where all along before it had stood even, obliging him, by a probatory command, to sell and give away all that he had, and follow Him: "Sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and come, take up the cross and follow Me. " By this means he was at that moment, in the court of conscience, stripped of his great possession; so that from that time forward he could no longer keep them with a good conscience, as he might have done before. The man instantly felt the smart of this crook made in his lot; "he was sad at that saying; " that is, immediately upon the hearing of it, being struck with pain, disorder, and confusion of mind, his countenance changed, became cloudy and lowering, as the same word is used. He could not stand the test of that crook; he could by no means submit his lot to God in that point, but behaved to have it, at any rate, according to his own mind. So he "went away grieved, for he had great possessions. " He went away from Christ back to his plentiful estate, and though with a pained and sorrowful heart, sat him down again on it a violent possessor before the Lord, thwarting the Divine order. And there is no appearance that ever this order was revoked, or that ever he came to a better temper in reference to it.

Secondly, excitation to duty, weaning one from this world, and prompting him to look after the happiness of the other world. Many have been beholden to the crook in their lot, for that ever they came to themselves, settled, and turned serious. Going for a time like a wild ass used to the wilderness, scorning to be turned, their foot has slid in due time; and a crook being by that means made in their lot, their mouth has come wherein they have been caught. Thus was the prodigal brought to himself, and obliged to entertain thoughts of returning to his father. The crook in their lot convinces them at length that their rest is not here. Finding still a pricking thorn of uneasiness, whenever they lay down their head where they would fain take rest in the creature, and that they are obliged to lift it again, they are brought to conclude there is no hope from that quarter, and begin to cast about for rest another way, so it makes them errands to God, which they did not have before; forasmuch as they feel a need of the comforts of the other world, to which their mouths were out of taste while their lot stood even to their mind. Wherefore, whatever use we make of the crook in our lot, the voice of it is, "Arise and depart, this is not your rest." And it is surely that which of all means of mortification, of the afflictive king, most deadens a real Christian to this life and world.

Thirdly, conviction of sin. As when one walking heedlessly is suddenly taken ill of a lameness: his going halting the rest of his way convinces him of having made a wrong step;

and every new painful step brings it afresh to his mind. So God makes a crook in one's lot, to convince him of some false step he has made, or course he has taken. What the sinner would otherwise be apt to overlook, forget, or think light of, is by this means recalled to mind, set before him as an evil and bitter thing, and kept in remembrance, that his heart may every now and then bleed for it afresh. Thus, by the crook, men's sin finds them out to their conviction, "as the thief is

ashamed when he is found." The which Joseph's brothers feelingly express, under the crook made in their lot in Egypt: "we are verily guilty concerning our brother;" "God has found out the iniquity of your servants." The crook in the lot usually in its nature of circumstances, so naturally refers to the false step or course, that it serves for a providential memorial of it, bringing the sin, though of an old date, fresh to remembrance, and for a badge of the sinner's folly, in word or deed, to keep it ever before him. When Jacob found Leah, through Laban's unfair dealing, palmed on him for Rachel, how could he miss of a stinging remembrance of the cheat he had, seven years at least before, put on his own father, pretending himself to be Esau? How could it miss of galling him occasionally afterwards during the course of the marriage? He had imposed on his father the younger brother for the elder; and Laban imposed on him the elder sister for the younger. The dimness of Isaac's eyes favoured the former cheat; and the darkness of the evening did as much favor the latter. So he behaved to say, as Adoni-bezek in another case, "As I have done, so God has requited me. " In like manner, Rachel, dying in childbirth, could hardly avoid a melancholy reflection on her rash and passionate expression, "Give me children, or else I die. " Even holy Job read, in the crook in his lot, some false steps he had made in his youth, many years before: "You write bitter things against me, and make me possess the iniquities of my youth. "

Fourthly, correction, or punishment, for sin. In nothing more than in the crook of the lot is that word verified, "Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backslidings shall reprove you. " God may, for a time, wink at one's sin which afterward he will set a brand of his indignation upon, in crooking the sinner's lot, as he did in the case of Jacob, and of Rachel, mentioned before. Though the sin was a passing action, or a course of no long continuance, the mark of the Divine displeasure for it, set on the sinner in the crook of his

lot, may pain him long and sore, that by repeated experience he may know what an evil and bitter thing it was. David's killing Uriah by the sword of the Ammonites was soon over; but for that cause "the sword never departed from his house." Gehazi quickly obtained two bags of money from Naaman, in the way of falsehood and lying; but as a lasting mark of the Divine indignation against the profane trick, he got withal a leprosy which craved to him while he lived, and to his posterity after him. This may be the case, as well where the sin is pardoned as to the guilt of eternal wrath, as where it is not. And one may have confessed and sincerely repented of that sin, which yet shall make him go halting to the grave, though it cannot carry him to hell. A man's person may be accepted in the Beloved, who yet has a particular badge of the Divine displeasure, with his sin hung on him in the crook of his lot. "You were a God that forgave them, though you took vengeance on their inventions. "

Fifthly, preventing of sin. "I will hedge up your way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths. " The crook in the lot will readily be found to lie cross to some wrong bias of the heart, which peculiarly sways with the party; so it is like a thorn-hedge or wall in the way which that bias inclines him to. The defiling objects in the world specially take and prove ensnaring, as they are suited to the particular cast of temper in men; but by means of the crook in the lot, the paint and varnish is worn off the defiling object, by which it loses its former taking appearance. Thus, the edge of corrupt affections is blunted, temptation weakened, and much sin prevented; the sinner, after "gadding about so much to change his way, resuming ashamed " Thus the Lord crooks one's lot that "he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from men;" and so "he keeps back his soul from the pit. " Every one knows what is most pleasant to him; but God alone knows what is most profitable. As all men are liars, so all men are fools too. He is the only wise God. Many are

obliged to the crook in their lot, that they do not go to those excesses which their vain minds and corrupt affections would with full sail carry them to; and they would from their hearts bless God for making it, if they did but calmly consider what would most likely be the issue of the removal of it. When one is in hazard of fretting under the hardship of bearing the crook, he would do well to consider what condition he is as yet in to bear its removal in a Christian manner.

Sixthly, discovery of latent corruption, whether in saints or sinners. There are some corruptions in every man's heart, which lie, as it were, so near the surface, that they are ready on every turn to rise up; but then there are others also which lie so very deep, that they are scarcely observed at all. But as the fire under the pot makes the scum rise up, appear on top, and run over; so the crook in the lot raises up from the bottom, and brings out such corruption as otherwise one could hardly imagine to be within. Who would have suspected such strength of passion in the meek Moses as he discovered at the waters at strife, and for which he was kept out of Canaan? Or so much bitterness of spirit in the patient Job, as to charge God with becoming cruel to Him? So much ill-nature in the good Jeremiah, as to curse not only the day of his birth, but even the man who brought tidings of it to his father? Or such a tang of atheism is Asaph, as to pronounce religion a vain thing? But the crook in the lot, bringing out these things, showed them to have been within, how long so-ever they had lurked unobserved. And as this design, however indecently proud scoffers allow themselves to treat it, is in no way inconsistent with the Divine perfections; so the discovery itself is necessary for the due humiliation of sinners, and to stain the pride of all glory, that men may know themselves. Both which appear, in that it was on this very design that God made the long-continued crook in Israel's lot in the wilderness; even to humble them and prove them, to know what was in their heart.

Seventhly, the exercise of grace in the children of God. Believers, through the remains of indwelling corruption, are liable to fits of spiritual laziness and inactivity, in which their graces lie dormant for the time. Besides, there are some graces which of their own nature are but occasional in their exercise, as being exercised only upon occasion of certain things which they have a necessary relation to, such as patience and long-suffering. Now, the crook in the lot serves to rouse up a Christian to the exercise of the graces, overpowered by corruption, and withal to call forth to action the occasional graces, ministering proper occasions for them. The truth is, the crook in the lot is the great engine of Providence for making men appear in their true colours, discovering both their ill and their good. And if the grace of God is in them, it will bring it out, and cause it to display itself. It so puts the Christian to his shifts, that however it makes him stagger for awhile, yet it will at length evidence both the reality and the strength of grace in him. "You are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, may be found unto praise." The crook in the lot gives rise to many acts of faith, hope, love, self-denial, resignation, and other graces; to many heavenly breathings, partings, and groanings, which otherwise would not be brought forth. And I make no question but these things, however by carnal men despised as trifling, are more precious in the sight of God than even believers themselves are aware of, being acts of immediate internal worship; and will have a surprising notice taken of them, and of the sum of them, at long run. However it may be the persons themselves often can hardly think them worth their own notice at all. The steady routing of a gallant army or horse and foot to the routing of the enemy is highly prized; but the acting of holy fear and humble hope is in reality far more valuable, as being so in the sight of God, whose judgment, we are sure, is according to truth. This the Psalmist teaches: "He

delights not in the strength of the horse; He takes not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy." And indeed the exercise of the graces of his Spirit in his people is so very precious in His sight, that whatever grace any of them excel in, they will readily get such a crook made in their lot as will be a special trial of it, that will make a proof of its full strength. Abraham excelled in the grace of faith, in trusting God's bare word of promise above the dictates of sense; and God, giving him a promise that he would make of him a great nation, made withal a crook in his lot, by which he had enough ado with all the strength of his faith; while he was obliged to leave his country and kindred, and sojourn among the Canaanites; his wife continuing barren, till past the age of child-bearing; and when she had at length brought forth Isaac, and he was grown up, he was called to offer him up for a burnt-offering, the more exquisite trial of his faith, that Ishmael was now expelled his family, and that it was declared, that in Isaac only his seed should be called. "Moses was very meek above all the men which were on the face of the earth." And he was entrusted with the conduct of a most perverse and unmanageable people, the crook in his lot plainly designed for the exercise of his meekness. Job excelled in patience, and by the crook in his lot, he got as much to do with it. For God gives none of his people to excel in a gift, but some time or other he will afford them use for the whole compass of it.

Now, the use of this doctrine is threefold. (1.) For reproof. (2.) For consolation. And (3.) for exhortation.

Use 1. For reproof. And it meets with three sorts of persons as reprovably.

First, The carnal and earthly, who do not with awe and reverence regard the crook in their lot as of God's making. There is certainly a signature of the Divine hand on it to be

perceived by just observers; and that challenges an awful regard, the neglect of which forebodes destruction. "Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them, and not build them up. " And in that they are deeply guilty, who, pouring on second causes, and looking no further than the unhappy instruments of the crook in their lot, overlook the first cause; as a dog snarls at the stone, but does not look to the hand that casts it. This is, in effect, to make a God of the creature; so regarding it, as if it could of itself effect anything, while in the mean time it is but an instrument in the hand of God, "the rod of His anger. " "Ordained of Him for judgment, established for correction. " Oh! Why should men terminate their view on the instruments of the crook in their lot, and so magnify their scourges? The truth is, they are, for the most part, rather to be pitied, as having an undesirable office, which for their gratifying their own corrupt affections, in making the crook in the lot of others, returns on their own head at length with a vengeance, as did "the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu. " And it is specially undesirable to be so employed in the case of such as belong to God; for rarely is the ground of the quarrel the same on the part of the instrument as on God's part, but very different; witness Shimei's cursing David as a bloody man, meaning the blood of the house of Saul, which he was not guilty of, while God meant it of the blood of Uriah, which he could not deny. Moreover, the quarrel will be, at length, taken up between God and His people; and then their scourgers will find they had but a thankless office. "I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction, " says God, in resentment of the heathen crooking the lot of His people. In like manner are they guilty who impute the crook in their lot to fortune, or their ill-luck, which in very deed is nothing but a creature of imagination, framed for a blind to keep man from acknowledging the hand of God. Thus, what the Philistines doubted, they do more impiously determine, saying, in effect, "It is not His hand that smote us, it was a

chance that happened to us. " And, finally, those also are guilty, who, in the way of giving up themselves to despise the crook in their lot, to make nothing of it, and to forget it. I question not, but one committing his case to the Lord, and looking to Him for remedy, in the first place, may lawfully call in the moderate use of the comforts of life for help in the second place. But as for that course so frequent and usual in this case among carnal men, if the crook of the lot really is, as indeed it is, of God's making, it must needs be a most indecent, unbecoming course, to be abhorred of all good men. 'My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.'" It is surely a very desperate method of cure, which cannot miss of issuing in something worse than the disease, however it may palliate it for awhile. "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and behold joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine: and it was revealed in my ears, by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die. "

Secondly, the unsubmissive, whose hearts, like the troubled sea, swell and boil fret and murmur, and cannot be at rest under the crook in their lot. This is a most sinful and dangerous course. The apostle Jude, characterising some, "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever, " says of them, "these are murmurers, complainers," namely, still complaining of their lot, which is the import of the word here used by the Holy Ghost. For, since the crook in their lot, which their unsubdued spirits can by no means submit to, is of God's making, this their practice must needs be a fighting against God. And these their complainings and murmurings are indeed against Him, whatever face they put on them. Thus when the Israelites murmur against Moses, God charges them with murmuring against Himself. "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmured against Me? " Ah! May not He who made and fashioned us without our advice, be allowed to make our lot too, without asking our mind, but

we must rise up against Him on account of the crook made in it? What does this speak, but that the proud creature cannot endure God's work, nor bear what He has done? And how black and dangerous is that temper of spirit! How is it possible to miss of being broken to pieces in such a course? "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who has hardened himself against him and has prospered? "

Thirdly, the careless and unfruitful, who do not set themselves dutifully to comply with the design of the crook in their lot. God and nature do nothing in vain. Since he makes the crook, there is, doubtless, a becoming design in it, which we are obliged in duty to fall in with, according to that, "Hear the rod. " And, indeed, if one did not shut his own eyes, but is willing to understand, he may easily perceive the general design of it to be, to wean him from this world, and move him to seek and take up his heart's rest in God. And nature and the circumstances of the crook itself being duly considered, it will not be very hard make to a more particular discovery of the design of it. But, alas! the careless sinner, sunk in spiritual sloth and stupidity, is in no concern to discover the design of Providence in the crook; so he cannot fall in with it, but remains unfruitful; and all the pains taken on him by the great Husbandman in the dispensation are lost. ' They cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty;" groaning under the pressure of the crook itself, and weight of the hand of the instrument of it: "But none said, What is God my Maker?" they look not, they turn not to God.

Use 2. For consolation. It speaks comfort to the afflicted children of God. Whatever is the crook in your lot, it is of God's making; and therefore you may look upon it kindly. Since it is your Father who has made it for you, question not but there is a favourable design in it towards you. A discreet child welcomes his father's rod, knowing that, being a father, he seeks his benefit in this way; and shall not God's children

welcome the crook in their lot, as designed by their Father, who cannot mistake His measures, to work for their good, according to the promise? The truth is, the crook in the lot of a believer, how painful it proves, is a part of the discipline of the covenant, the nurture secured to Christ's children by the promise of the Father. "If His children forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments, then I will visit their transgressions with the rod." Furthermore, all who are disposed to betake themselves to God, under the crook in their lot may take comfort in this, let them know that there is no crook in their lot but they may be made straight; for God made it, surely then He can mend it. He himself can make straight what He has made crooked, though none other can. There is nothing too hard for Him to do: "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dung-hill; that he may set him with princes. He makes the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. " Do not say that your crook has been of so long continuance, that it will never mend. Put it in the hand of God, who made it, that He may mend it, and wait on Him. And if it is for your good that it should be mended, it shall be mended; for "no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. "

Use 3. For exhortation. Since the crook in the lot is of God's making, then, eyeing the hand of God in yours, be reconciled to it, and submit under it whatever it is. I say, eyeing the hand of God in it, for otherwise your submission under the crook in your lot cannot be a Christian submission, acceptable to God, having no reference to Him as your party in the matter.

Object. 1. But some will say, 'The crook in my lot is from the hand of the creature; and such a one too as I deserted no such treatment from.'

Ans. From what has been already said, it appears that, although the crook in your lot is indeed immediately from the

creature's hand, yet it is mediately from the hand of God; being nothing of that kind, no penal evil, but the Lord has done it. Therefore without all peradventure, God Himself is the principal party, whoever is the less principal. And although you have not deserved your crook at the hand of the instrument which He makes use of for your correction, you certainly deserve it at His hand; and He may make use of what instrument He will in the matter, or may do it immediately by Himself, even as seems good in His sight.

Object. II. "But the crook in my lot might quickly be evened, if the instrument or instruments of it pleased: only there is no dealing with them, so as to convince them of their fault in making it."

Ans. If it is so, be sure God's time is not as yet come that the clock should be made even; for if it were come, though they stand now like an impregnable fort, they would give way like a sandy bank under one's foot; "they would bow down to you with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. " Meanwhile, that state of the matter is so far from justifying one's not eyeing the hand of God in the crook in the lot, that it makes a piece trial in which His hand very eminently appears, namely, that men should be signally injurious and burdensome to others, yet by no means susceptible of conviction. This was the trial of the church from her adversaries. "All that found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, We do not offend: because they have sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice. " They were very abusive, and gave her barbarous usage; yet would they own no fault in the matter. How could they ward off the conviction? Were they verily blameless in their devouring the Lord's straying sheep? No, surely, they were not. Did they look on themselves as ministers of the Divine justice against her? No, they did not.

