

A N
E S S A Y

UPON THE

Book 17.

Faith of Assurance:

BEING

The 'SUBSTANCE' of Several

S E R M O N S

Preached by the Author to his own Congregation.

To which is added

An APPENDIX

Containing a modest Resolution of Two important
CASES relating to ASSURANCE.

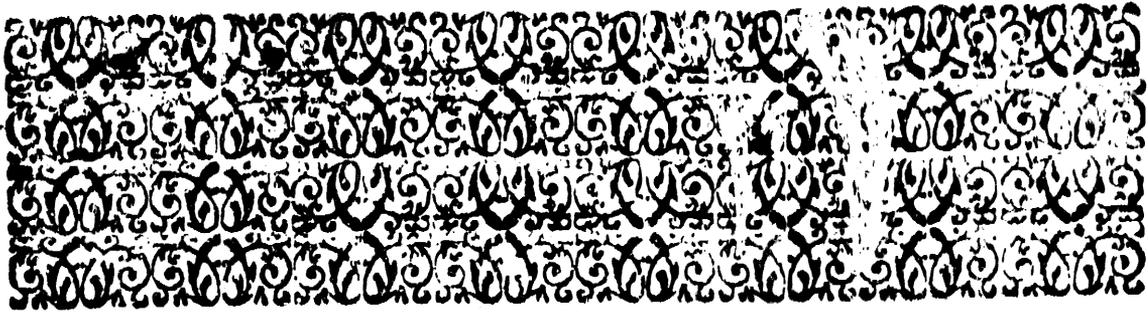
By a MINISTER of the GOSPEL.

Eph. 4. 14. *That we henceforth be no more Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Slight of Men, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*

Coll. 1. 23. *If ye continue in the Faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard,-----*

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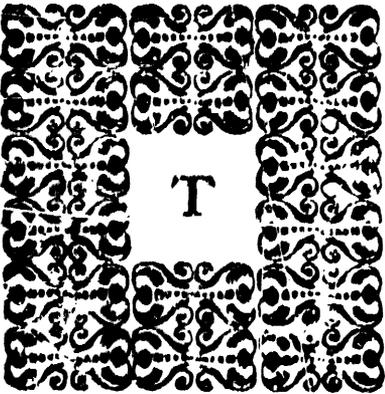
E S S A Y

UPON THE

Faith of Assurance.

II. PETER, i. 10.

Wherefore the rather, Brethren, give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure: For if ye do these Things ye shall never fall

 **T**HE Faith of Assurance is, undoubtedly, one of the greatest and highest Attainments that a Christian can arrive at, in this Life. The Matter about which it is conversant, is of the greatest Moment and Importance, even our eternal Peace and Happiness: And therefore it cannot but highly concern us all, to have our Understandings well instructed, and our Judgments rightly and truly informed, concerning the Nature of this Assurance, and the true Method of obtaining

it: And therefore, I hope it may be an edifying and profitable Entertainment, to give you some Instructions, concerning this great and important Subject; and accordingly have made choice of this Text, upon which to found our following Discourse in Relation thereunto.

IN the foregoing Part of this Chapter, the Apostle, after the intercription of the Epistle, and his heavenly Salutation, in the two first Verses, proceeds to mention some of the great Benefits and Privileges which those Christians, to whom he writes, were favoured with; such as *the Knowledge of Christ*, and thereby *all Things pertaining to Life and Godliness*, the *precious Promises of the Gospel*, and *regenerating Grace*, which he calls *the divine Nature*, in ver. 3 and 4. He then goes on to exhort them to join the Practice of all other *Graces and Christian Virtues* to their *Faith*, as necessary to evidence the *Truth* of it, ver. 5, 6, 7.

IN the two next following *Verses* he inforceth his Exhortation, by laying before them, on the one Hand, the *Advantage* of their so doing, and on the other, the *Disadvantage* of neglecting it. Saith he, *if these Things*, viz. those *Graces and Virtuous Practices*, *be in you and abound*, *they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. *But he, that lacketh these Things, is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old Sins*, i. e. By his Practice he declares, that he hath forgotten the Obligation he is under, to live and behave as becomes one who professeth himself to have been cleansed from Sin, by *Justification and Sanctification*.

THE Words of our Text are an Inference from what went before, the Scope and Design whereof is, further and more effectually, to engage these Believers in the Exercise and Practice of the forementioned Graces; as if he had said, seeing it is by the assiduous and persevering Practice of these Things, that you can expect to arrive at a well grounded Certainty of your gracious State, and sure Interest in electing Love; See that you be diligent to seek this Assurance, by striving to persevere and increase in the Exercise and Practice of these Graces.

FROM the Words thus briefly opened up, these two following *Doctrines* are plain and obvious.

Doctrine I. THAT the regular and rational Way for a Person to know that he is elected unto everlasting Life, is first to make sure Work of his Calling or Conversion. We are in the Text, exhorted to make first our Calling, and then our Election sure. As the Order of the Words seem to point out this Observation unto us, so the Nature of the Things signified by them, together with the Scope of the Text, make it evident. The eternal Decree of Election being in itself such a Secret, that no finite Creature can immediately pry into it: It remains, that the only rational Way of coming to the Knowledge of our Interest in it, must be, by seeking and obtaining a Discovery of Something, that is inseparably connected therewith: now our Conversion or effectual Calling being inseparably connected with our Election unto everlasting Life, as a proper Fruit and Effect thereof, as we may see in *Rom. viii. 29.* it natively and evidently follows, that if we can or may be sure of our Conversion or Regeneration, we may by infal-

lible Consequence, be as sure of our Interest in Electing Love. Hence

Learn, THAT such Persons who puzzle and discourage themselves or others, with anxious and impertinent Doubts and Queries, whether they be elected unto Everlasting Life or no; as if this were needful to be known in order to their Encouragement to their Duty, or the Use of the appointed Means, in order to their Salvation: I say, such take a very wrong and preposterous Way of managing their Souls Concerns, in which they can never expect to be successful; but rather, while they continue in Pursuit of this Method, are in Danger of cutting themselves out of that Salvation they seem so much to desire. Be persuaded then, O Christian! first to make sure of thy Conversion, and then thou shalt have no room left for any Doubts about thine Election.

Doctrine II. THAT a full Assurance, an infallible and certain Knowledge of our being in a State of Grace, that we are elected to eternal Life, and shall come to Glory at the last, is in itself, attainable by the true Believer, in this Life, in the diligent Use of ordinary Means, and by the ordinary Help of the holy Spirit, without immediate Revelation or infallible Inspiration.

THIS Doctrine is, I think, very clearly and plainly contained in the Text; for when the inspired Apostle exhorts Believers *to give Diligence, to make their Calling and Election sure,* it plainly implies, that what he exhorts to, is practicable; and that their Diligence in this Matter, is to be employed in using of such Methods and Means, as were within their Reach. We have also a parallel Exhortation

hortation in *Hebr. vi. 11.* *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same Diligence, to the full Assurance of Hope unto the End.*

I MIGHT bring many other Scriptures for Proof of this Doctrine, such as *Rom. viii. 16.* *1 Cor. ii. 12.* *1 John iii. 14.* &c. But I think it needless to insist longer, in Proof of a Doctrine, in which all sound Protestants are so well agreed.

I WILL therefore proceed to handle this Point of Truth, as the Lord may enable me, in the following Method :

- I. *I will endeavour to remove some mistaken Apprehensions about this great and high Attainment.*
- II. *Lay down some Instructions, or Observations, concerning the Nature of this Assurance, and the rational Foundation; according to Scripture, upon which it is built.*
- III. *Propose some Scripture Marks, or Characters, whereby a Christian may examine himself, in order to attain this Assurance.*
- IV. *Give some Instructions or Directions how to attain it.*
- V. *How to maintain and keep it, when it is attained.*
- VI. *Inquire into the Reasons, why so many Professors, yea, true Believers, do not arrive this Length.*

VII. *Shew, how great a Sin and Disadvantage it is, to be slack and slothful in endeavouring to obtain it; and then conclude, with some brief Improvement.*

I. According to the Method proposed, I will endeavour to remove some *Mistakes*, about a Christian Assurance of Grace and Glory.