Some indeed would make a question here, How the adversaries of the church could celebrate her God as the habitation of justice? But the original pointing of the text being retained, it appears that there is no ground at all for this question here, and withal the whole matter is set in a clear light. "All that found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, We do not offend: because they have sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice. " These last are not the words of the adversaries, but the words of the prophet showing how it came to pass that the adversaries devoured the Lord's sheep, as they lighted on them, and withal stood to the defence of it, when they had done, far from acknowledging any wrong; the matter lay here, the sheep had sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice; and, as a just punishment of this from His hand, they could have no justice at the hand of their adversaries.

Wherefore, laying aside these frivolous pretences, and eyeing the hand of God, as that which has bowed their lot in that part, and keeps it in the bow, be reconciled to and submit under the crook, whatever it is, saying from the heart, "Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it. " And to move you to this consider,

1. It is a duty you owe to God, as your sovereign Lord and Benefactor. His sovereignty challenges our submission, and it can in no case be meanness of spirit to submit to the crook which His hand has made in our lot, and to go quietly under the yoke that He has laid on; but it is really madness for the potsherds of the earth, by their turbulent and refractory carriage under it, to strive with their Maker. And His beneficence to us, ill-deserving creatures, may well stop our mouth from complaining of His making a crook in our lot, who would have done us no wrong had He made the whole of it crooked. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? "

2. It is an unalterable statute, for the time of this life, that nobody shall want a crook in their lot; for "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. " And those who are designed for heaven are in a special manner assured of a crook in theirs, "that in the world they shall have tribulation;" for by means of it the Lord makes them suitable for heaven. And how can you imagine that you shall be exempted from the common lot of mankind? "Shall the rock be removed out of his place for you? " And since God makes the crooks in men's lot according to the different exigency of their cases, you may be sure that yours is necessary for you.

3. A crook in the lot, which one can by no means submit to, makes a condition of all things the likest to that in hell. For there a yoke, which the wretched sufferers can neither bear nor shake off, is wreathed about their necks; there the almighty arm draws against them, and they against it; there they are ever suffering and ever sinning; still in the furnace, but their dross not consumed, nor they purified. Even such is the case of those who now cannot submit to the crook in their lot.

4. Great is the loss by not submitting to it. The crook in the lot, rightly improved, has turned to the best account, and made the best time to some that ever they had all their life long, as the Psalmist from his own experience testifies: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept Your word. " There are many now in heaven who are blessing God for the crook they had in their lot here. What a sad thing must it then be to lose this teeth-wind for Immanuel's land! But if the crook in your lot does you no good, be sure it will not miss doing you great damage. It will greatly increase your guilt and aggravate your condemnation, while it shall for ever cut you to the heart, to think of the pains taken by means of the crook in the lot to wean you from the world and bring you to God, but all in vain. Take heed, therefore, how you manage it, "Lest you mourn at

the last and say, How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof! "

Prop II. What God sees suitable to mar, we shall not be able to mend in our lot. What crook God makes in our lot, we shall not be able to even.—We shall,

1. Show God's marring and making a crook in one's lot, as He sees fitting.

II. We shall consider men's attempting to mend or even that crook in their lot.

III. In what sense it is to be understood that we shall not be able to mend or even the crook in our lot.

IV. Render some reasons of the point.

I. As the first head, namely, to show God's marring and making a crook in one's lot, as he sees fitting.

First, God keeps the choice of every one's crook to Himself; and therein He exerts His sovereignty. It is not left to our option what that crook shall be, or what our peculiar burden; but, as the potter makes of the same clay one vessel for one use, another for another use; so God makes one crook for one, another for another, according to His own will and pleasure. "Whatever the Lord pleased, that He did in heaven and in earth. " &c.

Secondly, He sees and observes the bias of every one's will and inclination, how it lies, and where it especially bends away from Himself, and consequently where it needs the special bow; so He did in that man's case. "One thing you lack; go your way, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor. " &c. Observe the bent of His heart to His great

possession. He takes notice what is that idol that in every one's case is most apt to be His rival, that so He may suit the trial to the case, making the crook there.

Thirdly, by the conduct of His providence, or a touch of His hand, He gives that part of one's lot a bow the contrary way; so that henceforth it lies quite contrary to the bias of the party's will. And here the trial is made, the bent of the will lying one way, and that part of one's lot another, that it does not answer the inclination of the party, but thwarts it.

Fourthly, He wills that crook in the lot to remain while He sees fitting, for a longer or shorter time, just according to the holy ends He designs it for. By that will it is so fixed, that the whole creation cannot alter it, or put it out of the bow.

II. We shall consider men's attempting to mend or even that crook in their lot. This, in a word, lies in their making efforts to bring their lot in that point to their own will, that they may both go one way; so it imports three things.

First, A certain uneasiness under the crook in the lot; it is a yoke which is hard for the party to bear, till his spirit is tamed and subdued. "You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn me and I shall be turned." &c. And it is for the breaking down of the weight of one's spirit that God lays it on: for which cause it is declared to be a good thing to bear it, that being the way to make one at length as a weaned child.

Secondly, A strong desire to have the cross removed, and to have matters in that part going according to our inclinations. This is very natural, nature desiring to be freed from everything that is burdensome or cross to it; and if that desire is kept in a due subordination to the will of God, and it is not too pre-emptory, it is not sinful. "If it is possible, let this cup

pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will." &c. Hence so many accepted prayers of the people of God, for the removal of me crook in their lot.

Thirdly, An earnest use of means for that end. This naturally follows on that desire. The man, being pressed with the cross which is in his crook, labours all he can in the use of means to be rid of it. And if the means used are lawful, and not relied on, but followed with an eye to God in them, the attempt is not sinful, whether he succeed in the use of them or not.

III. In what sense it is to be understood that we shall not be able to mend or even the crook in our lot.

It is not to be understood as if the case were absolutely hopeless, and that there is no remedy for the crook in our lot. For there is no case so desperate, but God may right it. "Is anything too hard for the Lord? " When the crook has continued long, and spurned all remedies one has used for it, one is ready to lose hope about it; but many a crook, given over for hopeless that would never mend, God has made perfectly straight, as in Job's case.

But we shall never be able to mend it ourselves; if the Lord Himself does not take it in hand to remove it, it will stand before us immovable, like a mountain of brass, though perhaps it may be in itself a thing that might easily be removed. We take it up in these three things:

I . It will never do by the mere force of our hand. "For, by strength shall no man prevail. " The most vigorous endeavors we can use will not even the crook, if God give it not a touch of His hand; so that all endeavors that way, without an eye to God, are vain and fruitless, and will be but ploughing on the rock.

2. The use of all allowable means for it will be successless unless the Lord bless them for that end. "Who is He that says, and it comes to pass, when the Lord does not command it?" As one may eat and not be satisfied, so one may use means proper for evening the crook in his lot, and yet prevail nothing. For nothing can be or do for us any more than God makes it to be or do. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor torches to men of understanding, "&c.

It will never do in our time, but in God's time, which seldom is so early as ours. "My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready. " Hence that crook remains sometimes immovable, as if it were kept by an invisible hand; and at another time it goes away with a touch, because God's time is come for evening it.

IV. We shall now assign the reasons of the point.

1st. Because of the absolute dependence we have on God. As the light depends on the sun, or the shadow on the body, so we depend on God, and without Him can do nothing, great or small. And God will have us to find it so, to teach us our dependence.

2ndly. Because His will is irresistible. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. " When God wills one thing, and the creature the contrary, it is easy to see which will must be done. When the omnipotent arm holds, in vain does the creature draw. "Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered? "

Inference 1. There is a necessity of yielding and submitting to the crook in our lot; for we may as well think to remove the rocks and mountains, which God has settled, as to make that part of our lot straight which He has made crooked.

2. The evening of the crook in our lot, by main force of our own, is but a cheat we put on ourselves, and will not last, but, like a stick by main force made straight, it will quickly return to the bow again.

3. The only effectual way of getting the crook evened is to apply to God for it.

Exhortation 1. Let us then apply to God for removing any crook in our lot, that in the settled order of things may be removed. Men cannot cease to desire the removal of a crook, more than that of a thorn in the flesh. But, since we are not able to mend what God sees fitting to mar, it is evident we are to apply to Him that made it to amend it, and not take the evening of it in our own hand.

Motive 1. All our attempts for its removal will, without Him, be vain and fruitless. Let us be as resolute as we will to have it evened, if God say it not, we will labor in vain. However fair the means we use bid for it, they will be ineffectual if He does not command the blessing.

Such attempts will generally make it worse. Nothing is more ordinary than for a proud spirit, striving with the crook, to make it more crooked. "Whoso breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removes stones shall be hurt with them," &c. This is evident in the case of the murmurers in the wilderness. It naturally comes to be so; because, at that rate, the will of the party bends farther away from it. Moreover, God is provoked to wreath the yoke faster about one's neck, that He will by no means let it sit easy on him.

3. There is no crook but what may be remedied by Him, and made perfectly straight. "The Lord raises them that are bowed down." &c. He can perform that concerning which there

remains no hope with us. "Who quickens the dead, and calls those things which are not as though they were. " It is His prerogative to do wonders; to begin a work where the whole creation gives it over as hopeless, and carry it on to perfection.

4. He loves to be employed in evening crooks, and calls us to employ Him that way. "Call on like in the day of trouble and I will deliver you. " &c. He makes them for that very end, that He may bring us to Him on that errand, and may manifest His power and goodness in evening of them. The straits of the children of men afford a large field for displaying His glorious perfections, which otherwise would be wanting.

5. A crook thus evened is a double mercy. There are some crooks evened by a touch of the hand of common providence, while people are either not exercised about them, or when they fret for their removal; these are sapless mercies and short-lived. Fruits thus too hastily plucked off the tree of providence can hardly miss to set the teeth on edge, and will certainly be bitter to the gracious soul. But oh the sweets of the evening of the crook by a humble application to and waiting on the Lord! It has the image and superscription of Divine favor on it, which makes it bulky and valuable. "For therefore I have seen your face, as though I had seen the face of God. " &c.

6. God has signalised His favor to His dearest children, in making and mending notable crooks in their lot. His darling ones ordinarily have the greatest crooks made in their lot. But then they make way for their richest experiences in the removal of them on the application to Him. This is clear from the case of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Which of the patriarchs had so great crooks as they? But which of them, on the other hand, had such signal tokens of the Divine favor? The greatest of men, as Samson and the Baptist, have been

born of women naturally barren; so the greatest crooks issue in the richest mercies to them that are exercised by that means.

7. It is the shortest and surest way to go straight to God with the crook in the lot. If we would have our wish in that point, we must, as the eagle, first soar aloft, and then come down on the prey. Mark 5:36. Our faithless out-of-the-way attempts to even the crook, are but our fool's haste, that is no speed; as in the case of Abraham going in to Hagar. God is the first mover, who sets all the wheels in motion for evening the crook, which without Him will remain immovable.

Object. 1. "But it is needless, for I see that though the crook in my lot may mend, yet it never will mend. In its own nature it is capable of being removed, but it is plain it is not to be removed, it is hopeless."

Ans. That is the language of unbelieving haste, which faith and patience should correct. Abraham had as much to say for the hopelessness of his crook, and yet he applies to God in faith for the mending of it. Sarah had made such a conclusion, for which she was rebuked. Nothing can make it needless in such a case to apply to God.

Object. 2. "But I have applied to Him again and again for it, yet it is never mended."

Ans. Delays are not denials of suits at the court of heaven, but trials of the faith and patience of the petitioners. And whose will persevere will certainly speed at length. "And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. " Sometimes indeed folk grow pettish in the case of the crook in the lot, and let it drop out in their prayers, in a course of despondency, while yet it continues uneasy to

them; but, if God mind to even it in mercy, He will oblige them to take it in again. "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. " &c. If the removal comes while it is dropped, there will be little comfort in it. Though it were never to be removed while we live, that should not cut off our applying to God for the removal; for there are many to be answered till we come to the other world, and there all will be answered at once.

Thomas Boston

The Crook in the Lot

Part 2

"Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He has made crooked?"—Eccles. 7:13.

Directions for rightly managing the application for removing the crook in the lot.

1. Pray for it, and pray in faith, believing that, for the sake of Jesus, you shall certainly obtain at length, and in this life too, if it is good for you; but without peradventure in the life to come. They will not be disappointed that get the song of Moses and of the Lamb. And, in some cases of that nature, extraordinary prayer, with fasting, is very expedient.

2. Humble yourselves under it, as the yoke which the sovereign hand has laid on you. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him." &c. Justify God, condemn yourselves, kiss the rod, and go quietly under it; this is the most feasible way to get rid of it, the end being obtained. "You will prepare your hearts, you will cause your ear to hear. "

3. Wait on patiently till the hand that made it mend it. Do not give up the matter as hopeless, because you are not so soon relieved as you would wish; "But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. "

Leave the timing of the deliverance to the Lord; His time will at length, to conviction, appear the best, and it will not go beyond it. "I, the Lord, will hasten it in his time. " Waiting on Him you will not be disappointed; "For they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me. "

Exhortation 2. What crook there is, which in the settled order of things cannot be removed or evened in this world, let us apply to God for suitable relief under it. For instance, the common crook in the lot of saints, namely, indwelling sin; as God has made that crook not to be removed here He can certainly balance it, and afford relief under it. The same is to be said of any crook, while it remains unremoved. In such cases apply yourself to God, for making up your losses another way. And there are five things I would have you to keep in view and aim at here.

1. To take God in Christ for and instead of that thing, the withholding or taking away of which from you makes the crook in your lot. There is never a crook which God makes in our lot, but it is in effect Heaven's offer of a blessed exchange to us; such as, "Sell whatever you have, - and you shall have treasure in heaven." In managing of which exchange, God first puts out His hand, and takes away some earthly thing from us; and it is expected we put out our hand next, and take some heavenly thing from Him in the stead of it, and particularly His Christ. Wherefore has God emptied your left hand of such and such an earthly comfort? Stretch out your right hand to God in Christ, take Him in the room of it, and welcome. Therefore the soul's closing with Christ is caned buying, wherein parting with one thing, we get another in its stead. "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. " Do this, and you will be more than even hands with the crook in your lot.

2. Look for the stream running as full from Him as ever it did or could run, when the crook of the lot has dried it. This is the work of faith, confidently to depend on God for that which is denied us from the creature. "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. " This is a most rational expectation: for it is certain there is no good in the creature but what is from God; therefore there is no good to be found in the creature, the stream, but what may be got immediately from God, the fountain. And it is a welcome plea, to come to God and say, Now, Lord, You have taken away from me such a creature-comfort, I must have as good from Yourself.

3. Seek for the spiritual fruits of the crook in the lot. We see the way in the world is, when one trade fails, to fall on and drive another trade; so should we, when there is a crook in the lot, making our earthly comforts low, set ourselves the more for spiritual attainments. If our trade with the world sinks, let us see to drive a trade with heaven more vigorously; see, if by means of the crook, we can obtain more faith, love, heavenly-mindedness, contempt of the world, humility, self-denial, &c. So while we lose at one hand we shall gain another.

4. Grace to bear us up under the crook. " For this thing I besought to the Lord thrice;" and He said, "My grace is sufficient for you. " Whether a man is faint, and have a light burden, or is refreshed and strengthened, and have a heavy one, it is all the same; the latter can go as easy under his burden as the former under his. Grace proportioned to the trial is what we should aim at; getting that, though the crook is not evened, we are even hands with it.

5. The keeping in our eye the eternal rest and weight of glory in the other world. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal

weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." This will balance the crook in your lot, be what it will; while they who have no well-grounded hope of salvation will find the crook in their lot in this world such a weight, as they have nothing to counterbalance it. But the hope of eternal rest may bear up under all the toil and trouble met with here.

Exhortation 3. Let us then set ourselves rightly to bear the crook in our lot, while God sees fit to continue it. What we cannot mend, let us bear Christianly, and not fight against God, and so kick against the pricks. So let us bear it.

1. Patiently, without fuming and fretting, or murmuring. Though we lose our comforts in the creature through the crook in our lot, let us not lose the possession of ourselves. The crook in our lot makes us like one who has but a scanty fire to warm at: but impatience under it scatters it, so as to set the house on fire about us, and expose us to danger. "He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls. "

2. With Christian fortitude, without sinking under discouragement, - "nor faint when you are rebuked of Him." Satan's work is by the crook, either to bend or break people's spirits, and oftentimes by bending to break them. Our work is to carry evenly under it, steering a middle course, guarding against splitting on the rocks on either hand. Our happiness lies not in any earthly comfort, nor will the want of any of them render us miserable. So that we are resolutely to hold on our way with a holy contempt and regardlessness of hardships. "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Quest. "When may any one be reckoned to fall under sinking discouragement from the crook in his lot?"

Ans. When it prevails so far as to unfit us for the duties either of our particular or Christian calling. We may be sure it has carried us beyond the bounds of moderate grief, when it unfits us for the common affairs of life, which the Lord calls us to manage. Or for the duties of religion, hindering them altogether, "That your prayers are not hindered, " (Greek, cut off, or cut up, like a tree from the roots), or making one quite hopeless in them.

3 Let us bear it profitably, so we may gain some advantage by that means. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes. " There is an advantage to be made by it. And it is certainly an ill-managed crook in our lot, when we get not some spiritual good of it. The crook is a kind of spiritual medicine, and as it is lost physic that purges away no ill humours, in vain are its unpleasantness to the taste and its gripings endured; so it is a lost crook, and ill is the bitterness of it borne, if we are not bettered by it. "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin. "

Motives to press this exhortation.

Motive 1. There will be no evening of it while God sees fit to continue it. Let us behave under it as we will, and make what sallies we please in the case, it will continue immovable, as fixed with bands of iron and brass. "But He is of one mind, and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, even that He does. For He performs the thing that is appointed for Me; and many such things are with Him. " Is it not wisdom then to make the best we may of what we cannot mend? Make a virtue then of necessity. What is not to be cured must be endured, and should be with a Christian resignation.

Motive 2. An awkward carriage under it notably increases the pain of it. What makes the yoke gall our necks, but that we struggle so much against it, and cannot let it sit at ease on us. How often are we, in that case, like men dashing their heads against a rock to remove it! The rock stands unmoved, but they are wounded, and lose exceedingly by their struggle. Impatience under the crook lays an overweight on the burden, and makes it heavier, while withal it weakens us, and makes us less able to bear it.

Motive 3. The crook in your lot is the special trial God has chosen for you to take your measure by. It is God's fire, by which He tries what metal men are made of: Heaven's touchstone for discovering true and counterfeit Christians. They may bear and go through several trials, whom the crook in the lot will discover to be naught, because by no means they can bear that. Think then with yourself under it,—Now, here the trial of my state turns; I must, by this, be proved either sincere or a hypocrite; for, can any be a cordial subject of Christ, without being able to submit his lot to Him? Do not all who sincerely come to Christ, put a blank in His hand? And does He not tell us, that without that disposition we are not His disciples? "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. " Perhaps you will find you can submit to anything but that: but will not that but mar all? Did ever any hear of a sincere closing with Christ with a reserve or exception of one thing, in which they behaved to be their own lords?

Quest. "Is that disposition then a qualification necessarily pre-required to our believing, and if so, where must we have it? Can we work it out of our natural powers? "

Ans. No, it is not so; but it necessarily accompanies and goes along with believing, flowing from the same saving illumination

in the knowledge of Christ, by which the soul is brought to believe on Him. By this means the soul sees Him an able Savior, and so trusts on Him for salvation; the rightful Lord and infinitely wise Ruler, and so submits the lot to Him. The soul taking Him for a Savior, takes Him also for a head and ruler. It is Christ's giving Himself to us, and our receiving Him, that causes us to quit other things to and for Him, as it is the light that dispels the darkness.

Case. "Alas! I cannot get my heart freely to submit my lot to Him in that point."

Ans. 1. That submission will not be carried on in any without a struggle; the old man will never submit to it, and when the new man of grace is submitting to it, the old man will still be rebelling. "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary, the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. " But are you sincerely desirous and habitually aiming to submit to it? From the ungracious struggle against the crook, turn away to the struggle with your own heart to bring it to submit, believing the promise, and using the means for it, being grieved from the heart with yourself that you cannot submit to it. This is submitting of your lot, in the favourable construction of the gospel. If you had your choice, would you rather have your heart brought to submit to the crook, than the crook evened to your heart's desire? And do you not sincerely endeavor to submit, notwithstanding the reluctance of the flesh?

Ans. 2. Where is the Christian self-denial and taking up the cross, without submitting to the crook? This is the first lesson Christ puts in the hands of His disciples. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. " Self-denial would procure a reconciliation with the crook, and an admittance of the cross. But while we cannot bear our corrupt self to be denied any of its cravings, and

particularly that which God sees fit especially to be denied, we cannot bear the crook in our lot, but fight against it in favor of self.

Ans. 3. Where is our conformity to Christ, while we cannot submit to the crook? We cannot evidence ourselves Christians, without conformity to Christ. "He that says he abides in Him, ought himself, also so to walk, even as He walked." There was a continued crook in Christ's lot, but He submitted to it. "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. " "For even Christ pleased not Himself. " &c. And so must we, if we will prove ourselves Christians indeed.

Ans. 4. How shall we prove ourselves the genuine kindly children of God, if still warring with the crook? We cannot pray, Our Father,—Your will be done on earth as, &c. Nay, the language of that practice is, We must have our own will, and God's will cannot satisfy us.

Motive 4. The trial by the crook here will not last long. What though the work is sore, it may be me better comported with that it will not be lonesome; a few days or years at farthest will put an end to it, and take you off your trials. Do not say, I shall be eased of it; for, if not eased before, you will be eased of it at death, come after it what will. A serious view of death and eternity might make us set ourselves to behave rightly under our crook while it lasts.

Motive 5. If you would, in a Christian manner, set yourselves to bear the crook, you would find it easier than you imagine. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and you shall find rest to your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. " Satan has no readier way to gain his purpose than to persuade men it is impossible that ever their minds should ply

with the crook; that it is a burden to them altogether insupportable; as long as you believe that, be sure you will never be able to bear it. But the Lord makes no crook in the lot of any, but what may be borne of them acceptably, though not sinlessly and perfectly. For there is strength for that effect secured in the covenant, and being by faith fetched, it will certainly come.

Motive 6. If you behave Christianly under your crook here, you will not lose your labor, but get a full reward of grace in the other world, through Christ. There is a blessing pronounced on him that endures on this very ground, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him. " Heaven is the place into which the approved, upon the trial of the crook, are received. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. " When you come there, no vestiges of it will be remaining in your lot, nor will you have the least uneasy remembrance of it; but it will accent your praises, and increase your joy.

Motive 7. If you do not behave Christianly under it, you will lose your souls in the other world. Those who are at war with God in their lot here, God will have war with them forever. If they will not submit to His yoke here, and go quietly under it, He will wreath His yoke about their neck forever, with everlasting bonds that shall never be loosed. Therefore, set yourselves to behave rightly under the crook in your lot.

If you ask what way one may reach that; for direction we propose, -

Prop III. The considering the crook in the lot as the work of God is a proper means to bring one to behave rightly under it.

1. What it is to consider the crook as the work of God. We take it up in these five things

First, An inquiry into the spring from where it rises. Reason and religion both teach us, not only to notice the crook, which we cannot avoid, but to consider and inquire into the spring of it. Surely it is not our choice, nor do we designedly make it for ourselves; and to ascribe it to fortune is to ascribe it to nothing. It is not sprung of itself, but sown by one hand or another for us. And we are to notice the hand from which it comes.

Secondly, A perceiving of the hand of God in it. Whatever hand any creatures have in there, we ought not to terminate our view in them, but look above and beyond them to the supreme manager's agency. Without this we shall make a God of the creature that is instrumental of the crook, looking on it as if it were the first cause, which is peculiar to God, and bring ourselves under the doom, "Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them, and not build them up."

Thirdly, A representing it to ourselves as a work of God, which He has wrought against us for holy and wise ends, becoming the Divine perfections. This is to take it by the right handle, to represent it to ourselves under a right notion, from where a right management under it may spring. It can never be safe to overlook God in it, but very safe to overlook the creature; ascribing it to God, as if no other hand were in it, His being always the principal in it: "It is the Lord: let Him do what seems Him good. " Thus David overlooked Shimei, and looked to God in the matter of his cursing, as one fixing his eyes, not on the axe, but on him that welded it. Here two things are to come into our consideration.

1st. The degree of God, purposing that crook for us from eternity; "for He works all things after the counsel of His own will," the sealed book, in which are written all the black lines that made the crook. Whatever valleys of darkness, grief, and sorrow we are carried through, we are to look on Him as made by the mountains of brass, the immovable Divine purposes. This can be no presumption in that case, if we carry it no further than the event goes in our sight and feeling. For so far the book is opened for us to look into.

2ndly. The providence of God bringing to pass that crook for us in time. There is nothing can befall us without Him in whom we live. Whatever kind of agency of the creatures may be in the making of our crook, whatever they have done or not done towards it, He is the spring that sets all the created wheels in motion, which ceasing, they would all stop: though He is still infinitely pure in His agency, however impure they are in theirs. Job considered both these.

Fourthly, A continuing in me thought of it as such. It is not a simple glance of the eye, but a contemplating and leisurely viewing of it as His work, that is the proper mean. We are to be,

1st. Habitually impressed with this consideration: as the crook is some lasting grievance, so the consideration of this as the remedy should be habitually kept up. There are other considerations besides this that we must entertain, so that we cannot always have it expressly in our mind: but we must lay it down for a rooted principle, according to which we are to manage the crook, and keep the heart in a disposition, by which it may expressly slip into our minds, as occasion calls.

2ndly. We are to be occasionally exercised in it. Whenever we begin to feel the smart of the crook, we should fetch in this remedy; when the yoke begins to gad the neck, there should

be an application of this spiritual ointment. And however often the former comes in on us, it will be our wisdom to fetch in the latter as the proper remedy; the oftener it is used, it will more easily come to hand, and also be the more effectual.

Fifthly, A considering it for the end for which it is proposed to us, namely, to bring us to a dutiful carriage under it. Men's corruptions will cause them to enter on the consideration of it; but as the principle is, so the end and effect of it will be, corrupt. But we must enter on and use it for a good end, if we would have good of it, taking it as a practical consideration for regulating our conduct under the crook.

II. How it is to be understood to be a proper means to bring one to behave rightly under the crook.

Not as if it were sufficient of itself, and as it stands alone, to produce that effect. But as it is used in faith, in the faith of the Gospel; that is to say, a sinner's bare considering the crook in his lot as the work of God, without any saving relation to Him, will never be a way to behave himself rightly under it. But having believed in Jesus Christ, and so taking God for his God, the considering of the crook of the work of God, his God, is the proper means to bring him to that desirable temper and behavior. Many hearers mistake here. When they hear such and such lawful considerations proposed for bringing them to duty, they presently imagine that by the mere force of them, they may gain the point. And many preachers too, who, forgetting Christ and the Gospel, pretend by the force of reason to make men Christians; the eyes of both being held, that they do not see the corruption of men's nature, which is such as sets the true cure above the force of reason; all that they are sensible of being some ill habits, which they think may be shaken off by a vigorous application of their rational faculties. To clear this matter, consider,—

First, Is it rational to think to set fallen man, with his corrupted nature, to work the same way with innocent Adam? That is, to set beggars on a level with the rich, lame men to a journey with those that have limbs. Innocent Adam had a stock of gracious abilities, by which he might, by the force of moral considerations, have brought himself to perform duty aright. But where is that with us? Whatever force is in them to a soul endowed with spiritual life, what power have they to raise the dead, such as we are?

Secondly, The Scripture is very plain on this head, showing the indispensable necessity of faith; and that, such as unites to Christ, "Without Me," that is, separate from Me, "you can do nothing;" no, not with all th

e moral considerations you can use. How were the ten commandments given on Mount Sinai? Not as bare exactions of duty, but fronted with the Gospel, to be believed in the first place; "I am the Lord your God, " &c. And so Solomon, whom many regard rather as a moral philosopher than an inspired writer leading to Christ, fronts his writings, in the beginning of the Proverbs, with most express gospel. And must we have it expressly repeated in our Bibles with every moral precept, or else shut our eyes and take these precepts without it? That is the effect of our natural enmity to Christ. If we loved Him more, we should see Him more in every page and in every command, receiving the law at His mouth.

Thirdly, Do but consider what it is to behave rightly under the crook in the lot; what humiliation of soul, self-denial, and absolute resignation to the win of God must be in it. What love to God it must proceed from; how regard to His glory must influence it as the chief end of it; and try and see if it is not impossible for you to reach it without that faith before mentioned. I know a Christian may reach it without full assurance. But still, according to the measure of their

persuasion that God is their God, so will their attainments in it be; these keep equal pace. Oh! what kind of hearts do they imagine themselves to have, what think they can for a moment empty them of the creature further than they can fill them with a God as their God in its room and stead? No doubt men may, from the force of moral considerations, work themselves to a behavior under the crook externally right, such as many pagans had; but a Christian disposition of spirit under it will never be reached without that faith in God.

Object. "Then it is saints only that are capable of the improvement of that consideration."

Ans. Yea, indeed it is so, as to that and all other moral considerations, for true Christian ends: and that amounts to no more than that directions for walking rightly are only for the living that have the use of their limbs; and, therefore, that you may improve it, set yourselves to believe in the first place.

III. I shall confirm that it is a proper mean to bring one to behave rightly under it. This will appear, if we consider these four things.

1. It is of great use to divert from the considering and dwelling on those things about the crook which serve to irritate our corruption. Such are the balking of our will and wishes, the satisfaction we should have in the matter's going according to our mind, the instruments of the crook, how injurious they are to us, how unreasonable, how obstinate, &c. The dwelling on these considerations is but the blowing of the fire within; but to turn our eyes to it as the work of God would be a cure by way of diversion; and such diversion of the thoughts is not only lawful, but expedient and necessary.

2. It has a moral aptitude for producing this good effect. Though our cure is not compassed by the mere force of

reason, yet it is carried on not by a brutal movement, but in a rational way. This consideration has a moral efficacy on our reason, it is fit to awe us into a submission, and ministers a deal of argument for behaving Christianly under our crook.

3. It has a Divine appointment for that end, which is to be believed. So the text. The creature in itself is an inefficacious and moveless thing, a mere vanity. That which makes anything a means, fit for the end is a word of Divine appointment. To use anything then for an end, without the faith of this, is to make a god of the creature; therefore it is to be used in a dependence on God, according to that word of appointment. And everything is fit for the end for which God has appointed it. This consideration is appointed for that end; and therefore is a fit means for it.

4. The Spirit may be expected to work by it, and does work by it, in them that believe, and look to him for it, forasmuch as it is a mean of his own appointment. Papists, legalists, and all superstitious persons devise various means of sanctification, seeming to have, or really having a moral fitness for the same; but they are quite ineffectual, because, like Abana, and Pharpar, they want a word of Divine appointment for curing us of our leprosy; therefore the Spirit works not by them, since they are not His instruments, but devised of their own hearts. And since even the means of Divine appointment are ineffectual without the Spirit, these can never be effectual. But this consideration having a Divine appointment, the Spirit works by it.

Use. Then take this direction for your behaving rightly under the crook in your lot. Inure yourselves to consider it as the work of God. And for helping you to improve it, so as it may be effectual, I offer these advices:

1. Consider it as the work of your God in Christ. This is the way to sprinkle it with Gospel-grace, and so to make it tolerable. The discerning of a Father's hand in the crook will take out much of the bitterness of it, and sugar the pill to you. For this cause it will be necessary, (1.) Solemnly to take God for your God, under your crook. (2.) In all your encounters with it, resolutely to believe and claim your interest in Him.

2. Enlarge the consideration with a view of the Divine relations to you, and the Divine attributes. Consider it, being the work of your God, the work of your Father, elder Brother, Head, Husband, &c., who, therefore, surely consults your good. Consider His holiness and justice, showing He does not wrong you; His mercy and goodness, that it is not worse; His sovereignty, that may silence you; His infinite wisdom and love, that may satisfy you in it.

3. Consider what a work of His it is, how it is a convincing work, for bringing sin to remembrance: a correcting work, to chastise you for your follies, a preventing work, to hedge you up from courses of sin you would otherwise be apt to run into; a trying work, to discover your state, your graces, and corruption; a weaning work, to wean you from the world and fit you for heaven.

4. In all your considerations of it in this manner look upward for His Spirit to render them effectual. —Thus may you behave Christianly under it, till God make it even either here or in heaven.

"Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly,

than to divide the spoil with the proud"—Prov. 16:19.

Could men once be brought to believe that it is better to have their minds bend to the crook in their lot, than to force the

crook to their mind, they would be in a fair way to bring their matters to a good account. Hear then the Divine decision in that case: "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. " In which words

First, There is a comparison instituted and that between two parties, and two points in which they vastly differ.

1st. The parties are the lowly and the proud, who differ like heaven and earth. The proud are climbing up and soaring aloft; the lowly are content to creep on the ground, if that is the will of God. Let us view them more particularly as the text represents them.

On the one hand is the lowly. Here there is a line-reading and a marginal, both from the Holy Spirit, and they differ only in a letter. The former is the afflicted or poor, that are low in their condition; those that have a notable crook in their lot through affliction laid on them, by which their condition is lowered in the world. The other is the lowly or meek humble ones, who are low in their spirit, as well as their condition, and so have their minds brought down to their lot. Both together making the character of this lowly party.

On the other hand is the proud, the gay and high-minded ones. It is supposed here that they are crossed too, and have crooks in their lot; for, dividing the spoil is the consequence of a victory, and a victory presupposes a battle.

2nd. The points wherein these parties are supposed to differ, namely, being of a humble spirit, and dividing the spoil.

Afflicted and lowly ones may sometimes get their condition changed, may be raised up on high, and divide the spoil, as Hannah, Job, &c. The proud may sometimes be thrown down and crushed, as Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar, &c. But that is

not the question, Whether it is better to be raised up with the lowly, or thrown down with the proud? There would be no difficulty in determining that. But the question is, whether it is better to be of a low and humble spirit, in low circumstances, with afflicted ones; or to divide the spoil, and get one's will, with the proud? If men would speak the native sentiments of their hearts, that question would be determined in a contradiction to the text. The points then here compared and set one against another are these:

On the one hand, to be of a humble spirit with afflicted lowly ones. To be low of spirit; for the word primarily denotes lowness in situation or state. So the point here proposed is to be with, or in the state of, afflicted lowly ones, having the spirit brought down to that low lot; the lowness of the spirit balancing the lowness of one's condition.

On the other hand, to divide the spoil with the proud. The point here proposed is, to be with or in the state of the proud, having their lot by main force brought to their mind; as those who, taking themselves to be injured, fight it out with the enemy, overcome and divide the spoil according to their will.