Mistake 1. Is that of *Papists* who teach, that there is no Certainty or Assurance of Salvation to be had in this Life; but that still the Christian hath Ground of Doubt in this Matter? To which I may add, those that go into the *Arminian* Scheme, and deny the Perseverance of the Saints. who of Course must deny all Assurance of Salvation in this Life, even altho' a Christian were sure of his gracious State for the present: Because, according to them, the true Believer may totally fall away and perish; contrary to *John* x. 28, 29. *I give unto them Eternal Life, and they shall never perish, &c.* and *Rom.* viii. 1. *There is therefore now no Condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, &c.*

Mistake 2. Another Mistake which, I am afraid, keeps back and discourages many true Christians from that diligent and vigorous Endeavour after Assurance, which we all ought to practise, is this, They apprehend, that Assurance of Grace and eternal Life is so high, arduous and difficult to attain, that it would be in vain for them to attempt it; that it is a distinguishing Favour granted only to some select Christians, which others of a common Rank cannot well expect. And therefore, seeing Salvation may be had and obtained, by the Faith of Adherence, without Assurance, they think it is as good for them to content themselves without it, as to
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lose their Pains in seeking what they despair to obtain.

FOR removing this hurtful Mistake, I would offer these Things to be considered.

1. To argue thus, is to dispute about a plain commanded Duty, which cannot but be wrong; The Command makes it our Duty to seek it, altho' we should never attain it.

2. In the Nature of it, its not so arduous or difficult, but that it is in itself attainable by Diligence, altho' every true Christian doth not actually attain it.

3. Slackness in the Use of Means, through Sloth or Despondency, is a great and principal Cause why so few attain it. *Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.* Hosea, vi. 3.

4. O Christian! who trustest to be saved by thy Faith of Adherence, How dost thou know, or art thou assured, that thou hast the true Faith of Adherence? If thou art sure that thou hast the Faith of Adherence, thou hast the Assurance we are treating of; if thou art not sure, thou mayest perish for ought thou knowest, because thou art not sure thou hast true Faith,

5. Altho' it be granted, that Assurance is an high and arduous Thing, yet Regeneration or Conversion is further out of the Reach of an unregenerate Person, than Assurance is from a true though weak Believer: Yet Sinners must not be discouraged from seeking to be converted, much less ought the weak Believer to be discouraged from endeavouring after Assurance.

The Help of the Spirit is promised in the diligent Use of appointed Means. *Wait on the Lord; be of good Courage, and he shall strengthen thine Heart: Wait, I say, on the Lord.* Psal. xxvii. 14.

7. Altho' thou shouldst not arrive at a full Assurance; yet if thou be diligent in Pursuit of it, in the Use of proper Means, thou shalt certainly attain greater and higher Degrees of a well-grounded rational Probability, the Benefit and Comfort whereof will more than compensate all thy Pains.

8. There is but a gradual difference between a well-grounded rational Probability, and a full Assurance; and persevering Diligence may obtain the latter as well as the former.

9. All Means and Endeavours needful to be used in seeking after Assurance, are the Believers indispensable Duty; even altho' the obtaining Assurance were not in his View; as, if the Lord will, I will shew more at large hereafter; yet take now a short Hint; consider the Verses preceding our Text, together with the Scope of the Text itself, and it will appear, that the Sum of all that's incumbent on us, in order to attain Assurance, is to persevere and increase in the Exercise of Grace, and Practice of universal Righteousness and Holiness.

10. Beware, lest, by an habitual, total and allowed Neglect to seek this Assurance, under any Pretence whatsoever, thou make it manifest to thyself and all the World beside, that thou art an absolute Stranger to all true Grace: For, where true Grace is, it will certainly prompt the Person who hath it, to these two Things, *viz.* to desire and endeavour after Increase, and to know if it be truly Grace, as it appears to be.

I WILL endeavour to be more brief in the Mistakes that follow.

Mistake 3. A Third Mistake is, That every true Believer or converted Person is assured, or fully sensible of his own gracious State, as a Person
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can be of what he perceives by his outward Senses : But this is contrary to Scripture, Experience, our *Westminster Confession*, and the concurring Testimony of all *Antient* Divines ; is contrary to the Scope of our *Text*, which exhorts Believers to make their *Calling and Election* sure, which clearly implies, that Persons may be Believers, and yet have their *Calling and Election* to make sure : Yea, that much Labour and Diligence is needful to the Believer, in order thereunto. The Injunction of the Work of Self-Examination doth also plainly prove, that Believers may be uncertain of their own gracious State, until by Examination they find it out. *Heman, Psal. 88.* was undoubtedly a true Believer, yet from his Youth was under great Clouds of Darkness as to this Matter.

I readily acknowledge, that every Person must be conscious of all the Exercises, Thoughts and Affections, which are at any time raised in his Heart or Mind ; and consequently when gracious Thoughts or Affections are first excited in the Mind of a new Convert, he is and must be surely conscious, that such Thoughts are produced in himself ; but this doth not at all prove, that every such Person is sensible of his gracious State, unless he were also surely sensible, that those Thoughts were excited in him by the holy Spirit, in a supernatural Work of Conversion ; which is not so easy to discern, seeing every Grace hath its Counterfeit ; and the Counterfeit may, for Degree and Vehemence of Motion, exceed the like Exercises and Motions of true Grace. The *Israelites* at the *Red Sea* had vehement Motions of Joy, Love and Gratitude towards God, for their miraculous Deliverance ; and yet their after Behaviour discovered, that as to many of them, they were Strangers to true Grace.

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Tho' their Words were good, their Hearts were not sincere.

Mistake 4. Others again think, that this Assurance cannot be obtained, but by immediate Revelation or infallible Inspiration of the holy Spirit, as it were, in an Objective Way, suggesting to the Believer, that he is converted, that his Sins are pardoned, &c. But this Apprehension of the Matter, doth no wise quadrate with the Account of this Matter, which we have in the Word of God; which directs us to try ourselves by such and such Scripture Marks and Characters, in order to our coming to the distinct Knowledge of our spiritual State in a reasonable Way. *Hereby, says St. John, we know that we know him. if we keep his Commandments.* 1. John ii. 3. and John xiv. 21. *He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:* In both which Texts, and many such like, there is express Reference to something discernable, by the Believer, in himself, for his discerning and discovering his own gracious State. Its true, there is a necessity of the Concurrence of the Spirit of God, enabling the Believer to exercise his own Reason, in reflecting upon these genuine Marks of a Believer, which he finds in himself, and from which he draws the Conclusion about his own gracious State, according to what we have in 1 Cor. ii. 12. *Now we have received, not the Spirit of the World, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the Things that are freely given us of God.* i. e. The Spirit of God enables the Believer to see and discern the Exercises and Fruits of true Grace in himself, and from thence to conclude, that he is in a gracious State. We might be deceived by a false Revelation or Inspiration; but the Believers Assurance, and the Ground upon which it

it is built. is a rational Thing, and capable to be try'd by the sure Word of Prophecy; and accordingly we are commanded to examine ourselves, *2. Cor. xiii. 5.* What the Apostle *Peter* hath, *2. Pet. i. 19.* is observable to this Purpose; after he had taken Notice of the Voice from Heaven, which he, and other Disciples with him, heard in the Mount, he recommends unto us the inspired Scriptures, as a more sure Word of Prophecy, whereby even a Voice from Heaven, should be examined and try'd, before it be trusted unto.