Secondly, The decision made, in which the former is preferred to the latter; "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." If these two parties were set before us, it were better to take our lot with those of a low condition, who have their spirits brought as low as their lot, than with those who, being of a proud and high spirit, have their lot brought up to their mind. A humble spirit is better than a heightened condition.

Doctrine. There is a generation of lowly afflicted ones, having their spirit lowered and brought down to their lot; whose case, in that respect, is better than that of the proud getting their will, and carrying all to their mind.

1. We shall consider the generation of the lowly afflicted ones, having their spirit brought down to their lot. And we shall,

First, Lay down some general considerations about them.

1. There is such a generation in the world, bad as the world is. The text expressly mentions them, and the Scripture elsewhere speaks of them. Where shall we seek them? Not in heaven, there are no afflicted ones there; nor in hell, there are no lowly or humble ones there, whose spirit is brought to their lot. In His world they must then be, where the state of trial is.

2. If it were not so, Christ, as He was in the world, would have no followers in it. He was the head of that generation whom they all copy after: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." And for His honor, and the honor of His cross, they will never be wanting while the world stands. "Whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. " His image lies in these two, suffering and holiness, of which lowliness is a chief part.

3. Nevertheless they are certainly very rare in the world. Agur observes, that there is another generation ("their eyes are lofty, and their eyelids lifted up") quite opposite to them, and this makes the greatest company by far. The low and afflicted lot is not so very rare, but the lowly disposition of spirit is rarely yoked with it. Many a high spirit keeps up in spite of lowering circumstances.

4. They can be no more in number than the truly godly; for nothing less than the power of Divine grace can bring down men's minds from their native height, and make their will pliant to the will of God. Men may put on a face of submission to a law and a crossed lot, because they cannot help it, and they

see it is in vain to strive; but to bring the spirit truly to it, must be the effect of humbling grace.

5. Though all the godly are of that generation, yet there are some of them to whom that character more especially belongs. The way to heaven lies through tribulation to all; and all Christ's followers are reconciled to it notwithstanding; yet there are some of them more remarkably disciplined than others, whose spirit is in this way humbled and brought down to their lot. "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child." "For I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content with it. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abjured and to suffer need. "

6. A lowly disposition of soul, and habitual aim and bent of the heart that way, has a very favorable construction put upon it in heaven. Should we look for a generation perfectly purged of pride and risings of heart against their adverse lot at any time, we should find none in this world. But those who are sincerely aiming and endeavoring to reach it, and keep the way of contented submission, though sometimes blown aside and returning to it again, God accounts to be that lowly generation.

Secondly, We shall enter into particulars. There are three things which together make up their character.

1st. Affliction in their lot. That lowly generation, preferred to the proud and prosperous, is a generation of afflicted ones, whom God keeps under the discipline of the covenant. We may take it up in these two:

1. There is a yoke of affliction of one kind or other oftentimes upon them. God is frequently visiting them as a master does

his scholars, and a physician his patients; whereas others are in a sort overlooked by Him. They are accustomed to the yoke, and that from the time they enter into God's family, God sees it good for them.

2. There is a particular yoke of affliction which God has chosen for them, that hangs on them, and is seldom, if ever, taken off them. That is their special trial, the crook in their lot, the yoke which lies on them for their constant exercise. Their other trials may be exchanged, but that is a weight that still hangs about them, bowing them down.

2ndly. Lowliness in their disposition and tenor of spirit. They are a generation of lowly humble ones, whose spirits God has, by His grace, brought down from their natural height. And thus.

1. They think soberly and meanly of themselves; what they are; what they can do; what they are worth, and what they deserve. Viewing themselves in the glass of the Divine law and perfection, they see themselves as a mass of imperfection and sinfulness.

2. They think highly and honorably of God. They are taught by the Spirit what God is; and so entertain elevated thought of Him. They consider Him as the Sovereign of the world; His perfections as infinite; His work as perfect. They look on Him as the fountain of happiness, as a God in Christ, doing all things well; trusting His wisdom, goodness, and love, even where they cannot see.

3. They think favorably of others, as far as in justice they may. Though they cannot hinder themselves from seeing their glaring faults, yet they are ready withal to acknowledge their excellencies, and esteem them so far. And, because they see more into their own mercies and advantages for holiness, and

misimproving of it, than they can see into others, they are apt to look on others as better than themselves, circumstances compared.

4. They are sunk down into a state of subordination to God and His will. Pride sets a man up against God; lowliness brings him back to his place, and lays him down at the feet of his sovereign Lord, saying, Your will be done on earth, &c. They seek no more the command, but are content that God Himself sit at the helm of their affairs, and manage all for them.

5. They are not bent on high things, but disposed to stoop to low things. Lowliness levels the towering imaginations which pride mounts up against heaven; draws a veil over all personal worth and excellencies before the Lord, and yields a man's all to the Lord, to be as stepping-stones to the throne of His glory.

6. They are apt to magnify mercies bestowed on them. Pride of heart overlooks and vilifies mercies one is possessed of, and fixes the eye on what is wanting in one's condition, making one like the flies, which pass over the sound places, and swarm together on the sore. On the contrary, lowliness teaches men to recount the mercies they enjoy in the lowest condition, and to set a mark on the good things they have possessed, or yet do.

3rdly. A spirit brought down to their lot. Their lot is a low and afflicted one; but their spirit is as low, being, through grace, brought down to it. We may take it up in these five things:

1. They submit to it as just. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him. " There are no hardships in our condition, but we have procured them to ourselves; and it is therefore just that we kiss the rod, and be

silent under it, and so lower our spirits to our lot. If they complain, it is of themselves; their hearts do not rise up against the Lord, far less do they open their mouth against the heavens. They justify God, and condemn themselves, reverencing His holiness and spotless righteousness in His proceedings against them.

2. They go quietly under it as tolerable. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sits alone, and keeps silence, because he has borne it on him; he puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. " While the unsubdued spirit rages under the yoke as a bull unaccustomed to it, the spirit brought to the lot goes softly under it. They see it is of the Lord's mercies that it is not worse; they take up the naked cross, as God lays it down, without those overweights on it that turbulent passions add to them; and so it becomes really more easy than they thought it could have been, like a burden fitted on the back.

3. They are satisfied in it, as drawing their comfort from another quarter than their outward condition, even as the house stands fast when the prop is taken away that it did not lean on. "Although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit is in the vine, - yet I will rejoice in the Lord. " Thus did David in the day of his distress. "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God. " It is an argument of a spirit not brought down to the hardships of it, as if their condition in the world were the point on which their happiness turned. It is want of mortification that makes men's comfort to wax and wane, ebb and flow, according to the various appearances of their lot in the world.

4. They have a complacency in it, as that which is fit and good for them. Men have a sort of complacency in the working of physic, though it gripes them sore; they rationally think with

themselves that it is good and best for them. So these lowly souls consider their afflicted lot as a spiritual medicine, necessary, fit, and good for them; yea, best for them for the time, since it is ministered by their heavenly Father. So they reach a holy complacency in their low afflicted lot. The lowly spirit extracts this sweet out of the bitterness of his lot, considering how the Lord, by means of that afflicting lot, stops the provision for unruly lusts, that they may be starved; how He cuts off the by-channels, that the whole stream of the soul's love may run towards Himself; how He pulls off and holds off the man's burden and clog of earthly comforts, that he may run the more expeditiously in the way to heaven.

5. They rest in it, as what they desire not to come out of, till the God that brought them into it see it fit to bring them out with His good will. Though an unsubdued spirit's time for deliverance is always ready, a humble soul will be afraid of being taken out of its afflicted lot too soon. It will not be for moving for a change, till the heaven's moving brings it about. So this does not hinder prayer and the use of appointed means, with dependence on the Lord, but requires faith, hope, patience, and resignation.

II. We shall consider the generation of the proud getting their will, and carrying all to their mind. And in their character also are three things.

First, there are crosses in their lot. They also have their trials allotted them by overruling providence, and let them be in what circumstances they will in the world, they cannot miss them altogether. For, consider,—

1. The confusion and vanity brought into the creation by man's sin, have made it impossible to get through the world but men must meet with what will ruffle them. Sin has turned the world from a paradise into a thicket, there is no getting through

without being scratched. As midges in the summer will fly about those walking abroad in a goodly attire, as well as about those in sordid apparel; so will crosses in the world meet with the high as well as the low.

2. The pride of their heart exposes them particularly to crosses. A proud heart will make a cross to itself, where a lowly soul would find none. It will make a real cross ten times the weight it would be to the humble. The generation of the proud are like nettles and thorn hedges, upon which things flying about do fix, while they pass over low and plain things; so none are more exposed to crosses than they, though none so unfit to bear them; as appears from,

Secondly, reigning pride in their spirit. Their spirits were never subdued by a work of thorough humiliation; they remain at the height in which the corruption of nature placed them. Thus they can by no means bear the yoke God lays on them. The neck is swollen with the ill humors of pride and passion; thus, when the yoke once begins to touch it, they cannot have any more ease. We may view the case of the proud generation here in three things.

1. They have an over-value for themselves; and so will not stoop to the yoke; it is below them. What a swelling vanity is in that, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" Thus a work of humiliation is necessary to make one take on the yoke, whether of Christ's precepts or providence. The first error is in the understanding; from where Solomon ordinarily calls a wicked man a fool; accordingly the first stroke in conversion is there too, by conviction to humble. Men are bigger in their own conceit than they are indeed; therefore God, suiting things to what we are really, cannot please us.

2. They have an unmortified, self-will, arising from that over-value for themselves, and they will not stoop. The question

between heaven and us is, whether God's will or our own must prevail? Our will is corrupt, God's will is holy; they cannot agree in one. God says in His providence, our will must yield to His; but that it will not do till the iron sinew in it is broken.

3. They have a crowd of unsubdued passions taking part with self-will. They say, He shall not stoop, and so the war begins, and there is a field of battle within and without man.

A holy God crosses the self-will of proud creatures by His providence, overruling and disposing of things contrary to their inclination; sometimes by His own immediate hand, as in the case of Cain, sometimes by the hand of men carrying things against their mind, as in the case of Ahab, to whom Naboth refused his vineyard.

The proud heart and will, unable to submit to the cross, or to bear to be controlled, rises up against it, and fights for the mastery, with its whole force of unmortified passions. The design is to remove the cross, even the crook, and bring the thing to their own mind. This is the cause of this unholy war, in which,

(1.) There is one black band of hellish passions that marches upward, and makes an attack; on heaven itself, namely, discontent, impatience, murmuring, frettings, and the like. "The foolishness of man perverts his way; and his heart frets against the Lord." These fire the beast, fall the countenance, let off sometimes a volley of indecent and passionate complaints, and sometimes of blasphemies.

(2.) There is another that marches forward, and makes an attack on the instrument or instruments of the cross, namely, anger, wrath, fury, revenge, bitterness, &c. These carry the man out of the possession of himself, fill the heart with a boiling heat, the mouth with clamor, and evil-speaking, and

threatenings are breathed out, and sometimes set the hands on work—a most heavy event—as in the case of Ahab against Naboth.

Thus the proud carry on the war, but oftentimes they lose the day, and the cross remains immovable for all they can do; yea, and sometimes they themselves fall in the quarrel, it ends in their ruin. But that is not the case in the text. For we are to consider them as,

Thirdly, getting their will, and carrying all to their mind. This speaks,

1. Holy providence yielding to the man's unmortified self-will, and letting it go according to his mind. God sees it suitable to let the struggle with him fall, for it does not prevail to his good. So the reins are laid on the proud man's neck, and he has what he would be at; "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."
"

2. The lust remaining in its strength and vigor. "They were not estranged from their lust." God, in the method of His covenant, sometimes gives His people their will, and sets them where they would be; but then, in that case, the lust for the thing is mortified, and they are as weaned children. But here the lust remains rampant. The proud seek meat for it and get it.

3. The cross removed, the yoke taken off. They could not think of bringing their mind to their lot; but they thwarted with it, wrestled and fought against it, till it is brought up to their mind; so the day is their own, the victory is on their side.

4. The man is pleased in his having carried his point, even as one is when he is dividing the spoil.

Thus the case of the afflicted lowly generation, and the proud generation prospering, is stated. Now,

III. I am to confirm the doctrine, or the decision of the text, that the case of the former is better than that of the latter. It is better to be in a low afflicted condition, with the spirit humbled and brought down to the lot, than to be of a proud and high spirit, getting the lot brought up to it, and matters going according to one's mind. This will appear from the following considerations.

1. Humility is so far preferable to pride, that in no circumstances whatever its preferableness can fail. Let all the afflictions in the world attend the humble spirit, and all the prosperity in the world attend pride, humility will still have the better. As god in a dunghill is more excellent than so much lead in a cabinet, For,

(1.) Humility is a part of the image of God. Pride is the masterpiece of the image of the devil. Let us view Him who was the express image of the Father's person, and we shall behold Him meek and lowly in heart. None more afflicted, yet His spirit perfectly brought down to His lot. 'He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. " That is a shining part of the Divine image; for though God cannot be low in respect of His state and condition, yet He is of infinite condescension. None bears as He, nor suffers patiently so much contradiction to His will; which is proposed to us for our encouragement in affliction, as it shone in Christ. 'For consider Him that endures such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied, and faint in your minds. "

Pride, on the other hand, is the very image of the devil. Shall we value ourselves on the height of our spirits? Satan will vie with the highest of us in that point. Though he is the most miserable, yet he is the proudest in the whole creation. There

is the greatest distance between his spirit and his lot; the former is as high as the throne of God, the latter as low as hell. As it is impossible that ever his lot should be brought up to his spirit; so his spirit will never come down to his lot. Therefore he will be eternally in a state of war with his lot. Thus, even at this time, he has no rest, but goes about, seeks rest indeed, but finds none.

Now, is it not better to be like God than like the devil; like Him who is the fountain of all good, than him who is the spring and sink of all evil? Can anything possibly cast the balance here, and turn the preference to the other side? "Then better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, " &c.

(2.) Humility and lowliness of spirit qualify us for friendly communion and intercourse with God in Christ. Pride makes God our enemy. Our happiness here and hereafter depends on our friendly intercourse with heaven. If we have not that, nothing can make up our loss. If we have that nothing can make us miserable. "If God is for us who can be against us?" Now, who are they whom God is for but the humble and lowly? They who being in Christ are so made like Him. He blessed them, and declares them the heirs of the crown of glory: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. " He will look to them, be their condition ever so low, while He overlooks others. He will have respect to them however they are despised: "Though the Ford is high, yet He has respect to the lowly: but the proud He knows afar off. " He will dwell with them, however poorly they dwell. He will certainly exalt them in due time, however low they lie now.

Whom is He against? Whom does He resist? The proud. Them He curses, and that curse will dry up their arm at length. The proud man is God's rival; he makes himself his own god, and would have those about him make him theirs too; he

rages, he blusters, if they will not fall down before him. But God will bring him down.

Now, is it not better to be qualified for communion with God than to have Him engaged against us, at any rate?

(3.) Humility is a duty pleasing to God, pride a sin pleasing to the devil. God requires us to be humble, especially under affliction, "and be clothed with humility." That is our becoming garment. The humble publican was accepted, the proud Pharisee rejected. We may say of the generation of the proud as "Wrath is come on them to the uttermost." They please neither God nor men, but only themselves and Satan, whom they resemble in it. Now duty is better than sin at any rate.

2. They whose spirits are brought down to their afflicted lot have much quiet and repose of mind, while the proud, that must have their lot brought up to their mind, have much disquiet, trouble, and vexation. Consider here on the one hand that quiet of mind, and ease within is a great blessing upon which the comfort of life depends. Nothing without this can make one's life happy. And where this is maintained nothing can make it miserable. This being secured in God that is a defiance bid to all the troubles of the world, like the child sailing in the midst of the rolling waves. The spirit brought down to the lot makes and maintains this inward tranquillity. Our whole trouble in our lot in the world rises from the disagreement of our mind with it; let the mind be brought to the lot, and the whole tumult is instantly hushed; let it be kept in that disposition, and the man shall stand at ease in his affliction, like a rock unmoved with waters beating on it: "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called."

On the other hand, consider what disquiet of mind the proud suffer before they can get their lot brought up to their mind.

"They have taught their tongues to speak lies, and they weary themselves to commit iniquity." "You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not. " What arrows of grief go through their heart! What torture of anxiety, fretting, and vexation must they endure! What contrary passions fight within them! And what sallies of passion do they make! What uneasiness was Haman in because he could carry the point of revenge against Mordecai by obtaining the king's decree!

When the thing is got to their mind it will not quit the cost. The enjoyment of it does not bring so much satisfaction and pleasure as the want of it gave pain. This was evident in Rachel's case, as to the having of children. There is a dead fly in the ointment that mars the savour they expected to find in it. Fruit plucked off the tree of providence before it is ripe will readily set the teeth on edge. It proves like the manna kept over night.

They have but an unsure hold of it; it does not last with them. Either it is taken from them soon, and they are just where they were again, "I gave you a king in my anger, and took him away in my wrath, " having a root of pride, it quickly withers away; or else they are taken from it, that they have no access to enjoy it. So Haman obtained the decree; but before the day of the execution came he was gone.