I doubt not, but in some Cases and Instances, the holy Spirit may and doth, in an uncommon and unexpected Way, sometimes raise up in the Believers Soul, a clear and full Persuasion concerning his gracious State, by an inward Irradiation or enlightning of his Mind, as to his Interest in divine Love: But even this, as I humbly conceive, is first by exciting the Believer's Graces to an uncommon Degree of lively Exercise; and then enabling him to behold and discern those Graces so enlivened: But as such sudden Glances of Assurance are for ordinary, not the Result of the Believers direct Endeavours after it, so neither is the Assurance which is obtain'd this Way, the Pillar on which the Believer habitually leans or depends, unless as the same has been confirmed by the rational Evidence of Scripture Marks and Characters of a Believer, which upon Search, he hath found in himself; from all which, I think it is evident, that divine Revelation or any Thing like it, is not the ordinary Way, from which to try at Assurance.

Mistake 5. Again, some think that the only sure Way of attaining Assurance, is by calling to Remembrance the inward Exercises which the Believer hath
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hath had, or undergone, in or about the Time of his Conversion ; and that unless this can be done, there can be no true Ground of Assurance,

I acknowledge that in many Instances, the Work of Conversion is and hath been so remarkably carried on, that they have had sufficient Reason, to commence their Reckoning from such or such a Time ; as was the Case of the Apostle *Paul*, the *Failer*, with many others. But to alledge, that it is necessary to all true Believers, to be able to recollect the first Beginnings of Grace in their Hearts, is I think a great Mistake ; first in general, because the Lord hath his various Manners, as well as various Seasons, of bringing home Sinners to himself : Some are driven home with Terrors, as the Multitude, *Acts* ii. Some are drawn with Cords of Love, which appears to have been the *Eunuch's* Case. In some the Change is sudden and remarkable, in others more gradual and with more insensible and indiscernable Beginnings, which often are much forgotten and out of Memory, so that the Believer should never be able to arrive at Assurance, by reflecting upon those indiscernable and forgotten Beginnings of Grace in himself. Again, the first Beginnings of Grace in many, are so faint and so strongly born down and opposed with Corruption, that the poor Believer might think it would be Presumption, to term such weak and faint Motions by the Name of true Grace. And further, there are no doubt, many true Believers, who are converted in their Childhood and younger Days, and in whom the Grace of God hath gradually increased, together with their Stature and Reason ; and this by Virtue of a divine promised Blessing, upon the pious diligent Endeavours of Parents and others, so that they cannot be expected to remember distinctly,
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when true Grace began at first to work. And finally, I think it would be the height of Absurdity, to say that a Person, who, upon an impartial Search, finds in himself the true Marks and Characters of a Child of God, should yet doubt of his gracious State, meerly because he cannot give an Account of the precise Time or Manner, in which those Graces began first to work in him.

Mistake 6. Another Mistake is of those who build their Assurance of their gracious State, upon some sudden Motions, fervent Affections or strong Resolutions, which they have felt in themselves, at some Times; and which may be where there is no real Work of Grace or Conversion wrought. The *Israelites* had strong Motions of Joy and Gratitude at the *Red Sea*, they had strong Resolutions and Promises, *Exod. xxiv. 7.* So likewise *Saul* repented with Tears and promised Reformation, yet the Event proved him unsound. The stony Ground Hearers may be brought in here also, as a Proof of the Fallacy of this Opinion.

Mistake 7. The last Mistake that I shall here mention, shall be of those, who, altho' they may have strong and earnest Desires after Assurance of their gracious State; yet they do not in Proportion desire and endeavour after Increase of Grace in their Hearts, and suitable Fruits in their Conversation: Such Persons may long and seek for Assurance all their Days, and yet never attain it, because they seek it not in the Right Way. For while sanctifying Grace keeps low, weak and languishing, tho' it be real, it cannot afford Ground of a full Assurance, because the Believer, in that Case, is not able to discern, whether it be true Grace or a Counterfeit; or whether his Corruptions which

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he feels yet strong, and often prevalent, be in their Reigning, or only in their Captivating Power; or whether the weak Resistance, which he discerns himself to make against the strong, and often prevailing Motions of Sin, be from Grace or from a natural Conscience only. So that while sanctifying Grace is low and languishing, Assurance in an ordinary Way cannot be attained.

II. I proceed in the Second Place, to lay down some Instructions or Observations concerning the Nature and rational Foundation of this Faith of Assurance.

Observation 1. This Faith of Assurance doth consist in a well-grounded certain Persuasion in the Believers Mind, concerning his own gracious State, and his Interest in eternal Life. *2 Tim. i. 12. I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him, against that Day.* And *Rom. viii. 38, 39. I am persuaded, that neither Death, nor Life, nor Angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor Things present, nor Things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other Creature, shall be able to separate us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I say it is a well grounded Persuasion, to distinguish it from the presumptuous Persuasion and Hope of the Hypocrite, or formal Professor; which altho' it may be strong and without actual Doubting, yet it is built upon a sandy Foundation, and therefore, sooner or later, will certainly fall to the Ground; as we are taught by our Lord, *Matth. vii. 22. Many will say unto me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, &c.* And by the Parable of the foolish Virgins, *Matth. xxv. 1.*

I call it a certain Perswasion to distinguish it from the lower and weaker Degrees of true Faith, which, altho' it be well grounded on a sure Foundation, yet for Want of clearness of Evidence, the weak doubting Christian is uncertain, whether his Faith and other Graces, be of the right Stamp; and so is still uncertain about his gracious State. The Truth of his Grace renders his spiritual State good and safe, but the Weakness of his Faith and other Graces, renders him uncertain concerning it. There is an objective Certainty in the Thing, but the weak Believer labours under a subjective Uncertainty about it: He hopes and believes upon sure Grounds, that his Faith is good and safe, but he dares not be peremptory that it is so. He is ready to say with the poor Man, *Mark ix. 24. Lord I believe, help thou mine Unbelief*; and with *Peter* to say, *Lord save me, Matth. xiv. 30.*

Observation 2. This Faith of Assurance doth necessarily imply these following Things.

1. The in-being, or implantation of true sanctifying regenerating Grace: For its upon the evident Discovery of true Grace that the Faith of Assurance is built.

2. It implies, that this Grace is in Exercise, and brings forth Fruit in the Conversation: For its by these Things, that the Existence and Being of Grace is discovered. The Acts of Faith discover the Habit and Grace of Faith, to be in the Soul, and the genuine Fruits of Faith, manifest its reality, *James ii. 16.*

3. This Faith of Assurance implies, that this Grace is grown and arrived to such a Degree of Strength, in the Exercise and Fruits of it; and that it hath obtained so much of the Ascendant and

prevalency over indwelling Sin, in a Way of Mortification, that it is conspicuous and clearly discernable by the Believer, so that upon Observation, Reflection or Self-Examination, he may be evidently and infallibly sure, that it is true Grace and no Counterfeit, that works in him ; which cannot be while Grace is weak and languishing, and much born down by prevailing captivating Sin.

4. There must be an actual Reflection of the Believer's Mind upon his own Grace, in the Exercises and Fruits thereof ; by which Reflection he observes, sees, and clearly discerns his Grace to be really and truly what it appears to be, *viz.* true Grace and no Counterfeit 1. *John* ii. 3. *Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his Commandments.*

5. There must be also a concurring Assistance of the holy Spirit, enabling the Believer clearly to see, and discern his own Grace, in the Exercise and Fruits of it ; and so to draw this comfortable Conclusion, That he is a true Child of God, and an Heir of Eternal Life, *Rom.* viii. 15. As it is the Spirit of God that works and implants Grace in the Believer's Soul, and excites this Grace unto Exercise ; so also its the same Spirit that enables him to reflect upon his own Grace, and to draw such a comfortable Conclusion from it. *For without him we can do nothing.* Hence.