3. They that get their spirit brought down to their afflicted lot gain a point far more valuable than they who in their pride force up their lot to their mind. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit, than he that takes a city. " This will appear if you consider,

(1.) The latter makes but a better condition in outward things, the former makes a better man. The life is more than meat. The man himself is more valuable than all external

conveniences that attend him. What therefore betters the man is preferable to what betters only his condition. Who doubts but where two are sick, and the one gets himself transported from a coarse bed to a fine one, the sickness still remaining; the other lies still in the coarse bed, but the sickness is removed; that the case of the latter is preferable? So here, &c.

(2.) The subduing of our own passions is more excellent than to have the whole world subdued to our will: for then we are masters of ourselves, according to that. Whereas, in the other case, we are still slaves to the worst of masters. In the one case we are safe, blow what storm will; in the other we lie exposed to thousands of dangers. "He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. "

(3.) When both shall come to be judged it will appear the one has multiplied the tale of their good works in bringing their spirit to their lot; the others the tale of their ill works in bringing their lot to their spirit. We have to do with an omniscient God, in whose eyes every internal action is a work, good or bad, to be reckoned for.

An afflicted lot is painful, but where it is well managed it is very fruitful; it exercises the graces of the spirit of a Christian, which otherwise would lie dormant. But there is never an act of resignation to the will of God under the cross, nor an act of trusting in Him for His help, but they will be recorded in heaven's register as good works. And these are occasioned by affliction.

On the other hand there is never a rising of the proud heart against the lot, nor a faithless attempt to bring it to our mind, whether it succeed or not, but it passes for an ill work before God. How then will the tale of such be multiplied by the way in which the spoil is divided!

Use 1. Of information. Hence we may learn,

1. It is not always best for folks to get their will. Many there are who cannot be pleased with God's will about them, and they get their own will with a vengeance. "Israel would none of me, so I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels." It may be most pleasant and grateful for the time but it is not the safest. Let not the people pride themselves in their carrying things that way then by a strong hand; let them not triumph in such victory: the after-reckoning will open their eyes.

2. The afflicted crossed party whose lot is kept low is so far from being a loser that he is a gainer by it if his spirit is brought down to it. And if he will see things in the light of God's unerring Word, he is in better case than if he had got all carried to his mind. In the one way the vessels of wrath are fitted for destruction. In the other the vessels of mercy are fitted for glory, and so God disciplines His own.

3. It is better to yield to Providence than to fight it out, though we should win. Yielding to the sovereign disposal is both our becoming duty and our greatest interest. Taking that way we act most honorably; for what honor can there be in the creature's disputing his ground with his Creator? And we act most wisely; for whatever may be the success of some battles in that case, we may be sure victory will be on heaven's side in the war, "For by strength shall no man prevail. "

4. It is of so much greater concern for us to get our spirits brought down than our outward condition raised. But who believes this? All men strive to raise their outward condition; most men never mind the bringing down of their spirits, and few there are who apply themselves to it. And what is that but to be concerned to minister drink to the thirsty sick, but never

to mind to seek a cure for them, by which their thirst may be carried off.

Use 2. Of exhortation. As you meet with crosses in your lot in the world, let your desire be rather to have your spirit humbled and brought down than to get the cross removed. I mean not but that you may use all lawful means for the removal of your cross, in dependence on God; but only that you be more concerned to get your spirit to bow and ply, than to get the crook in your lot evened.

Motive 1. It is far more needful for us to have our spirits humbled under the cross than to have the cross removed. The removal of the cross is needful only for the ease of the flesh, the humbling for the profit of our souls, to purify them, and bring them into a state of health and cure.

2. The humbling of the spirit will have a mighty good effect on a crossed lot, but the removal of the cross will have none on the unhumbed spirit. The humbling will lighten the cross mightily for the time, and in due time carry it cleanly off. But the removal of the cross is not a means to humble the unhumbed; though it may prevent irritation, yet the disease still remains.

3. Think with yourselves how dangerous and hopeless a case it is to have the cross removed before the spirit is humbled; that is, to have the means of cure pulled away and blocked up from us while the power of the disease is yet unbroken; to be taken off trials before we have given any good proof of ourselves, and so to be given over of our Physician as hopeless.

Use 3. For direction. Believing the Gospel, take God for your God in Christ towards your eternal salvation, and then dwell much on the thoughts of God's greatness and holiness, and of

your own sinfulness; so will you be humbled under the mighty hand of God; and in due time He will lift you up.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that He may exalt you in due time—1 Peter 5:6.

In the preceding part of this chapter the apostle presents the duties of the church officers towards the people; and then the duty of the people, both towards their officers and among themselves, which he winds up in one word, submission. For which causes he recommends humility as the great means to bring all to their respective duties. This is enforced with an argument taken from the different treatment the Lord gives to the proud and the humble: his opposing Himself to the one, and showing favor to the other. Our text is an exhortation drawn from that consideration: and in it we have,

1st. The duty we are to study: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." And in this we may notice,

(1.) The state of those to whom it is proposed, those under the mighty hand of God whom His hand has humbled or brought low in respect of their circumstances in the world. And by these, I think, are meant, not only such as are under particular signal afflictions, which is the lot of some, but also those who, by the providence of God, are in any kind of way lowered, which is the lot of all. All being in a state of submission or dependence on others, God has made this life a state of trial; and for that cause He has, by His mighty hand, subjected men one to another, as wives, children, servants, to husbands, parents, masters; and these again to their superiors; among whom, again, even the highest depend on those under them, as magistrates and ministers on the people, even the supreme magistrate. This state of the world God has made for

the trial of men in their several stations and dependence on others; and therefore, when the time of trial is over, it also comes to an end. "Then comes the end, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." Meantime, while it lasts, it makes humility necessary to all, to prompt them to the duty they owe their superiors, to whom God's mighty hand has subjected them.

(2.) The duty itself, namely, humiliation of our spirits under the humbling circumstances the Lord has placed us in. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. " Whether we are under particular afflictions, which have cast us down from the height we were sometime in, or whether we are only inferiors in one or more relations, or whether, which is most common, both these are in our case, we must in this eye the mighty hand of God, as that which places us there, and is over us, there to hold us down in it; and so, with an awful regard to it, bow down under it, in the temper and disposition of our spirits, suiting our spirits to our lot, and careful of performing the duty of our low sphere.

(3.) A particular spring of this duty: therefore we must consider, that those who cannot quietly keep the place assigned them of God in their afflictions or relation, but still press upward against the mighty hand that is over them, that mighty hand resists them, throwing them down, and often farther down than before; whereas it treats them with grace and favor that compose themselves under it to a quiet discharge of their duty in their situation; so, eyeing this, we must set ourselves to humble ourselves.

2ndly. The infallible issue of that course; that He may exalt you in due time. The particle that is not always to be understood finally, as denoting the end or design the agent proposes to himself, but sometimes eventually only, as

denoting the event or issue of the action. So here, the meaning is not, Humble yourselves, on design He may exalt you; but, and it shall issue in His exalting you.

(1.) Here is a happy event of humiliation of spirit secured, and that is exaltation or lifting up on high, by the power of God, that He may exalt you. Exalting will as surely follow on humiliation of spirit, suitable to the low lot, as the morning follows the night, or the sun rises after the dawning. And these words are fitted to obviate the objections that the world and our corrupt hearts are apt to make against bringing down the spirit to the low lot.

Object. 1. If we let our spirit fall we shall lie always at folks' feet, and they trample on us.

Ans. No; pride of spirit unsubdued will bring men to lie at the feet of others for ever. But humiliation of spirit will bring them undoubtedly out from under their feet. They that humble themselves now will be exalted for ever; they will be brought out of their low situation and circumstances. Cast yourselves even down with your low lot, and assure yourselves you shall not lie there.

Object. 2. If we do not raise ourselves none will raise us, and therefore we must see to ourselves to do ourselves right.

Ans. That is wrong. Humble yourselves in respect of your spirits, and God will raise you up in respect of your lot, or low condition; and they that have God engaged for raising them have no reason to say they have none to do it for them. Bringing down of the spirit is our duty, raising us up is God's work; let us not forfeit the privilege of God's raising us up by arrogating that work to ourselves, taking it out of His hand.

Object. 3. But sure we shall never rise high if we let our spirits fall.

Ans. This is wrong too: God will not only raise the humble ones, but He will lift them up on high; for so the word signifies. They shall be as high at length as ever they were low, were they ever so low; nay, the exaltation will bear proportion to the humiliation.

(2.) Here is the date of that happy event when it will fall out. In due time, or in the season, the proper season for it, "In due season we shall reap, if we do not faint." We are apt to weary in humbling, trying circumstances, and would instantly have up our head. But Solomon observes, There is a time for everything when it does best, and the wise will wait for it. There is a time too for exalting them that humble themselves; God has set it, and it is the due time for the purpose, the time when it does best, even as sowing in the spring, and reaping in the harvest. When that time comes, your exalting shall no longer be put off, and it will come too soon should it come before that time.

Doctrine I. The bent of one's heart, in humbling circumstances, should lie towards a suitable humbling of the spirit, as under God's mighty hand placing us in them. We shall consider,

I. What things are supposed in this. It supposes that

1. God brings men into humbling circumstances. "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree." There is a root of pride in the hearts of all men on earth, that must be mortified before they can be suitable for heaven: and therefore no man can miss, in this time of trial, some things that will give a proof whether he can stoop or not. And God brings them into humbling circumstances for that

very end. "The Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart. "

2. These circumstances prove pressing as a weight on the heart tending to bear it down. "Therefore he brought down their hearts with labor." They strike at the grain of the heart, and cross the natural inclination: whence a trial arises, whether, when God lays on His mighty hand, the man can yield under it or not; and consequently, whether he is suitable for heaven or not.

3. The heart is naturally apt to rise up against these humbling circumstances, and consequently against the mighty hand that brings and keeps them on. The man naturally bends his force to get off the weight, that he may get up his head, seeking more to please himself than to please his God. "They cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none says, where is God my maker?" This is the first gate the heart turns to in humbling circumstances, and in this way the unsubdued spirit holds on.

4. But what God requires is, rather to labor to bring down the heart than to get up the head. Here lies the proof of one's suitability for heaven; and then is one in the way heavenward, when he is more concerned to get down his heart than to get up his head, to go calmly under his burden than to get it off, to bow under the mighty hand than to put it off him.

5. There must be a noticing of the hand of God in humbling circumstances. "Hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it. " There is an abjectness of spirit, by which some give up themselves to the will of others in the harshest treatment, merely to please them, without regard to the authority and command of God. This is real meanness of spirit, by which

one lies quietly to be trampled on by a fellow-worm, from its imaginary weight; and none so readily fall into it as the proud at some times to serve their own turn. These are men-pleasers.

II. What are those humbling circumstances the mighty hand of God brings men into. Supposing here what was before taught concerning the crook in the lot being of God's making, these are circumstances,—

1. Of imperfection. God has placed all men in such circumstances under a variety of wants and imperfections. We can look nowhere where we are not beset with them. There is a heap of natural and moral imperfections about us. Our bodies and our souls, in all their faculties, are in a state of imperfection. The pride of all glory is stained; and it is a shame for us not to be humbled under such wants as attend us. It is like a beggar strutting in his rags.

2. Of inferiority in relations, by which men are set in the lower place in relations and society, and made to depend on others. God has, for a trial of men's submission to Himself, subjected them to others whom He has set over them, to discover what regard they will pay to His authority and commands at second-hand. Dominion or superiority is a part of the Divine image shining in them. And therefore reverence of them, consisting in an awful regard to that ray of the Divine image shining in them, is necessarily required. The same holds in all other relations and superiorities, namely, that they are so far in the place of God to their relatives, and though the parties are worthless in themselves, that losses not from the debt due to them. The reason is, because it is not their qualities, but their character, which is the ground of that debt of reverence and subjection; and the trial of God takes of us in that matter and turns not on the point of the former, but of the latter.

Now, God having placed us in these circumstances of inferiority, all refractoriness, in all things not contrary to the command of God, is a rising up against His mighty hand, because it is mediately on us for that effect, though it is a man's hand that is immediately on us.

3. Of contradiction, tending directly to balk us of our will. This was a part of our Lord's state of humiliation, and the apostle supposes it will be a part of ours too. There is a perfect harmony in heaven, no one to contradict another there; for they are in their state of retribution and exaltation. But we are here in our state of trial and humiliation, and therefore cannot miss contradiction, be we placed ever so high.

Whether these contradictions are just or unjust, God tries men with them to humble them, to break them off from addictedness to their own will, and to teach them resignation and self-denial. They are in their own nature humbling, and much the same to us as the breaking of a horse or a bull is to them. And I believe there are many cases in which there can be no accounting for them, but by recurring to this use God has for them.

4. Of affliction. Prosperity puffs up sinners with pride; for it is very hard to keep a low spirit with a high and prosperous lot. But God, by affliction, calls men down from their heights to sit in the dust, plucks away their gay feathers in which they prided themselves, rubs the paint and varnish from off the creature, by which it appears more in its native deformity. There are various kinds of affliction, some more, some less humbling, but all of them are humbling.

Wherefore, not to lower the spirit under the affliction is to attempt to rise up when God is casting and holding us down; and cannot fail, if continued in, to provoke the Lord to break us in pieces. For the afflicting hand of God is mighty.

5. Of sin, as the punishment of sin. We may allude to that. All the sin in the world is a punishment of Adam's first sin. Man threw himself into the mire at first, and now he is justly left weltering in it. Men wilfully make one false step, and for that cause they are justly left to make another worse; and sin hangs about all, even the best. And this is overruled of God for our humiliation, that we may be ashamed, and never open our mouth any more. Wherefore, not to be humbled under our sinfulness is to rise up against the mighty hand of God, and to justify all our sinful departings from Him, as lost to all sense of duty, and void of shame.

Thomas Boston

The Crook in the Lot

Part 3

"Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He has made crooked? "—Eccles. 7:13.

III. What it is in humbling circumstances to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. This is the great thing to be aimed at in our humbling circumstances. And we may take it up in these eight things.

1. Noticing God's mighty hand, as employed in bringing about everything that concerns us, either in the way of efficacy or permission. "And he said, It is the Lord; let him do what seems

him good. " "And the king said, The Lord has said to him, Curse David: who shall then say, Wherefore have you done so?" He is the fountain of all perfection, but we must trace our imperfections to His sovereign will. It is He that has posted every one in their relations by His providence; without Him we could not meet with such contradictions; for, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turns it wherever He pleases." He sends afflictions, and justly punishes one sin with another.

2. A sense of our own worthlessness and nothingness before him. Looking to the infinite Majesty of the mighty hand dealing with us, we should say, with Abraham, "Behold, I am but dust and ashes;" and say amen to the cry, "All flesh is grass. " &c. The keeping up of thoughts of our own excellency under the pressure of God's mighty hand is the very thing that swells the heart in pride, causing it to rise up against it. And it is the letting of all such thoughts of ourselves fall before the eyes of His glory that is the humbling required.

3. A sense of our guilt and filthiness. The mighty hand does not press us down, but as sinners; it is meet then that under it we see our sinfulness; our guilt, by which we shall appear criminals justly caused to suffer: our filthiness, whereupon we may be brought to loathe ourselves; and then we shall think nothing lays us lower than we well deserve. It is the overlooking our sinfulness that allows the proud heart to swell.

4. A silent submission under the hand of God. His sovereignty challenges this of us. "Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" And nothing but unsubdued pride of spirit can allow us to answer again under His sovereign hand. A view of His sovereignty humbled and awed the Psalmist into submission, with a profound silence. "I was dumb, I did not open my mouth, because You did it." "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed is the name of the Lord. " And,

"What shall I answer You? I will lay my hand on my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther. " And Eli, "It is the Lord; let Him do what pleases Him. "

5. A magnifying of His mercies towards us in the midst of all His proceedings against us. Has He laid us low? If we are duly humbled we shall wonder He has laid us no lower. For however low the humble are laid, they will see they are not yet so low as their sins deserve.

6. A holy and silent admiration of the ways and counsels of God, as to us unsearchable. Pride of heart thinks nothing too high for the man, and so arraigns before its tribunal the Divine proceedings, pretends to see through them, censures freely, and condemns; but humiliation of spirit disposes a man to think awfully and honorably of those mysteries of Providence he is not able to see through.

7. A forgetting and laying aside before the Lord all our dignity, by which we excel others. Pride feeds itself on the man's real or imaginary personal excellency and dignity, and, being so use to practising it before others, cannot forget it before God. "God, I thank You I am not as other men. " But humiliation of spirit makes it all vanish before him, as does the shadow before the shining sun, and it lays the man, in his own eyes, lower than any. "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. "

8. A submitting readily to the meanest offices requisite in or agreeable to our circumstances. Pride at every turn finds something that is below the man to condescend, or stoop to, measuring by his own mind and will, not by the circumstances God has placed him in. But humility measures by the circumstances one is placed in, and readily falls in with what they require. Concerning this our Savior gave us an example

to be imitated: "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death. " "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet. "

Use. Of exhortation. Let the bent of your heart, then, in all your humbling circumstances, be towards the humbling of your spirit, as under the mighty hand of God. This lies in two things.

1. Carefully notice all your humbling circumstances, and overlook none of them. Observe your imperfections; inferiority in relations; contradictions you meet with; your afflictions; uncertainty of all things about you; and your sinfulness. Look through them designedly, and consider the steps of the conduct of Providence toward you in these, that you may know yourselves, and may not be strangers at home, blind to your own real state and case.