Observation 3. We may again observe, that this Faith of Assurance, is a rational Act, Work or Exercise of the Believer's Mind ; a rational Conclusion drawn from suitable Arguments or Promises, in a Way of Observation, Reflection or Self-Examination : In this Exercise there must be a Concurrence of these Four Particulars :

1. Our own Minds' must formally make the Enquiry and draw the Conclusion.

2. As this is a truly gracious Exercise, so the Spirit of God must lead and assist in it, as well as in all other gracious Exercises.

3. The Word of God must be made use of as the only unerring Rule and Standard, by which the Believer must be directed in his Tryal of his gracious State.

4. There must be some particular Marks or Characters of true Believers, which are recorded in the Word; which the Believer must be conscious of, and clearly discern them in himself, to be the very Marks by which the Believer is described in the Word, and no counterfeit.

Observation 4. Hence further we may observe, concerning this Faith of Assurance, that in the Act or Exercise thereof, it is intirely distinct from the first and direct Acts of Faith, whereby the Believer accepts of Christ for Justification and Salvation. The direct Object of justifying Faith, is Christ and his Righteousness; but the direct Object of the former, is either the Believer's own Faith, or any other Grace, upon the clear and evident Sight of which, in himself, he grounds his Assurance of his gracious State. By the Existence and Exercise of true Grace, the Believer comes to be in a gracious State: By a clear and evident Observation of his own Grace, he comes to be assured of it; and consequently the Faith of Assurance, when obtained in the ordinary Way, is intirely posterior to justifying Faith. I say, when Assurance is obtained in the ordinary Way, as a Fruit of our Pains and Industry: For in some, yea many Instances, the Work of Conversion is so conspicuous in its Circumstances, that it carries its own

Evidence alongſt with it, in the Believers own Conſcience, from the firſt Commencement of it ; as in *Paul*, and the Jailer, &c.

Obſervation 5. When we ſpeak of the Assurance of Faith, or the Faith of Assurance, as a Thing attainable by the Believer in this Life, we would not be ſo underſtood, as if we meant ſuch a Perfection of Assurance, as excludes all Imperfection, Heſitation, or Relicts of Unbelief and Deſpondency : Such a Degree of Assurance is not conſiſtent with the many Imperfections that cleave to the Believer, while in this Life. We mean then ſuch an Assurance of Faith, as ſuits and is conſiſtent with the Believer's preſent imperfect State ; and is ſtill accompanied with various Imperfections ; ſuch as, firſt, it is unſtable and unconstant ; and after it is obtained, may be loſt again, by the Believer's loſing the clear Evidence of thoſe gracious Characters upon which it is built, and from which it is drawn ; as appears to have been the *Pſalmiſt's* Caſe, *Pſal.* xlii. and *Pſal.* li. and many other Places.

Another Imperfection ſtill cleaving to the militant Believer's Assurance is, that altho' while it continues in Life, it excludes all juſt and rational Grounds of Doubt and Heſitation, about the Goodneſs and Safety of his State ; yet the aſſured Chriſtian is liable to be rendered uneaſy with groundleſs Doubts and Fears ariſing from the Relicts of Deſpondency and Unbelief, which will cleave to him while in the Body ; and alſo from Satan's unbelieving Suggestions, which may put the aſſured Chriſtian ſo far to doubt his own State, as to be put to examine himſelf again, in order to be able, by a freſh evident View of his own Graces, to quench theſe fiery Darts of the wicked one. And

Further,

Further, as this Assurance is imperfect, so it may admit of Degrees; some Christians may have it in more, some in smaller Degrees; yea, the same Christian more at one Time than another; and be more able in the Exercise thereof, to exclude and trample upon his Doubts and unbelieving Suggestions, at one Time than at another. The Psalmist *David* in *Psal.* xviii. and cxviii. seems to enjoy a triumphant Assurance, exclusive of all Fears; but in the Close of the xlii, and xliii *Psalms*, he seems to act Assurance with more Difficulty, fighting against Unbelief, in the assured Hope of Victory. *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the Health of my Countenance, and my God.*

Observation 6. These Marks and Characters, by the clear Sight of which in himself, the Believer comes to be assured of his gracious State, must be such as no irregenerate Person, while such, is capable of, or else they cannot be the distinguishing Marks of a Believer. *Secondly*, They must be known by the Believer, to be peculiar to the true Child of God. And, *Thirdly*, They must be found and discerned, by the Believer, in himself, in so evident and clear a Light, as to render him sure and certain, that they are the true and genuine Marks, which they appear to be, and no counterfeit: Or else, if any of these Three be wanting in the Mark, by which the Christian tries his State, he must of Course fall short of Assurance, by that Mark. Hence,

Observation 7. That when the Christian is endeavouring to discover the Truth of his gracious spiritual State, by Reflection, Observation or Self-

Examination, by any of the Marks mentioned in the Scriptures; the Conclusion which he draws from thence, will unavoidably bear a Proportion unto the Light of Evidence, in which he can behold these Marks in himself: If the Marks be clear, evident and certain, then accordingly the Conclusion will amount to the Faith of Assurance; but if the Marks by which he tries himself, be more or less obscure, then according to the greater or less Obscurity, in which they are seen, the Conclusion will amount to a weaker or stronger Degree of rational Probability, as to the Goodness of his spiritual State; and in Proportion also will the Measure of his Comfort arising therefrom, be.

It is needful in this Matter to observe, that there are Three different Sorts of Perswasions, wherewith a Person may be perswaded, concerning his own gracious State.

I. When an Hypocrite or formal Professor, who is yet utterly destitute of all saving Grace, hopes or is perswaded of the Goodness or Safety of his State, upon false and unwarrantable Grounds, because he believes the Truths of the Gospel; that Jesus Christ came to the World to save Sinners; that its only by Faith in him that we can be saved; and because he is admitted to the external Privileges of the Church, and makes some Conscience of external Duties; all which and much more, a meer Formalist may do, and yet be a Stranger to true regenerating Grace: Such an Hope and Perswasion of the Goodness of a Person's State, is but meer Presumption; and will at last be like the Spiders Web, as is clear from the Parable of the foolish Virgins; and yet I'm afraid, that the Hopes and Perswasion, which the greater Part of visible Professors

nessors have, concerning their spiritual State, is no better than this; they believe Gospel Truths, they attend upon Ordinances, they run the Round of many Duties, they are free of scandalous Out-breakings, &c. And therefore they hope all is well; while yet for Want of Sanctifying Grace in their Hearts, they remain in the Gall of Bitterness and Bond of Iniquity. O Christians! beware of building your Hope or Perswasion upon such a sandy Foundation, lest at last you meet with a full Disappointment, and be rejected, with a *Depart from me, I know ye not, ye Workers of Iniquity.*

2. There is another Kind of Perswasion or Hope concerning the Goodness of a Person's spiritual State. When the poor Soul, being made to see the Sinfulness and Misery of his natural State, is truly convinced of his Guilt and Wickedness; and that unless he be renewed and sanctified by the Spirit and Grace of God, as well as freed from the Guilt of Sin, by pardoning Mercy, through the Blood of Christ, he cannot be saved, but must undoubtedly perish; and being informed by the Gospel, that the only Way to obtain these Things, is to repent of and forsake all Sin, to accept of the Lord Jesus Christ as a compleat Saviour, as our Prophet, Priest and King, as he is offered in the Gospel: and accordingly to give up ourselves to him, to be converted, saved and governed by him. I say, when a poor Soul, being convinced of these Things, and being suitably affected with them, doth truly and sincerely, as it were, point and aim at a Compliance with these Gospel Terms, aims at forsaking of all known Sin, and the Mortification of indwelling Corruption; and sets about the serious Performance of Duties which he formerly neglected; and in the mean time casts the whole Burden of his Salvation upon the Lord his Saviour;