2. Observe what these circumstances require of you, as suitable to them; bend your endeavors towards it, to bring your spirits into that temper of humiliation, that, as your lot is really low in all these respects, so your spirits may be low too, as under the mighty hand of God. Let this be your great aim through your whole life, and your exercise every day.

Motive 1. God is certainly at work to humble one and all of us. However high any are lifted up in this world, Providence has hung certain badges for humiliation on them, whether they will notice them or not. Now, it is our duty to fall in with the design of Providence, that while God is humbling us we may be humbled ourselves, and that we may not receive humbling dispensations in vain.

2. The humiliation of our spirit will not take effect without our own agency in there: while God is working on us that way, we

must work together with Him; for He works on us as rational agents, who, being moved, move themselves. God by His providence may force down our lot and condition without us, but the spirit must come down voluntarily and of choice, or not at all; therefore, strike in with humbling providences in humbling yourselves, as mariners spread out the sails when the wind begins to blow that they may go away before it.

3. If you do not you resist the mighty hand of God. You resist in so far as you do not yield, but stand as a rock, keeping your ground against your Maker in humbling providences. "You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; you have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. " Much more when you work against Him to force up your condition, which you may see God means to hold down. And of this resistance consider.

(1.) The sinfulness; what an evil thing it is. It is a direct fighting against God, a shaking off of subjection to our sovereign Lord, and a rising in rebellion against him.

(2.) The folly of it. How unequal is the match! How can the struggle end well? What else can possibly be the issue of the potsherds of the earth dashing against the Rock of ages, but that they are broken to pieces? All men must certainly bow or break under the mighty hand of God.

4. This is the time of humiliation, even the time of this life. Everything is beautiful in its season; and the bringing down of the spirit now is beautiful, as in the time of it, even as the ploughing and sowing of the ground is in the spring. Consider,

(1.) Humiliation of spirit is in the sight of God of great price. As he has a special aversion to pride of heart, he has a special liking of humility. The humbling of sinners and bringing them

down from their heights, in which the corruption of their nature has set them, is the great end of His Word and of His providences.

(2.) It is no easy thing to humble men's spirits; it is not a little that will do it; it is a work that is not soon done. There is need of a digging deep for a thorough humiliation in the work of conversion. Many a stroke must be given at the root of the tree of the natural pride of the heart before it falls; often it seems to be fallen, and yet it arises again. And even when the root stroke is given in believers, the rod of pride buds again, so that there is still occasion for new humbling work.

(3.) The whole time of this life is appointed for humiliation. This was signified by the forty years the Israelites had in the wilderness. It was so to Christ, and therefore it must be so to men. And in that time they must either be formed according to His image, or else appear as reprobate silver that will not take it on by any means. So that whatever lifting up men may now and then get in this life, the habitual course of it will still be humbling.

(4.) There is no humbling after this. If the pride of the heart is not brought down in this life it will never be; no kindly humiliation is to be expected in the other life. There the proud will be broken in pieces, but not softened; their lot and condition will be brought to the lowest pass, but the pride of their spirits will still remain, from which they will be in eternal agonies, through the opposition between their spirits and lot.

Therefore, beware lest you sit your time of humiliation: humbled we must be, or we are gone forever; and this is the time, the only time of it; therefore, make your hay while the sun shines; strike in with humbling providences, and do not fight against them while you have them. The season of grace will not last; if you sleep in seedtime, you will beg in harvest.

5. This is the way to turn humbling circumstances to a good account; so that, instead of being losers, you would be gainers by them. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. " Would you gather grapes of these thorns and thistles, set yourselves to get your spirits humbled by them.

Humiliation of spirit is a most valuable thing in itself. It cannot be bought too dear. Whatever one is made to suffer, if his spirit is by that means duly brought down, he has what is well worth bearing all the hardship for.

Humility of spirit brings many advantages along with it. It is a fruitful bough, well loaden, wherever it is. It contributes to one's ease under the cross. It is a sacrifice particularly acceptable to God. The eye of God is particularly on such for good. "To this man I will look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word " Yea, He dwells with them. And it carries a line of wisdom through one's whole conduct: "with the lowly is wisdom. "

6. Consider it is a mighty hand that is at work with us—the hand of the mighty God; let us then bend our spirits towards a compliance with it, and not wrestle against it. Consider,

(1.) We must fall under it. Since the design of it is to bring us down we cannot stand before it; for it cannot miscarry in its designs. "My counsel shall stand. " So fall before it we must, either in the way of duty or judgment. "Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, by which the people fall under You. "

(2.) They that are so wise as to fall in humiliation under the mighty hand, be they ever so low, the same hand will raise them up again. In a word, be the proud ever so high, God will

bring them down; be the humble ever so low, God will raise them up.

Directions For Reaching This Humiliation.

1. General Directions.

Direct. 1. Fix it in your heart to seek some spiritual improvement of the conduct of Providence towards you. Until your heart has gotten set, your humiliation is not to be expected. But nothing is more reasonable if we would act either like men or Christians, than to aim at turning what is so grievous to the flesh to the profit of the spirit; that if we are losers on one hand we may be gainers on another.

2. Settle the matter of your eternal salvation in the first place, by going to Christ, and taking God for your God in Him, according to the Gospel-offer. Let your humbling circumstances move you to this, that while the creature dries up, you may go to the Fountain: for it is impossible to reach due humiliation under His mighty hand, without faith in Him as your God and friend.

3. Use the means of soul-humbling in the faith of the promise. Moses, smiting the rock in faith of the promise, made water gush out, which otherwise would not at all have appeared. Let us do likewise in dealing with our rocky hearts. They must be laid on the soft bed of the Gospel, and struck there, as "Turn to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful;" or they will never kindly break or fall in humiliation.

II. Particular Directions.

1. Assure yourselves that there are no circumstances that you are in so humbling but you may get your heart acceptably brought down to them. "But God is faithful, who will not allow

you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it. " This is truth. "My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And you should be persuaded of it, with application to yourselves, if ever you would reach the end. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. " God allows you to be persuaded of it, whatever is your weakness and the difficulty of the task. "For our sakes this is written, that he that ploughs should plough in hope; and he that threshes in hope shall be partaker of his hope. " And the belief of it is a piece of the life of faith. If you have no hope of success, your endeavors, as they will be heartless, so they will be vain. "Therefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees. "

2. Whatever hand is, or is not, in your humbling circumstances, take God for your part, and consider yourselves in there as under His mighty hand. Men in their humbling circumstances overlook God, so they do not find themselves called to humility under them; they fix their eyes on the creature instrument, and instead of humility, their hearts rise. But take Him for your party that you may remember the battle and do no more.

3. Be much in the thoughts of God's infinite greatness; consider His holiness and majesty, to awe you into the deepest humiliation. Job met with many humbling providences in his case, but he was never sufficiently humbled under them, till the Lord made a new discovery of Himself to him, in His infinite majesty and greatness. He kept his ground against his friends, and stood to his points, till the Lord took that method with him. It was begun with thunder. Then followed God's voice out of the whirlwind, by which Job is brought down. It is renewed till he is further humbled, "Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. "

4. Make it your habit to silently admit mysteries in the conduct of Providence towards you, which you are not able to comprehend, but will adore. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" That was the first word God said to Job, "who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" It went to his heart, stuck with him, and he comes over it again, as that which particularly brought him to his knees, to the dust. Even in those steps of Providence which we seem to see far into, we may well allow there are some mysteries beyond what we see. And in those which are perplexing and puzzling, sovereignty should silence us; His infinite wisdom should satisfy, though we cannot see.

5. Be much in the thoughts of your own sinfulness. "Behold, I am vile. What shall I answer You? I will lay my hand on my mouth. " It is overlooking of that which gives us so much ado with humbling circumstances. While the eyes are held that they cannot see sin the heart rises against them; but when they are opened, it falls. Therefore, whenever God is dealing with you in humbling dispensations, turn your eyes, on that occasion, on the sinfulness of your nature, heart, and life, and that will help forward your humiliation.

6. Settle it in your heart that there is need of all the humbling circumstances you are put in. This is truth, "Though now for a season (if need be) you are in heaviness through manifold temptations." God brings no needless trials on us, afflicts none but as their need requires: "For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." That is an observable difference between our earthly and our heavenly Father's correction: "They, after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. " Look to the temper of your own hearts and nature, how apt to be lifted up, to forget God, to be carried away with the vanities of the world: what foolishness is bound up in your heart. Thus you

will see the need of humbling circumstances for ballast, and of the rod for the fool's back; and if at any time you cannot see that need, believe it on the ground of God's infinite wisdom, that does nothing in vain.

7. Believe a kind design of Providence in them towards you. God calls us to this, as the key that opens the heart under them. Satan suggests suspicions to the contrary, as the bar which may hold it shut: "This evil is of the Lord, what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" As long as the suspicion of an ill design in them against us reigns, the creature will, like the worm at the man's feet, put itself in the best posture of defence it can, and harden itself in sorrow; but the faith of a kind design will cause it to open out itself in humility before Him.

Case. "Oh, if I knew there were a kind design in it, I would willingly bear it, although there were more of it; but I fear a ruining design of Providence against me in it. "

Answ. Now, what word of God, or discovery from heaven, have you to ground these fears on? None at all but from hell. What do you think the design towards you in the Gospel is? Can you believe no kind design in all the words of grace there heaped up? What is that, I pray, but black unbelief in its hue of hell, flying in the face of the truth of God, and making Him a liar. The Gospel is a breathing of love and good-will to the world of mankind sinners. But you do not believe it, in that case, more than devils believe it. If you can believe a kind design there, you must believe it in your humbling circumstances too; for the design of Providence cannot be contrary to the design of the Gospel; but contrariwise, the latter is to help forward to the other.

8. Think with yourselves, that this life is the time of trial for heaven. "Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for

when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him." And therefore there should be a welcoming of humbling circumstances in that view, "Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations. " If there is an honourable office or beneficial employment to be bestowed, men strive to be taken on trial for it, in hope they may be in this way legally admitted to it. Now God takes trial of men for heaven by humbling circumstances, as the whole Bible teaches; and shall men be so very loath to stoop to them? I would ask you,

(1.) Is it nothing to you to stand a candidate for glory, to be put on trial for heaven? Is there not an honor in it, an honor which all the saints have had? "Behold, we count them happy that endure, " &c. And a fair prospect in it? "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Do but put the case, that God should overlook you in that case, as one whom it is needless ever to try on that head; that He should order you your portion in this life with full ease, as one that is to get no more of Him; what would that be?

(2.) What a vast disproportion is there between your trials and the future glory! Your most humbling circumstances, how light are they in comparison of the weight of it! The longest continuance of them is but for a moment, compared with that eternal weight. Alas! There is much unbelief at the root of all our uneasiness under humbling circumstances. Had we a clearer view of the other world we should not make so much of either the smiles or frowns of this.

(3.) What do you think of coming foul off in the trial of your humbling circumstances? "The lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melts in vain; for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord has rejected them. " That the issue of it is only that your heart

appear of such a temper as by no means to be humbled; and that therefore you must and shall be taken off them, while yet no humbling appears. I think the awfulness of the dispensation is such as might set up to our knees to deprecate the lifting us up from our humbling circumstances, before our hearts are humbled.

9. Think with yourselves, how, by humbling circumstances, the Lord prepares us for heaven. "Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The stones and timber are laid down, turned over and over, and hewed, before they are set up in the building; and not set up just as they come out of the quarry and wood. Were they capable of a choice, such of them as would refuse the iron tool would be refused a place in the building. Pray, how do you think to be made suitable for heaven by the warm sunshine of this world's ease, and getting all your will here? Nay, sirs, that would put your mouth out of taste for the joys of the other world. Vessels of dishonour are fitted for destruction that way; but vessels of honor for glory by humbling circumstances. I would here say,

(1.) Will nothing please you but two heavens, one here, another hereafter? God has secured one heaven for the saints, one place where they shall get all their will, wish, and desire; where there shall be no weight on them to hold them down; and that is in the other world. But you must have it both here and there or you cannot digest it. Why do you not quarrel, too, that there are not two summers in one year; two days in the twenty-four hours? The order of the one heaven is as firm as that of the years and days, and you cannot reverse it. Therefore, choose whether you will take your night or your day first, your winter or your summer, your heaven here or hereafter.

(2.) Without being humbled with humbling circumstances in this life you are not capable of heaven. "Now, he that has wrought us for the self-same thing is God. " You may indeed lie at ease here in a bed of sloth and dream of heaven, big with hopes of a fool's paradise, wishing to cast yourselves just out of Delilah's lap into Abraham's bosom; but except you be humbled you are not capable,

(1.) Of the Bible-heaven, that heaven described in the Old and New Testaments. Is not that heaven a lifting up in due time? But, how shall you be lifted up that are never well got down? Where will your tears be to be wiped away? What place will there be for your triumph, who will not fight the good fight? How can it be a rest to you who cannot submit to labor?

(2.) Of the saints' heaven. "And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." This answers the question about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the saints with them there. They were brought down to the dust by humbling circumstances, and out of these they came before the throne. How can you ever think to be lifted up with them with whom you cannot think to be brought down?

(3.) Of Christ's heaven. "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God " Oh! Consider how the Forerunner made His way. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" And lay your account with it that if you get where He is you must go there as He went. "And He said, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. "

10. Give up at length with your towering hopes from this world, and confine them to the world to come. Be as pilgrims and strangers here, looking for your rest in heaven, and not till

you come there. There is a prevailing evil. "You are wearied in the greatness of your way; yet you did not say, There is no hope. " So the Babel-building is still continued, though it has fallen down again and again. For men say, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. " This makes humbling work very lonesome; we are so hard to quit hold of the creature, to fall off from the breast and be weaned. But fasten on the other world, and let your hold of this go; so shall you "be humbled" indeed under "the mighty hand." The faster you hold the happiness of that world the easier it will be to accommodate yourselves to your humbling circumstances here.

II. Make use of Christ in all His offices for your humiliation under your humbling circumstances. That only is kindly humiliation that comes in His way. "And they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn," &c. This you must do by trusting on Him for that effect.

(1.) As a Priest for you. You have a conscience full of guilt, and that will make one uneasy in any circumstances; it will be like a thorn in the shoulder on which a burden is laid. But the blood of Christ will purge the conscience, draw out the thorn, give ease, and fit for service, doing our suffering. "How much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? "

(2.) As your Prophet to teach you. We have need to be taught rightly to discern our humbling circumstances; for often we mistake them so far that they prove an oppressive load; whereas, could we rightly see them, just as God sets them to us, they would be humbling, but not so oppressive. Truly we need Christ, and the light of His word and Spirit, to let us see your cross and trial as well as our duty.

(3.) As your King. You have a stiff heart, loath to bow, even in humbling circumstances: take a lesson from Moses what to do in such a case. "And he said, Let my Lord, I pray you, go among us (for it is a stiff-necked people), and pardon our iniquity and our sin. " Put it in His hand that is strong and mighty. He is able to cause it to melt, and, like wax before the fire, turn to the seal.

Think on these directions in order to put them in practice, remembering—If you know these things you are happy if you do them. Remember, humbling work is a word that will fill your hand while you live here, and that you cannot come to the end of it till death; and humbling circumstances will attend you while you are in this lower world. A change of them you may get; but a freedom from them you cannot, till you come to heaven. So the humbling circumstances of our imperfections, relations, contradictions, afflictions, uncertainties, and sinfulness, will afford matter of exercise to us while here.—What remains of the purpose of this text I shall comprise in,—

Doctrine II.—There is a due time in which those that now humble themselves under the mighty hand of God will certainly be lifted up.

1. Those who shall share of this lifting up must lay their account in the first place, with a casting down. "in the world you shall have tribulation. " There is no coming to the promised land, according to the settled method of grace, but through the wilderness: nor entering into this exaltation, but through a strait gate. If we cannot away with the casting down, we shall not taste the sweet of the lifting up.

2. Being cast down by the mighty hand of God, we must learn to lie still and quiet under it, till the same hand that cast us down raise us up, if we would share of this promised lifting up. It is not the being cast down into humbling circumstances by

the providence of God, but the coming down of our spirits under them, by the grace of God, that brings us within the compass of this promise.

3. Those who are never humbled in humbling circumstances shall never be lifted up in the way of this promise. Men may keep their spirits on the high bend in their humbling circumstances, and in that case may get a lifting up; but such a lifting up as will end in a more grievous fall. "Surely you set them in slippery places, you cast them down in a moment." But they who will not humble themselves in humbling circumstances will find that their obstinacy will keep their misery ever fast on them without remedy.

4. Humility of spirit in humbling circumstances ascertains a lifting up out of them some time, with the good-will and favor of Heaven. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." Solomon observes that "A soft answer turns away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger." And so it is, that while the proud, through their obstinacy, do but wreath the yoke faster about their own necks, the humble ones, by their yielding, make their relief sure. "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory. He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces. "So the cannon will break down a stone wall, while yielding packs of wool take away its force.

5. There is an appointed time for the lifting up of those that humble themselves in their humbling circumstances. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely

come, it will not tarry." To everything there is a time, as for humbling, so for lifting up. We do not know it but God knows it, Who has appointed it. Let not the humble one say, I shall never be lifted up. This is a time fixed for it, as precisely as for the rising of the sun after a long and dark night, or the return of the spring after a long and sharp winter.