Saviour ; resolving in the Strength of divine Grace, to persevere in this Method and Course, looking for Help and Salvation no other Way than through Jesus Christ ; in a Way of free, undeserved, preventing Grace : I say, when a poor Soul, resolving upon this Course, and endeavouring to put it in Practice, is enabled to conceive some faint Hopes or a weak Perswasion, that these Motions, Purposes, Resolutions and Endeavours, which he finds himself enabled thus to exercise, are or may be the Beginnings of true Grace, wrought in him by the Spirit of God ; while yet, in the mean time, he is very uncertain, whether these Motions may not proceed from common Convictions wrought in his Conscience, without any saving Grace ; yet still he is resolved, in Compliance with the Demands of the Gospel, to go on in these Exercises, and increase in them, hoping that they may prove to be the Beginning of true Grace at last, tho' as yet, the poor Soul is very uncertain, and afflicted with many Fears, lest they prove to be but flash and counterfeit, like the stony Ground. Such a weak, feeble and staggering Perswasion as this, concerning a Person's good or gracious State, tho' weak in the doubting, trembling Believer, yet being fixed on a sure and immoveable Foundation, *viz.* The Terms of the New Covenant of Grace, and Jesus the Mediator of it, will never make the poor Soul that hath it, ashamed ; but according as the Believer perseveres and makes Progress in his begun Course of Faith and Holiness, this his Perswasion of his gracious State, will grow in Strength and Stability. Now this Perswasion of a weak Believer, concerning his own gracious State, we may term a well-grounded rational Probability, to distinguish it from the former Kind of Perswasion, which is only a groundless Presumption ; and also

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from the following Kind of Perswasion, which exceeds a Probability, and amounts to a Certainty; and which is,

3. The Third Sort of Perswasion, which a Person may have, concerning his gracious State, which is the main Subject of this little Essay; and which, as I have already said, is that Perswasion which a true Believer attains concerning himself, when by Observation, Reflection or Self-Examination, he finds the Grace of the holy Spirit in himself, advanced to such a Degree of Strength and Perspicuity, in the Exercises and sensible Fruits thereof; and their sensible Prevalency over indwelling Sin, in a Way of Mortification, that he can find no rational Ground of Doubting left; but that certainly, it is the sanctifying Grace of God, that enables him to act and do as he doth, altho' still he is sensible of many Failings and Short-comings.

An Example of the first Kind, may be the *foolish Virgins* and *stony Ground Hearers*.

An Example of the second, is *Asaph*, *Pf. lxxvii.* and *Heman*, *Pf. lxxxviii.* throughout; as also *David*, as he expresth himself in many Places, particularly *Pf. cxix. 120. My Heart trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy Judgments;* which Words imply such a Degree of Fear and Doubting, as can hardly consist with actual Assurance. I may here also add, the Believers spoken to in our Text, who being exhorted to labour after Assurance, must be supposed, at least many of them, not yet to have attained it.

An Example of the third and last Sort, may be the Apostle *Paul*, *2. Tim. iv. 7. I have fought the good Fight:* Besides many other Saints recorded in Scripture.

Observation 8. From what hath been offered, we may further observe, that it is not so easy a Matter for the true Believer, to attain a well-grounded Faith of Assurance, as some now a-days do alledge: For while the Believer's Faith or sanctifying Grace is weak, and consequently Unbelief and various Lusts are strong, prevalent, and exerting, and captivating, tho' not a reigning Power; in that Case, and which, by the by, may be the real Case of many, if not most true Believers, thro' a great Part of their Time: I say, in that Case, there are several Things, which may and do ordinarily, effectually keep back the Christian from attaining the Faith of Assurance. Such as

1. The Difficulty that, in that Case, the Believer finds assuredly to distinguish between true Grace, while weak and a Counterfeit, which as to Degree and Vigour of Exercise, may exceed true Grace itself, in many Instances: This causes the Believer to doubt, whether his weak Grace may not be a Counterfeit, seeing the *Israelites* at the *Red Sea*, and at *Mount Sinai*, went as far, and perhaps farther than he hath yet done, as to what he can yet assuredly discern; and this often prompts the weak Christian, earnestly to pray to God for a clear Discovery of his State, as well as to make close and impartial Application of the Marks, to himself, which he meets with in the Scripture, in Sermons, &c.

2. When true sanctifying Grace is weak and Corruption strong, and doth exert such a Degree of captivating Power, that Grace gets little more done than to enter its descent with inward discontent and Remorse, as we may rationally suppose was *David's* and *Peter's* Case; in that Case, its not easy to discern, whether indwelling Sin, be in
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its reigning or only in its captivating Power : this Difficulty cannot but marr the Christians Assurance in this Case.

3. Unbelief and doubting do often stand in the Way of the Believer's Assurance, as it did with *Thomas*, as to our Saviour's Resurrection.

4. Satan is often permitted to assault the weak Believer so furiously with his fiery Darts of unbelieving Suggestion ; sometimes, yea, very often, he doth haunt and plague him with many horrid, wicked, prophane, yea, blasphemous Thoughts ; and then would perswade him, that such Thoughts as these are not consistent with true Grace, yea, that by them he hath committed the unpardonable Sin ; and so not only marrs his Assurance, but endeavours to drive him to Despair, which I have known to be the Case of several : And I have observed, that when once such tempted, distressed Souls, have been helped to see Satan's Policy in so doing ; and come satisfingly to know, that the worst of Thoughts and Suggestions, when resisted and opposed, are not inconsistent with Grace, but that rather the Resistance that's made, is an Evidence of Grace ; that then Satan hath left off that Way of Tempting, and betaken himself to some other Stratagem : However these Assaults and Temptations of Satan, do often marr and hinder the Believer's Assurance ; he is sometimes ready, with *David*, to say in his hast, *That all Men are Lyars*.

5. The Holy Ghost, for his own holy and wise Ends, may and often doth forbear, to grant that Assistance and enlightening Influence, that's needful to discern and clearly to see those Graces, which the Believer is possessed of, to be what they really are ; altho' he be sensible and conscious of their Exercises, yet he's not sure, that those Exercises
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proceed from true sanctifying Grace ; like as once the two Disciples, when they saw Christ, yet they knew not that it was he, until he opened their Eyes.

One wise End of such a Dispensation, may be to stir the Believer up to increase in Grace and Holiness, this being the very Method in which Assurance should be sought for, or may reasonably be expected. Another may be, to cause him to prize Assurance the more, and to make him the more thankful for it, when he obtains it. A third Reason may be, to engage him to be the more watchful against every Thing in his Conduct, that may have a Tendency to endanger the losing it again : All which is evident in the Case of the Spouse, *Canticles* iii. 1,---5. 1st. She is stirred up to increase in Diligence and Industry, in seeking her Beloved until she found him. 2dly. She shows how much she prized his Presence, *i. e.* The Evidences of his Love, and spiritual Communion with him : Says she, *I held him, and would not let him go, &c.* 3dly. How careful and cautious is she against every thing that might disturb or disquiet him, *ver. 5. I charge you, O ye Daughters of Jerusalem, by the Rees, and by the Minds of the Field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my Love, till he please.* Which shews that the Spouse was so exceeding tender of her Beloved, that she was not only resolved, not to disturb or offend him herself, but also desirous, that all others should be so likewise ; and I am persuaded, that the more Experience a Christian hath, of such divine Communications and spiritual Interviews, with him, who is altogether lovely, and the Standard-Bearer among Ten Thousand. He will be the more earnest to imitate the Spouses Conduct, in a solicitous Diligence to seek him when absent ; in
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prizing and rejoicing in his spiritual Presence when obtained ; and in guarding against what may provoke him to withdraw from and desert them ; and yet, alas for it, such is the instability and unconstancy of our Hearts ; such our Disposition to Pride, carnal Security, and Self-Confidence, that we often, alas ! alas ! for it, too too often grieve his holy Spirit, and provoke our Beloved to withdraw himself and be gone ; so that we are laid under a lamentable necessity of Seeking him over again many a Day, with deep Sorrow and great Discouragements, before we find him, yea with Fear, that we shall never again, at least in this Life, see his Face, and enjoy his Presence and Fellowship, as sometimes heretofore. Yea, for want of present Feeling, to be tempted to doubt, whether all our past Experience was not meer Flash and Delusion. If any, unto whose Hands this Essay may come, do complain, that this or any thing like it, is their Case, I would recommend unto them these two or three Passages, *Isaiab* 1. 10. *Who among you, that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the Voice of his Servant, that walketh in Darknes and hath no Light ? Let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay himself on his God ;* and *2. Sam. xxiii, 5. Altho' my House be not so with God ; yet hath he made with me an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all Things and sure : For this is all my Salvation, and all my Desire, altho' he make it not to grow ;* and *Psal. xlii. 11. Why art thou cast down, O my Soul ? And why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the Health of my Countenance. and my God.* O Christian, in thy dark and deserted Hours, cast not away all thy Confidence, but still claim thine Interest in God as thine own, plead thy Claim unto him by Covenant, in Imitation of what is contained in these Texts : For *the Heaven*
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and Earth should pass away; yet not one jot or tittle shall pass, until all be fulfilled, Even to thee, O deserted Believer, in God's good Time. Strive also to imitate the Spouse's Practice, *Cant. v.* throughout, *viz.* continue seeking him, whatever thy Discouragements be; continue to feed and maintain high Thoughts of him in thine Heart; and according to thy Oportunity and Capacity, strive to commend him to others.