6. It is not to be expected that immediately on one's humbling himself, the lifting up is to follow. No: one is not merely to lie down under the mighty hand, but to lie still, waiting the due time; humbling work is lonesome work; the Israelites had forty years of it in the wilderness. God's people must be brought to put a blank in His hand, as to the time; and while they have a long night of walking in darkness, must trust. "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. "

7. The appointed time for the lifting up is the due time, the time fittest for it, in which it will come most seasonably. "And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we do not faint. " For that is the time God has chosen for it; and be sure His choice, as the choice of infinite wisdom, is the best; and therefore faith sets to wait it. "He that believes shall not make haste. " Much of the beauty of anything depends on the timing of it, and He has fixed that in all that He does. "He has made everything beautiful in His time. "

8. The lifting up of the humble will not fail to come in the appointed and due time. Time makes no halting, it is running day and night; so the due time is fast coming, and when it comes it will bring the lifting up along with it. Let the humbling circumstances be ever so low, ever so hopeless, it is impossible but the lifting up from them must come in the due time.

A word, in the general, to the lifting up, abiding those that humble themselves. There is a two-fold lifting up.

1. A partial lifting up, competent to the humbled in time during this life. "I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up, and have not made my foes to rejoice over me. " This is a lifting up in part, and but in part, not wholly; and such liftings up the humbled may expect while in this world, but no more. – These give a breathing to the weary, a change of burdens, but do not set them at perfect ease. So Israel, in the wilderness, in the midst of their many mourning times, had some singing ones.

2. A total lifting up, competent to them at the end of time, at death. "It came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Then the Lord deals with them no more by parcels, but carries their relief to perfection. Then He takes off all their burdens, eases them of all their weights, and lays no more on forever. He then lifts them up to a height they were never at before, no, not even at their highest. He sets them quite above all that is low, and there fixes them, never to be brought down more. Now there is a due time for both these.

(1.) For the partial lifting up. Every time is not fit for it; we are not always fit to receive comfort and ease, or a change of our burdens. God sees there are times in which it is needful for His people to be "in heaviness," to have their "hearts brought down with grief: " But then there is a time really appointed for it in the Divine wisdom, when He will think it as needful to comfort them as before to bring down. "So that, contrariwise, you ought rather to forgive, and comfort him, lest perhaps such an one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow. " We are, in that case, in the hand of God, as in the hand of our physician, who appoints the time the drawing plaster shall

continue, and when the healing plaster shall be applied, and leaves it not to the patient.

(2.) For the total lifting up. When we are sore oppressed with our burdens, we are ready to think, O to be away, and set beyond them all! "As a servant earnestly desires the shadow, and as an hireling looks for the reward of his work; so am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me." But it may be fitter, for all that, that we stay awhile, and struggle without our burdens. "Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith. " A few days might have taken Israel out of Egypt into Canaan; but they would have been too soon there if they had made all that speed; so it was necessary that they spend forty years in the wilderness till their due time of entering Canaan should come. And be sure the saints entering heaven will be convinced that the time of it is best chosen, and there will be a beauty in that it was no sooner. And thus a lifting up is secured for the humble.

If one should assure you, when reduced to poverty, that the time would certainly come yet that you should be rich; when sore sick, that you should not die of that disease, but certainly recover; that would help you to bear your poverty and sickness the better, and you would comfort yourselves with that prospect. However, one may continue poor, and never be rich, may be sick, and die of his disease; but whoever humbles themselves under their humbling circumstances, we can assure them from the Lord's word they shall certainly, without all peradventure, be lifted up out of, and relieved from, their humbling circumstances; they shall certainly see the day of their ease and relief, when they shall remember their burdens as waters that fail. And you may be assured of it from the following considerations.

The nature of God, duly considered, insures it. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will He keep His anger forever. " The humbled soul, looking to God in Christ, may see three things in His nature jointly securing it.

1. Infinite power, that can do all things. No circumstances are so low but He can raise them; so entangling and perplexing but He can unravel them; so hopeless but He can remedy them. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Be our case what it will, it is never past reach with Him to help it; but then it is the most proper season for Him to take it in hand when all others have given it over. "For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants; when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left. "

2. Infinite goodness inclining to help. He is good and gracious in His nature. And therefore His power is a spring of comfort to them. Men may be willing that are not able, or able that are not willing; but infinite goodness joining infinite power in God, may ascertain the humbled of a lifting up in due time. That is a word of inconceivable sweetness. "And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." He has the bowels of a father towards the humble. "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. " Yea, bowels of mercy more tender than a mother to her sucking child. Wherefore, nevertheless His wisdom may see it necessary to put them in humbling circumstances, and keep them there for a time, it is not possible He can leave them there altogether.

3. Infinite wisdom, that does nothing in vain, and therefore will not needlessly keep one in humbling circumstances. "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies; for He does not afflict willingly,

nor grieve the children of men." God sends afflictions for humbling, as the end and design to be brought about by them; when that is obtained, and there is no more use for them that way we may assure ourselves they will be taken off.

The providence of God, viewed in its stated methods of procedures with its objects, insures it. Turn your eyes which way you will on the Divine providence, you may conclude from it that in due time the humble will be lifted up.

Observe the providence of God in the revolutions of the whole course of nature, day succeeding to the longest night, a summer to the winter, a waxing to a waning of the moon, a flowing to an ebbing of the sea, &c. Let not the Lord's humbled ones be idle spectators of these things. They are for our learning. "Thus says the Lord, which gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea, when the waves of it roar; the Lord of hosts is His name. If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever " Will the Lord's hand keep such a steady course in the earth, sea, and visible heavens, as to bring a lifting up in them after a casting down, and only forget His humbled ones? No, by no means.

Observe the providence of God in the dispensations of it, about the man Christ, the most noble and august object of it, more valuable than a thousand worlds. Did not Providence keep this course with Him, first humbling Him, then exalting Him, and lifting Him up? First bringing Him to the dust of death, in a course of sufferings thirty-three years, then exalting Him to the Father's right hand in an eternity of glory? "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. " "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedience unto death, even

the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him." The exaltation could not fail to follow His humiliation. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" And He saw and believed it would follow, as the springing of the seed does the sowing it. There is a near concern the humbled in humbling circumstances have here.

This is the pattern Providence copies after in its conduct towards you. The Father was so well pleased with this method in the case of His own Son, that it was determined to be followed and just copied over again in the case of all the heirs of glory. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brothers." And who would not be pleased to walk through the darkest valley treading His steps? This is a sure pledge of your lifting up. Christ, in His state of humiliation, was considered as a public person and representative, and so is He in His exaltation. So Christ's exaltation insures your exaltation out of your humbling circumstances. "Your dead men shall live, together with My dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in the dust. " "Come and let us return to the Lord: for He has torn, and He will heal us; He has smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. In the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. " "And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus " Yea, He is gone into the state of glory for us as our forerunner. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever. "

His humiliation was the price of your exaltation, and His exaltation a testimony of the acceptance of its payment to the full. There are no humbling circumstances you are in, but you would have perished in them, had not He purchased your lifting up out of them by His own humiliation. Now, His

humbling grace in you is an evidence of the acceptance of His humiliation for your lifting up.

Observe the providence of God towards the Church in all ages. This has been the course the Lord has kept with her. Abel was slain by wicked Cain, to the great grief of Adam and Eve and the rest of their pious children; but then there was another seed raised up in Abel's room. Noah and his sons were buried alive in the ark for more than a year; but then they were brought out into a new world and blessed. Abraham for many years went childless; but at length Isaac was born. Israel was long in miserable bondage in Egypt; but at length seated in the promised land, &c. We must be content to go by the footsteps of the flock; and if in humiliation, we shall surely follow them in exaltation too.

Observe the providence of God in the dispensations of His grace towards His children. The general rule is. "For God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. " How are they brought into a state of grace? Is it not by a sound work of humiliation going before? And ordinarily the greater the measure of grace designed for any, the deeper is their humiliation before, as in Paul's case. If they are to be recovered out of a backsliding case, the same method is followed: so that the deepest humiliation ordinarily makes way for the greatest comfort, and the darkest hour goes before the rising of the Sun of righteousness on them.

Observe the providence of God at length throwing down wicked men, however long they stand and prosper, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. " They are long green before the sun, but at length they are suddenly smitten with an east wind, and wither away; their lamp goes out with a stench, and they are put out in obscure darkness. Now, it is

inconsistent with the benignity of the Divine nature to forget the humble to raise them, while He minds the proud to abase them.

The word of God puts it beyond all peradventure, which, from the beginning to the end, is the humbled saint's security for a lifting up. "Remember the word to Your servant, on which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction; for Your word has quickened me. " His word is the great letter of His name, which He will certainly cause to shine, "For you have magnified Your word above all Your name;" and in all generations has been safely relied on. Consider,

1. The doctrines of the word; which teach faith and hope for the time, and the happy issue which the exercise of these graces will have. The whole current of Scripture, to those in humbling circumstances, is, "not to cast away their confidence, but to hope to the end;" and that for this good reason, "that it shall not be in vain. " "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord. " "For they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me. "

2. The promises of the word, by which heaven is expressly engaged for a lifting up to those that humble themselves in humbling circumstances: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up;" "And he that humbles himself shall be exalted " It may take a time to prepare them for lifting up, but that being done it is secured. "Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear " They have His word for deliverance. And though they may seem to be forgotten, they shall not be always so; the time of their deliverance will come. "For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever." "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. "

3. The examples of the word sufficiently confirming the truth of the doctrines and promises. "For whatever things were written before, were written for our learning: that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. " In the doctrines and promises the lifting up is proposed to our faith, to be reckoned on the credit of God's word; but in the examples it is, in the case of others, set before our eyes to be seen. "Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. " There we see it in the case of Abraham, Job, David, Paul, and other saints; but above all in the case of the man Christ.

4. The intercession of Christ, joining the prayers and cries of His humbled people, in their humbling circumstances, insures a lifting up for them at length. Be it so, that the proud cry not when He binds them; yet His own humbled ones will certainly cry to Him. "Deep calls to deep at the noise of your watersprouts; all your waves and your billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer to the God of my life. " And though unbelievers may soon be worn out and give it over altogether, surely believers will not do so. But even if they do so in a fit of temptation, dropping their hands in hopelessness, they will find it necessary to take it up again "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him nor speak His name any more. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with holding back, and I could not stay. " They will cry night and day unto him, knowing no time for giving it over till they be lifted up. "My eye trickles down and does not cease or have any intermission until the Lord looks down and beholds from heaven." Now, when Christ's intercession is joined with these cries, there cannot but fail to be a lifting up.

And Christ's intercession is certainly joined with the cries and prayers of the humbled in their humbling circumstances, "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, so that he might offer it with the prayers of all saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. " They are helped to groan for relief by the Spirit, and the prayers and groans which are through the Spirit are certainly to be made effectual by the intercession of the Son. And you may know they are by the Spirit if it happens that you are helped to continue praying, hoping for your relief on the ground of God's word of promise. For that praying which is by nature is a pool that will dry up in a long drought. The Spirit of prayer is the lasting spring. "In the day when I cried, You answered me and strengthened me with strength in my soul. " Truly there is an intercession in Heaven, on account of the humbling circumstances of the humble ones, "Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against which You have had indignation these seventy years?" How then can they fail to get a lifting up in due time?

Christ is in deep earnest in His intercession for His people in their humbling circumstances. Some will speak a good work in favor of the helpless, that would not be concerned if they succeed or not, but our Intercessor is in earnest in behalf of His humbled ones. For He is touched with sympathy in their case, "In all their affliction He was afflicted." A most tender sympathy has He; "For he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye. " He has their case upon His heart, where He is in the holy place in the highest heavens, and He keeps an exact account of the time of their humbling circumstances, however long it may be. And it is His own business. The lifting up which they are to have is a thing that is secured to Him in the promises made to Him on account of the blood He shed for them. So not only are they looking on earth, but the man

Christ is in Heaven looking for the accomplishment of these promises, "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever sat down on the right hand of God; from that time on expecting until His enemies should be made His footstool. " How is it possible, then, that He should be frustrated? Again, these humbling circumstances are still His own sufferings, though not in His person, yet in His members. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church." Therefore there is all ground to conclude that He is in deep earnest.

His intercession is always effectual, "And I know that You hear Me always. " It cannot fail to be so, because He is the Father's well-beloved Son. His intercession has a plea of justice for its ground, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. " And He has all power in Heaven and in earth lodged in Him And, finally, He and His Father are one, and their will is one. So both Christ and His Father desire the lifting up of the humble ones, but yet only in due time.

I now proceed to a more particular view of the point: We will consider the lifting up as brought about in time, which is the partial lifting up. This lifting up does not take place in every case of a child of God. One may be humbled in low circumstances from which he is not to get a lifting up in time. We would not from the promise presently conclude that we, being humbled under our low circumstances, shall certainly be taken out of them and freed from them before we get to the end of our journey. For it is certain there are some humiliating things which we can by no means be rid of while in this world, such as our imperfections, our sinfulness, and our mortality. And there are particular humbling circumstances the Lord may bring about us, and keep about us, until we go down to the grave. Yet at the same time He may lift up another from the same circumstances. Heman was pressed down all along,

from his youth onward; but others have been pressed down all their lifetime.

Objections: If that is the case, what about the promise to lift us up? Where is the lifting up if one may go to the grave under the weight?

Answer: If there were no life after this, there would perhaps be ground for such an objection. But since there is another life, there is no valid objection to be made. In the other life the promise will be accomplished to those who have been humbled. Consider that the great term for accomplishment of the promises is the other life, and not this one—"These all died in the faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off; and they were persuaded of them and embraced them. "Whatever accomplishment of the promise is here it is not of the nature of a stock, but it is but a sample or a pledge.

Question: But then may we not stop praying for the lifting up in that case?

Answer: No, because we do not know when that is our case. For a case may be past all hope in our eyes and in the eyes of others, yet God may design a lifting up in time. This was Job's case, "What is my strength that I should hope? And what is my end that I should prolong my life?" But, be that as it may, we should never give over praying for the lifting up, since it will certainly come to all that pray for it—if not here, then hereafter. The promise is sure, and that is the commandment; therefore such praying cannot fail to have a happy issue at length, "Call on Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." The whole life of a Christian is a praying, waiting life. And we are given temporal deliverances as pledges to encourage us to it. "And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we

ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body. " And whoever observes that full lifting up at death to be at hand must certainly rise, if he has given over his case as hopeless.

However, there are some cases in which this lifting up does not take place. God gives His people some notable deliverances, even in time raising them out of remarkably humbling circumstances. The storm is changed into a calm, and they remember it as waters that fail.

Some may be in humbling circumstances very long, heavy and hopeless circumstances, and yet a lifting up be held back for a long time. This is sometimes the case with the children of God who are set to bear the yoke in their youth as it was with Joseph and David; or of those that get it laid on them in their middle age, as it was with Job, who could not have been less than forty years old when his trouble came; but afterwards he lived one hundred and forty years. God by such methods prepares a man for peculiar usefulness.

Others may be in humbling circumstances, heavy and long, and may be quite hopeless in the ordinary course of providence, yet they may get a lifting up before they come to their journey's end. The life of some of God's children is like a cloudy and rainy day, in which the sun breaks out from under the clouds in the afternoon, shining fair and clear a little, and then it sets. ("And it shall happen in that day that the light shall not be clear nor dark. But it shall happen that at evening time it shall be light. ") Such was the case with Jacob in his old age, brought in honor and comfort into Egypt, to his son, and then he died.

Yet whatever liftings up they may get in this life, they will never lack some weights to hang on them for their humbling. They may have their singing times, but their songs while in

this world will be mixed with groanings, "For we that are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened." The unmixed dispensation is reserved for the other world. But this one will be a wilderness to the very end, where there will be howlings alongside of the most joyful notes.

All the liftings up which the humbled meet with now are pledges, and only pledges and samples of the great lifting up which awaits them on the other side. And they should look upon them as such, "And I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope. And she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. " Our Lord is now leading His people through the wilderness, and the manna and the water of the rock are earnest of the milk and honey flowing in the promised land. They have not yet come home to their Father's house, but they are travelling on the road. And their elder brother Christ is with them, bearing their expenses, taking them into inns for rest by the way, and as it were, refreshing them with partial liftings up. But then they must get on the road again. And that entertainment by the way is but a pledge of the full entertainment He will give them when they arrive at their eternal home.

Objection: But people may get a lifting up here in time, yet there is no pledge of a lifting up on the other side. How then shall I know it is a pledge?

Answer: That lifting up which comes by the promises is certainly a pledge of the full lifting up in the other world. For, as the other life is the proper time for the accomplishing of the promises, so we may be sure that when God once begins to clear His bond, He will certainly hold on until it is fully cleared. "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me." So we may say, as Naomi said to Ruth, when she received the six measures of barley from Boaz, "He will not rest until he has

finished the thing today." There are liftings up that come by common providence and these indeed are single, not being pledges of more. But the promise chains mercies together, so that one received is a pledge of another to come; yea, of the whole chain to the end.

Question: But how shall I know that the lifting up comes by way of the promise?

Answer: That which comes by the way of the promise comes in the low way of humiliation, the high way of faith, or believing the promise, and the long way of waiting hope and patient continuance, "Therefore, be patient, brothers, to the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and he has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain." Humility prepares for the accomplishment of the promise, faith sucks its breast, and patient waiting hangs by the breast until the milk comes flowing forth abundantly.