III. I proceed now to the *Third Head*, which I proposed to handle, *viz.* To lay down some Scripture Marks and Characters, whereby a Christian may examine himself concerning his spiritual State, in order to come to as clear and distinct a Knowledge thereof, as his Case will afford.

It would be remembered that I said before, that these Marks, upon which a Christian would build his Faith of Assurance, must be such, as no unconverted Person can possibly come up to, while in that Estate; and they may be summed up under these two Parts or Branches, *viz.* The Exercise of true Grace, and the Performance of real Good Works; those two must go together; they mutually illustrate and evidence each other; and both together do afford a compleat Evidence of the Believer's gracious State, in Proportion to the Degree of Light and Evidence, in which the Believer sees and discovers them in himself, see *Observation 7.* And therefore, every true Grace in the Believer, suitably evidenced by its proper Fruit, is capable to be made use of, as a Mark whereby to try his spiritual State, according to the Measure of Light in which he discerns such a Grace in himself, so as to distinguish it from its Counterfeit.

But inasmuch as there are some particular Graces, which according to the more common and sensible Experience of Christians; as I apprehend, may be more easily and clearly applied to this Use of Self-Examination, because they are more easily compared with what the Scripture says concerning them, and perhaps also, may be more easily examined in ourselves, with necessary Exactness and clearness, in order to distinguish them from Counterfeits; I will therefore condescend upon a few particular Marks, which, I conceive, are not so easily counterfeited as some others that might be named.

And inasmuch as Christians may frequently meet with both these, and many other Marks, handled clearly and at length, in the Sermons and other Labours of many of the faithful Ministers of Jesus Christ, whose Praise is in the Gospel, throughout the Churches: And because my Design in this weak Essay, is rather, if I might be enabled, to lay down some general Instructions concerning the Nature of Assurance, and the right Method how to obtain, maintain and improve it, than to handle and particularly to apply the Marks or Characters upon which it is, for ordinary built; this being done at large by many others, and I hope is daily a doing by my faithful Brethren, in the Preaching of the Gospel: And also, because to insist at any tolerable length upon these Marks, would swell this little Essay beyond the Bulk, that I judge at present convenient; I will therefore only give a short Hint at those Marks, which I here subjoin, recommending my Readers to the Blessing of God, upon other more copious Performances, either in Word or Writing, upon this particular Subject.

The first Mark then, which I mention, is that Complex one, which is contained in the latter Part of the v. Chap. of *Matth.* To forgive Injuries, to love our Enemies, to do good for evil, to render Blessing for Cursing, and Prayers for Persecution, --- after the Example of our Heavenly Father and our gracious Redeemer.

Mark 2. Another Mark may be Mortification of Sin, especially our darling and predominant Lusts, which are delicate and dear to us, as a right Hand, Foot or Eye.

Mark 3. To grieve for Hate, and strive against the Sins, which none but God and our own Consciences know any Thing of.

Mark 4. To love and delight in, and sincerely to obey the Law of God, in those Things wherein it most crosseth our Humour, Interest or Inclination.

Mark 5. To be severe Censurers of ourselves, and to be merciful to others Failings; to aggravate our own Sin more than others.

Mark 6. To choose Reproach, Loss, Contempt, and Persecution, rather than sin against Light and Conscience.

Mark 7. To endeavour habitually to do all Things in the Fear of God, agreeable to his Will, and for his Glory.

Mark 8. Cheerfully to resign and submit ourselves and all our Concerns to the Will and Disposal of God; to give him passive as well as active Obedience, and that from our very Heart, as *Job* did.

Now, altho' a Person is not so easily deceived by a Counterfeit, in these self-denying Particulars, as in some others, such as Love to God, Love to our Neighbour, or to the Truth in common Cases; yet because of the direct and strong Opposition which they bear to our Corruptions, neither are the Corruptions which they oppose, soon and easily so far subdued, as that these Graces have the sure and sensible Ascendant and Prevalency over them; therefore the Believer often finds it difficult, to make such a clear Discovery of these self-denying Graces, as to build a Faith of Assurance upon them; yet when they come to be conspicuous in their Strength and Victory over their Opposites, they afford as clear a Ground of Assurance as any whatsoever.

I would here observe, that altho' a Person, upon his most strict and impartial Search of himself, should not be able to draw such an evident and certain Conclusion, concerning his gracious State, as amounts to Assurance; yet his Labour is so far from being lost, that it may be of great and unspeakable Advantage unto him: For,

1. If he can attain to any Degree of a rational Probability, of a Work of Grace being begun in himself; this will yield him no small Comfort, and will encourage him to strive to persevere and increase in those Things, which have the probable Appearance of Good in him, even tho' he's not sure, that they are true Grace.

2. He will hereby more distinctly discover his own Deficiency, in the Exercise of Grace and Performance of Duty; and so will see wherein he stands in need to endeavour an Amendment.

3. He will be hereby rendered capable, in a sensible and suitable Manner, to represent his own Condition to God by Prayer, and suitably to implore the Help of his holy Spirit.

4. If, upon Examination, he should be constrained to fear, or even to conclude the worst; this also must be of unspeakable Advantage unto him, if he will but improve it, inasmuch as he is thereby rendered more sensible of his Danger, and the Need he hath to be delivered from it; and so is delivered from these dangerous presumptuous Hopes, in which he hath flattered himself heretofore; and so is driven to look for a better and surer Foundation, upon which to build his Hope and Expectation of eternal Life; even to flee to Christ, and in earnest to seek regenerating Grace in the diligent Use of all appointed Means; for, let us suppose that, in this Case, the Person who examines himself, finds it clear to a Demonstration, that he is yet altogether unconverted, and in a damnable State; yet there is Hope in his Case; Mercy is in his Offer, and the greatest Saint in Heaven was once in as bad and dangerous a State as he is now in; yea, his Salvation is yet sure, if he does but truly comply with the Terms of the Gospel; and he hath Reason to bless God, that he is come to such a clear Sight of his Danger, as well as that there is a Remedy offered and provided: Let such an one then without Delay, put in Practice the rousing Exhortation of *Psal. xcv. 7, 8.* --- *To Day if ye will hear his Voice, harden not your Heart,* --- lest that Salvation which is offered to Day, ere to-morrow come, be rendered impossible; for the Day of Life or Grace will not last always.

IV. I proceed now in the Fourth Place, to offer some Instructions or Directions for attaining this
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great and sweet Attainment of Assurance of God's Love, or a gracious State.

And there are Two Sorts of Persons, which under this Head, I would say something unto; and suit some Directions to each of their Conditions.

1. There are some who may have some Desires after Assurance, who, as to any Knowledge they have yet obtained, or can get, concerning their spiritual State, have ground to fear; yea, perhaps directly to conclude, that they are yet in their Sins, or in a State of unregeneracy, and so are yet under the Guilt and Power of their Sins.

2. There are others, who, having been convinced of their Sin and Misery by Nature, have, for some time, been endeavouring to flee to and apply the Remedy provided, to exercise Repentance towards God, and Faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, together with the Practice of Righteousness and Holiness in their Life and Conversation; and being convinced of their Need of Regeneration, have been using the Means for that Purpose; and have been endeavouring to live and behave as becomes true Believers, as far as they could attain; yet, after all, are at a Loss what to think of their own Spiritual State; they are conscious to themselves, that they are aiming at what is good; but they are also conscious of so many Imperfections in Grace and good Works, that tho' they would fain hope, that a good Work is begun in them; yet they also fear, that the apparent Good that is in them, is not real Grace, but something of a meaner and inferiour Nature.

I will offer a few Directions to each of these two Sorts of Persons. And,

First, O Christian Professor! Who canst see no Ground to judge well of thy spiritual State, if still thou art stupidly unconcerned about it, thy Case is deplorable indeed, and next to desperate; who seest thyself in Danger of Hell-fire, and yet not careful to seek Deliverance: Would to God there were not too many Professors, who live and act as if this were their Condition: All I shall say to such, is, you are in the direct Road to everlasting Misery, without any probable Appearance, but only a bare Possibility of your Escape. But,

If you be such as are under any serious Concern about your Danger; and have serious Desires after being brought into a better and safer State, then I would lay before thee these few following Directions.

Direction 1. Labour to be thoroughly convinced of thy natural State, both as to Guilt of Sin, Corruption and Wickedness of thy Nature and Inclinations, as well as thy Danger of eternal Fire: For this Purpose, consider the absolute Holiness and inflexible Justice of God, the Spiritualness of his Laws; and compare these Things with thine own Heart and Practice; think how well the Description of *Jeremiah xvii. 9.* agreeth unto thee. *The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked.* Watch thine own Heart, if it was but for a Day or an Hour; and consider how many Vanities it will entertain, which are all hateful to an holy God, whose Justice, Holiness and Truth oblige him to punish Sin in the Criminal, or in a Surety. Such Thoughts as these may, by a divine Blessing, serve to raise in thine Heart some just Apprehensions and Convictions of thy natural State. Labour also to be affected with the Sense of thine
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utter Inability to relieve thyself, and consequently of thy Need of the Blood of Christ, to wash thee from Guilt; and the Spirit of God, to renew thy Heart and convert thy Soul.

Direct. 2. Wrestle earnestly and assiduously with God, by Prayer, for his Spirit, to begin and carry on the great and powerful Work of Conversion in thy Heart, that thou mayest be made willing in a Day of his Power; knowing that unless he do it, it will never, it can never be done.

Direct. 3. Be diligent and unwearied in the Use of all appointed Means and Ordinances, publick and private; be as diligent in the Use of those Means, as if thou couldest by them effect the Work thyself; and rely as entirely on the divine Blessing and Co-operation of the holy Spirit, as if thou didst nothing at all.

Direct. 4. Deliberately give and deliver up thyself, guilty and defiled as thou art, into the Hands of a merciful and powerful God in Christ; to be sanctified by his Spirit, ruled and taught by his Word and Spirit, as well as justified by the Merits of Christ.

Direct. 5. Put on deliberate and sincere Resolutions, that from henceforth, without Delay, and without Reserve, thou wilt seek God's Face, fear his Name and obey his Will; striving to perform every Duty, and to avoid every Sin, with all thine Heart.

Direct. 6. In a particular Manner strive to exercise those Graces or Affections, as I may rather yet call them; and to perform those Duties, which require most Mortification and Self-Denial.

Direct. 7. Be more diligent to get and to exercise true Grace, than to know whether thou hast it: for if thou hast it not, thou canst never know that thou hast it; and if thou hast it, or canst but

obtain and exercise it, thou shalt assuredly know it in due Time. Yet,

Direct. 8. Be diligent to observe what Progress thou makest in these Particulars, that thou mayest be sensibly thankful to God for what thou art enabled to do in this Matter, tho' thou art not sure it's true Grace that works; and that thou mayest be sensibly humbled for thy Short-comings, and suitably endeavour to amend past Faults and Failings.

Direct. 9. Do not weary, but persevere in all these Particulars, considering it's for an Eternity thou art working and running; and that there is no other Door or Way open; considering also the Shortness and Precariousness of thy Time and Season of Grace: And for thy Encouragement I may say, if thou sincerely and perseveringly practise these Directions, thy Labour shall not be lost; *For the Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, To as many as received him, to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name:* Now truly and sincerely to follow these Directions, is to believe on his Name, in the true Gospel-meaning of the Phrase. Its true, nothing that a Sinner by natural Strength can do, can procure him a Right to any saving Promise, nor is there any inseparable Connection between what a Sinner can do, and Gospel Grace; yet, O Sinner! if thou observe and practise these Directions, it shall then appear, that tho' thou couldst not by Nature, yet by Grace, thou art enabled to do what, according to the Tenor of the Gospel, will entitle thee to Gospel Grace.

And accordingly, I now proceed to offer some Directions to the other Sort of Persons, *viz.* Such who have something of a rational Probability of their
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their gracious State ; how such may attain to a full and well-grounded Assurance thereof. To such, I would offer the following Directions.

Direction 1. O Christian ! Art thou a Person, who, after the most impartial Search that thou canst make, art obliged to own, that thou discernest something in thyself, which hath the Appearance of Grace, and which thou canst not condemn for counterfeit, tho' thou art afraid it may be so for all ; and wouldst fain be certain concerning the Truth of thy State ? Then beware of Trusting too confidently to Probabilities and uncertain Appearances. Be earnest with God by Prayer, and be frequently, again and again, searching thyself by Self-Examination, in order to know the worst of thy Condition.

Direct. 2. Take this as a main and principal Direction in this Matter, without which all other Endeavours will be abortive, *viz.* Beware of sitting down contented with any Measure of Grace and Holiness, which thou hast already attained : But strive, and strive continually to increase and make Progress in Grace and Holiness, *by dying unto Sin and living unto Righteousness* more and more. Be daily searching out such Sins as retain most Strength, in order to execute the Sword of Mortification upon them ; and daily searching out such Graces as continue weak and feeble, in order to enliven and improve them by proper Exercise and Employment : And striving to observe thy Failures in Conduct, whether by Omission or Commission, whether in whole or in Part, whether as to Matter or Manner, &c. That so thou may'st advance in practical Righteousness and Holiness. I say, strive to grow and increase continually in Grace and Holiness. For by this Means thy Graces shall become, daily, more and more conspicuous ; and shall

evidently, in time, prove themselves to be what they appear to be. But while Christians, though sincere in the main, are slack, lazy and slothful; and do not with Vigour endeavour to be more holy and more heavenly in their Frame and Walk, than they have been, they will find still the same Bars, Difficulties and Impediments, which I mentioned under the last Observation, *viz.* the 8th. to stand as an effectual Let in their Way to Assurance. We must resolve to be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord; if we would, on sure Grounds, know that our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Direct. 3. Let thy Endeavours after Increase in Grace and Holiness, be universal, extending to all Graces, Sins and Duties: Beware of picking and chusing in this Matter, but have Respect to all God's Commandments; and be more and more of a tender Conscience, even with Respect to little Sins and Duties: For, *whosoever breaketh the least Commandment, shall be least in the Kingdom of God.*