But no liftings up of God's children here are any more than pledges of lifting up. God gives worldly men their stock here, but His children get nothing but a sample of theirs here. Even as the servant at the term gets his fee in a round sum, while the young heir gets nothing but a few pence for spending money. The truth is, this same spending money is more valuable than the world's stock "You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." But though it is better than that and their services too and worth more than all their waiting, yet it is below the honor of their God to put them off with it, "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one; therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. "

We shall now consider what they will get by this lifting up promised to the humbled ones. They will get:

1. A removal of their humbling circumstances. God having tried them a while humbling them and bringing down their hearts, will at length take their burden off, remove the weight that has hung on them so long, and so will take them off that part of their trial joyfully. And He will let them get up, though their back has been long bowed down. And this He will do in two ways: either in kind, or by a total removal of the burden. Job got such a lifting up when the Lord turned back his captivity, increased again his family and substance, which had both been desolated. When his persecutor Saul fell in battle, David was brought to the kingdom after many a weary day, yet he had expected one day to fall by his hand. It is easy with our God to make such turns in the most humbling circumstances.

Or the equivalent good, removing the weight of the burden so that it does not press them down any more, even though it remains. "And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather glory in my infirmities, so that the power of Christ may rest on me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities. " Though they may not yet be to the shore, yet their head is no longer under the water, but lifted up. David speaks feelingly of such a lifting up, "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion. In the secret of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me on a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me. Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle. I will sing, yea, I will sing praises to the Lord." Such an experience overwhelmed the Hebrews in the fiery furnace: the fire burned, but it could burn nothing but their bonds; they had its warmth and its light, but nothing of the scorching heat.

2. A comfortable sight of the acceptance of their prayers which they put up in their humbling circumstances. While prayers are not answered, but trouble continued, they are apt to think they are not accepted or regarded in Heaven, because there is no change in their case, "If I had called, and He had answered me, yet I would not believe that He had listened to my voice, for He breaks me with a tempest." But that is a mistake! They are accepted immediately, even though there does not seem to be an answer to prayer, "And this is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." The Lord does with them as a father with the letters coming thick from his son abroad, He reads them one by one with pleasure and carefully lays them up to be answered at His convenience. And when the answer comes, the son will know how acceptable they were to his father.

3. A heart-satisfying answer to their prayers, so that they shall not only get the thing, but see they have it as an answer of prayer. And they will put a double value on the mercy. Accepted prayers may not be answered for a long time; in Abraham's and David's case it was many years, but they cannot miscarry or be unanswered at length. The time will come when God will count it out to them according to the promise, and they shall change their note and say, "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplication:" looking on their lifting up as bearing the signature of the hand of a prayer-hearing God.

4. Full satisfaction' as to the conduct of Providence, in all the steps of the humbling circumstances, and the delay of the lifting up, however perplexing these were before. Standing on the shore and looking back to what they have passed through, they will be made to say, "He has done all things well. " Those things which are bitter to Christians in the passing through are

very sweet when we reflect on them (Samson's riddle is then verified in their experience).

5. They get the lifting up, together with the interest for the time they lay out of it. When God pays His bonds of promises, He pays both principal and interest together: the mercy is increased according to the time they waited, and the expenses and hardships sustained during the dependence of the process. The fruits of common providence are soon ripe, soon rotten. But the fruit of the promise is often a long time ripening, but then it endures. And the longer it takes to ripen, the more valuable it is when it comes. Abraham and Sarah waited for the promise about ten years, and at length they thought of a way to hasten it. It soon took, in the birth of Ishmael, but he was not the promised son. They were coming into extreme old age before the promise was brought forth. But when it came, they got it with an addition of the renewing of their ages. The most valuable of all the promises was the longest in being fulfilled, namely, the promise of Christ, being about four thousand years.

6. The spiritual enemies that flew thick about them in the time of the darkness of the humbling circumstances, these will be scattered at this lifting up in the promise.

"And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoices in the Lord, my mouth is enlarged over my enemies. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry ceased" Formidable was Pharaoh's host behind the Israelites, while they had the Red Sea before them; but when they were through the sea, they saw the Egyptians dead on the shore. Such a sight will they that humble themselves under humbling circumstances get of their spiritual enemies when the time comes for their lifting up.

We come now to the due time of His lifting up. That is a natural question of those who are in humbling circumstances, "Watchman, what of the night? " And we cannot answer it to the humbled soul, but in the general.

The lifting up of the humbled will not be lonesome, considering the weight of the matter; that is to say, considering the worth and value of the lifting up of the humble; when it comes, it can by no means be reckoned long to the time of it. When you sow your corn in the fields, though it does not ripen so soon as some garden-seeds, but you wait three months or so, you do not think the harvest long a coming, considering the value of the crop. This view the apostle takes of the lifting up in humbling circumstances, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. " So that a believer, looking on the promise with an eye of faith, and perceiving its accomplishment, and the worth of it when accomplished, may wonder it is come so shortly. Therefore, it is determined to be a time that comes soon, soon in respect of its weight and worth.

When the time comes, it and only it will appear the due time. To every thing there is a season, and a great part of Wisdom lies in discerning it, and doing things in this season of it. And we may be sure infinite Wisdom cannot miss the season, by mistaking it. "He is a rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are judgment. " But whatever God does will abide the strictest examination, in that, as all other points. "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God does it that men may fear before Him. " It is true, many times, appear to us as the due time for lifting up, which yet really is not so, because there are some circumstances hid from us, which render that season unfit for the thing. Thus, "My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready." But when all the circumstances, always

foreknown to God, shall come to be opened out, and laid together before us, we shall then see the lifting up is come in the time most for the honor of God and our good, and that it would not have done so well sooner.

When the time comes that is really the due time, the proper time for the lifting up a child of God from his humbling circumstances, it will not be put off one moment longer. "At the end it shall speak; it will surely come, it will not tarry. " Though it tarry, it will not linger, nor be put off to another time. Oh, what rest of heart would the firm faith of this afford us! There is not a child of God but would, with the utmost earnestness, protest against a lifting up before the due time, as against an unripe fruit cast to him by an angry father, which would set his teeth on edge. Since it is so, then, could we firmly believe this point, that it will undoubtedly come in the due time, without losing of a minute, it would afford a sound rest. It must be so because God has said it; were the case ever so hopeless, were mountains of difficulties lying in the way of it, at the appointed time it will blow (Hebrew),—a metaphor from the wind rising in a moment after a dead calm.

The humbling circumstances are ordinarily carried to the utmost point of hopelessness before the lifting up. The knife was at Isaac's throat before the voice was heard. "For we would not, brothers, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life; but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raises the dead. " Things soon seem to us arrived at that point; such is the hastiness of our spirits. But things may have far to go down after we think they are at the foot of the hill. And we are almost as little competent judges of the point of hopelessness, as of the due time of lifting up. But generally God carries His people's

humbling circumstances downward, still downward, till they come to that point.

In this God is holding the same course which He held in the case of the man Christ, the beloved pattern copied after in all the dispensations of Providence towards the Church and every particular believer. He was all along a man of sorrows; as His time went on the waters swelled more, till He was brought to the dust of death; then He was buried, and the grave-stone sealed; which done, the world thought they were quit of Him, and He would trouble them no more. But they quite mistook it; then, and not till then, was the due time for lifting Him up. And the most remarkable liftings up that His people get are fashioned after this grand pattern.

Another end which Providence aims at is to carry the believer clean off his own and all created foundations, to fix his trust and hope in the Lord alone. "That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raises the dead " The life of a Christian here is designed to be a life of faith; and though faith may act more easily when it has some help from sense, yet it certainly acts most nobly when it acts in opposition to sense. Then is it pure faith, when it stands only on its own native legs, the power and word of God. "And being not weak in faith, he did not consider His own body now dead - neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. " And thus is must do when matters are carried to the utmost point of hopelessness.

Again, due preparation of the heart, for the lifting up out of the humbling circumstances goes before the due time of that lifting up, according to the promise. It is not so in every lifting up. The liftings up of common providences are not so critically managed; men will have them, will wait for them no longer, and God flings them in anger, before they are prepared for

them. "I gave you a king in My anger." They can by no means abide the trial, and God takes them off as reprobate silver, that is not able to abide it.

This due preparation consists in due humiliation. And it often takes much work to bring this about, which is another point that we are very incompetent judges of. We shall have thought Job was brought very low in his spirit by the providence of God bruising him on the one hand, and his friends on the other, for a long time. Yet, after all that he had endured both ways, God saw it necessary to speak to him Himself, for his humiliation. By that speech of God Himself, he was brought to his knees. And we should have thought he was men sufficiently humbled, and perhaps he thought so too. But God saw a further degree of humiliation necessary, and therefore begins again to speak for his humiliation, which at length laid him in the dust. And when he was thus prepared for lifting up he got it.

There are six things, I conceive, belong to this humiliation, preparatory to lifting up.

1. A deep sense of sinfulness and unworthiness of being lifting up at all. "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I will lay my hand on my mouth" People may be long in humbling circumstances before they are brought this length; even good men are much prejudiced in their own behalf, and may so far forget themselves as to think God deals His favours unequally, and is mighty severe on them more than others. Elihu marks this fault in Job, under his humbling circumstances. And I believe it will be found, there is readily a greater keenness to vindicate our own honor from the imputation the humbling circumstances seem to lay on it than to vindicate the honor of God in the justice and equity of the dispensation. The blindness of an ill-natured world, still ready to suspect the worst causes for humbling circumstances, as if

the greatest sufferers were surely the greatest sinners, gives a handle for this bias of the corrupt nature. But God is a jealous God, and when He appears sufficiently to humble, He will cause the matter of our honor to give way to the vindication of His.

2. A resignation to the Divine pleasure as to the time of lifting up. God gives the promise, leaving the time blank as to us. Our time is always ready, and we rashly fill it up at our own hand. God does not keep our time, because it is not the due time. Thus we are ready to think His word fails whereas it is but our own rash conclusion from it that fails. "I said in my haste, All men are liars." Several of the saints have suffered much by this means, and in this way learned to let alone filling up that blank. The first promise was thus used by believing Eve. Another promise was so by believing Abraham, after about ten years' waiting.

If this is the case of any child of God, do not let them be discouraged on it thinking they were over-rash in applying the promise to themselves: they were only so in applying the time to the promise; a mistake that saints in all ages have made, which they repented, and saw the folly of, and let alone that point for the time to come; and then the promise was fulfilled in its own due time. Let them in such circumstances go and do likewise, leaving the time entirely to the Lord.

3. An entire resignation as to the way and manner of bringing it about. We are ready to do, as to the way of accomplishing the promise, just as with the time of it, to set a particular way for the Lord's working in it; and if that is not kept, the proud heart is stumbled. "But Naaman was angry, and he went away, and said, Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place. " But the Lord will have His people broken off from that too, that they shall prescribe no

way to Him, but leave it to Him entirely, as in that case, "He went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and he was clean. " The compass of our knowledge of ways and means is very narrow, as, if one is blocked up. Often we cannot see another; but our God knows many ways of relief, where we know but one or none at all, and it is very usual for the Lord to bring the lifting up of His people in a way they had no view to, after repeating disappointments from those quarters from which they had great expectation.

4. Resignation as to the degree of the lifting up, yea, and as to the very being of it in time. The Lord will have His people weaned so, that however hastily they have sometimes been, that they behoved to be so soon lifted up, and could no longer bear, they shall be brought at length to set no time at all, but submit to go to the grave under their weight, if it seem good in the Lord's eyes. In that case they will be brought to be content with any measure of it in time, without prescribing how much. "If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again - But if He thus say, I have no delight in you; behold, here I am, let Him do as seems good to Him. "

5. The continuing of praying and waiting on me Lord in the case. "Praying always with an prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereto with all perseverance." It is pride of heart, and unsubduedness of spirit that makes people give over praying and waiting, because their humbling circumstances are lengthened out time after time. But due humility, going before the lifting up, brings men to that temper to pray, wait, and hang on resolutely, setting no time for the giving it over till the lifting up come, whether in time or eternity.

6. Mourning under mismanagements in the trial. "Therefore have I uttered that I did not understand things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. " The proud heart dwells and

expatiates on the man's sufferings in the trial, and casts out the folds of the trial on that side, and views them again and again. But when the Spirit of Cod comes duly to humble, in order to lifting up, He will cause the man to pass, in a sort, the suffering side of the trial, and turn his eyes on his own conduct in it, ransack it, judge himself impartially, and condemn himself, so that his mouth will be stopped. This is that humility mat goes before the lifting up in time, in the way of the promise.

We proceed to consider the lifting up as brought about at the end of time, in the other world. And,

1st. A word as to the nature of this lifting up. Concerning it we shall say these face things:

1. There is a certainty of this lifting up, in all cases of the humbled under humbling circumstances. Though one cannot in every case make them sure of a lifting up in time, yet they may be assured, be the case what it may, they will, without all peradventure, get a lifting up on the other side. "For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. " Though God's humble children may both breakfast and dine on bread of adversity and water of affliction, they will be sure to sup sweetly and plentifully. And the believing expectation of the latter might serve to qualify the former, and make them easy under it.

2. It will be a perfect lifting up. They will be perfectly delivered out of their particular trials and special furnace, be what it will, that made them weary many a day. Lazarus was then delivered from his poverty and sores and lying at the rich man's gate, and fully delivered. Yea, they will get a lifting up from all their humbling circumstances together. All imperfections will then be at an end, inferiority in relations,

contradictions, afflictions, uncertainty, and sin. If it was long in coming, there will be a blessed moment when they shall get all together.

3. They will not only be raised out of their low condition, but they will be set up on high; as Joseph, not only brought out of prison, but made ruler over the land of Egypt. And they will be lifted up into a high place. "The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham 's bosom. " Now they are at best but in a low place on this earth; there they will be seated in the highest heavens. Often, in their humbling circumstances, they are obliged now to embrace dunghills; then they will be set with Christ on His throne; "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne. " Though they now cleave to the earth, and men say, Bow down, that we may pass over you, they will then be settled in the heavenly mansions, above the sun, moon, and stars. They will also be lifted up into a high state and condition; a state of perfection. Out of all their troubles and uneasiness, they will be set in a state of rest; from their mean and inglorious condition, they will be advanced into a state of glory. Their burdened and sorrowful life will be succeeded with a fullness of joy; and, for their humbling circumstances, they will be clothed with eternal glory and honor.

4. It will be a final lifting up, after which there will be no more casting down forever. When we get a lifting up in time we are apt to imagine fondly we are at the end of our trials; but we soon find we are too hasty in our conclusions, and the cloud returns. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. You hid Your face, and I was troubled. " But then indeed the trial is quite over, the fight is at an end, and then is the time of the retribution and triumph.

5. There will not be the least remaining uneasiness from the humbling circumstances, but, on the contrary, they will have a

glorious and desirable effect. I make no question but the saints will have the remembrance of the humbling circumstances they were under here below. Did the rich man in hell remember his having five brothers on earth, how sumptuously he fared, how Lazarus sat at his gate; and can we doubt but the saints will remember perfectly their heavy trials? But then they will remember them as waters that fail; as the man recovered to health remembers his tossings on the sick bed; and that is a way of remembering that sweetens the present state of health beyond what otherwise it would be. Certainly the shore of the Red Sea was the place that, of all places, was the fittest to help the Israelites to sing in the highest key. And the humbling circumstances of saints on the earth will be of the same use to them in heaven.

2ndly. A word to the due time of this lifting up. There is a particular, definite time for it in every saint's case, which is the due time, but it is hid from us. We can only say in general,

1. Then is the due time for it, when our work we have to do in this world is over. God has appointed to every one his task, fight, trial, and work; and, till that is done, we are in a sort immortal. That work is,

Doing work; work set to us by the great Master, to be done for the honor of God and the good of our fellow-creatures. We must be content to be doing on, even in our humbling circumstances, till that is done out. It is not the due time for that lifting up, till we are at the end of that work, and so have served our generation. And it is,

Suffering work. There is a certain portion of suffering that is allotted for the mystical body; the Head has divided to the several members their proportions of it; and it is not the due time for that lifting up, till we have exhausted the share of it allotted to us. Paul looked on his life as a going on in that.

2. When that lifting up comes we shall see it is come exactly in the due time; that it was well it was neither sooner nor later; for though heaven is always better than earth, and that it would be better for us, absolutely speaking, to be in heaven than on earth, yet certainly there is a time where it is better for the honour of God and His service that we are on the earth than in heaven. "Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. " And it will be no grief of heart to them when there, that they were so long in their humbling circumstances, and were not brought sooner.

Use 1. Let not then the humble cast away their confidence, whatever their humbling circumstances are; let them assure themselves there will come a lifting up to them at length; if not here, yet to be sure hereafter. Let them keep this in their view, and comfort themselves with it, for God has said it. "The needy shall not always be forgotten. " If the night were ever so long, the morning will come at length.

2. Let patience have her perfect work. The husbandman waits for the return of his seed, the merchant for the return of his ships, the store-master for what he calls year-time, when he draws in the produce of his flocks. All these have long patience, and why should not the Christian too have patience, and patiently wait for the time appointed for his lifting up?

You have heard much of the Crook in the Lot; the excellency of humbleness of spirit in a low lot, beyond pride of spirit, though joined with a high one. You have been called to humble yourselves in your humbling circumstances, and have been assured in that case of a lifting up. To conclude: we may assure ourselves, God will at length break in pieces the proud, be they ever so high: and He will triumphantly lift up the humble, be they ever so low.

End.