Direct. 4. O Christian! if thou wouldest attain Assurance of thy gracious State, and of thy Interest in the unchangeable Love of God, I would advise and counsel thee, to be earnest, frequent and sincere, in renewing thy Covenant with God in Christ in an explicate Manner. *Yield thyself* often up unto him, as one that is alive from the dead; and thy Members as Instruments of Righteousness unto God, *Rom. vi. 13.* Be frequent in giving up thyself wholly, both to the Service and Disposal of God; and that both in secret, in the Way of personal Covenanting; and also by setting thy Seal to this Covenant, in a publick and solemn Manner, in the great Ordinance of the Lord's Supper: And be sure to give all Diligence, to call forth all thy reasonable Faculties, Graces and Affections, to a
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lively Exercise on such Occasions. Be diligent in preparing for such a solemn Transaction; endeavour after a suitable Frame when thou goest about it; and watchfully endeavour to live and act afterwards, as becomes one who art under the habitual Impressions of such solemn Bonds and Obligations to God thy Saviour: And be as careful as possible to guard against all sinful Reservations, which thy deceitful Heart will be ready, in a subtle Way, to entertain, solemnly protesting against all Things of that Kind; and resolving and promising in the Strength of divine Grace, to renounce and abandon every thing of that Kind, which hereafter thou mayest discover in thyself. This Method, through the divine Blessing, hath proved an effectual Means of strengthening the weak Faith of many; and of advancing them to such Degrees of Faith, Hope and Joy, that they have been brought, as it were, to the very Suburbs of Heaven, and made to rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory. A sincere and faithful Management of such covenant Transactions, between God and the believing Soul, hath Influence, on his attaining this Assurance of Faith, several Ways: As

1. The very Design thereof, is to strengthen the Believer's Faith, and engage his sincere Obedience.

2. All the spiritual Exercises, which are called for on such Occasion, when accompanied with a suitable Liveliness and Vigour, are the very Foundation upon which the Believer's Assurance is built, *i. e.* They are the Marks and Evidences of his gracious State. And further, they cultivate and improve his Graces, confirm his pious Resolutions, nourish his spiritual Frame, fortify him against Temptations, and make him truly Fruitful in the Ways of Righteousness and good Works.

Direct.

Direct. 5. Be careful to observe in what Degree and in what Particulars, you attain to a Conformity to the Scripture Marks and Characters of a Child of God ; and also in what Particulars you fall short : That you may be thankful for what you attain, and bewail and reform what is wanting or amiss.

Direct. 6. If upon Observation, you meet with any Scripture Mark, which you seem to have or grow in, be humbly thankful for it ; and strive to improve and grow in it, until you be sure it is real.

Direct. 7. If you meet with any Scripture Mark, which thou missest or findest very weak, never rest till thou obtain it ; resolve positively and peremptorily, yet in the Strength of divine Grace, to perform whatever Duty it leads to, and to avoid the Sin which it opposeth.

Direct. 8. Let your Endeavours of this Kind, be not by Fits and Starts ; but resolve that this shall be the main Business of thy Life, unto which all thy other Business shall give Way and be subordinate.

Direct. 9. Be earnest and assiduous in Prayer to God, for his Spirit, to assist thee in these Particulars, as well as to enable thee to discern them in thy self.

Direct. 10. Be not impatient under the Want of Assurance, but persevere in this Method until you obtain it ; and perhaps when you go but a little further, you shall find it, as the Spouse did.

It is worthy our Observation, that as the Faith of Assurance is built upon the evident lively Exercise of sanctifying Grace, which supposeth its Advancement unto considerable Measure of Strength and Conspicuity ; so the great Measure of Joy and Comfort, that for ordinary, doth accompany and flow from it, doth also best suit an high and advanced Degree of sanctifying Grace in Exercise :

While

While sanctifying Grace is weak and low in Exercise, the Believer is not so fit to feed upon the rich Cordials of Assurance, but would be in Danger of abusing them, one Way or other, unto spiritual Pride, carnal Security, or a lazy Slackness to grow in Grace, &c.

Well then ; O Christian ! if thou wouldst desire to be assured of thy gracious State, the Way is plain before thee ; there is not so much Mystery in these Directions, nor Difficulty to apprehend them, as there is in reducing them to Practice : And the chief Difficulty of this, ariseth from the woful By-asse of thy corrupt Nature and Inclinations, against every Thing that's spiritually good. But thou must remember, that thy Christian Life is a spiritual Warfare, wherein thou art ingaged against the whole Kingdom of Darknes, the Devil, the World and the Flesh ; and what Progress thou makest in thy Way heavenwards, must be by Violence, Force and Conquest of those thine Enemies ; and Assurance is no small Degree or Part of this Victory and Conquest : And therefore, thou must resolve to fight, if thou thinkest thus to overcome ; if thou canst but overcome thyself, thy corrupt sinful self, by the Help of the Omnipotent Spirit, the World and Satan will become less powerful and dangerous ; therefore, still be mauling and killing this wicked, sinful self, wherever and in whatever Form thou findest it, shew it no Mercy ; thou must either mortify it, or it will kill thee. *Rom. viii. 13. For if ye live after the Flesh, ye shall die.*

V. I proceed now in the *Fifth* Place, to give some Directions how to keep this precious and lovely Jewel, when it is obtained : For, by the by, I may observe, concerning it, that it requires Diligence to attain it, Watchfulness and Diligence too,
to

to keep it ; it causeth much Sorrow in the losing, and is often difficult and tedious in recovering. But to proceed, in order to thy keeping this precious Jewel, O Christian ! when thou hast obtained it, take these following Directions briefly.

Direction 1. Be watchful, constant and persevering, in the use of the very same Means, by which thou hast attained it ; particularly to increase and grow in Grace and Holiness, more and more continually ; and so much the more, because now thou hast so much more Comfort and Encouragement in thy Work, than heretofore : Consider that thou art thus formed of God, not to encourage thee to lay down, to take thy Ease upon a Bed of Security ; but rather to invigorate thine Endeavours and Exercise in Grace and Holiness ; that now, more than ever, thy Life and Walk may be to the Glory of God. This Jewel must be kept, in the same Manner in which it is at first obtained, by Industry and Diligence ; strive therefore, to flourish like the Palm Tree, and to grow like the Cedar in Lebanon. *Psal. xcii. 12.* To go from Strength to Strength, until thou appear before God in Zion. *Psal. lxxxiv. 7.*

Direct. 2. Watchfully guard against spiritual Pride, that thy vain, proud, deceitful Heart do not lift thee up in Conceit, on Account of this high Attainment. What hast thou that thou hast not received ? Why then shouldst thou glory as if thou hadst not received it ? This would be to turn the Grace of God into spiritual Wantonness, with a Witness : And yet, its what the assured Christian is in Danger of, through the remaining Corruption of his Heart. Therefore watch unto Humility, lest thou be abased by the Hidings of God's Face, and Loss of thy sweet and precious Jewel.

Direct. 3. Watch also against carnal Security, as if you were above all Danger ; your Enemies are
all

all yet alive and strong; they will watch for your Halting, they will recruit their Force, and rally again upon you, when you least expect it: Never hadst thou more Need than now, to *watch and pray that thou enter not into Temptation.*

Direct. 4. Be watchful to maintain an heavenly and spiritual Frame of Mind. O take care! that a carnal dead Frame of Heart, do not gradually and insensibly creep in upon thee, and so marr the spiritual Beauty and Lustre of thy religious Duties. Remember the Saying of the Apostle, *Rom. viii. 6. To be carnally minded, is Death: but to be spiritually minded, is Life and Peace.*

Direct. 5. Trust not to the Stock of Grace which thou hast already attained, as if it were sufficient for thy Through-bearing and Fruitfulness; but depend, seek and wait upon Christ, for new and fresh Communications of his Grace, by the Spirit; *For without him thou canst do nothing.* Still remember, that whatever Measure of Grace thou hast attained, it is still dependent on him: Grace is in thee, as the Sap is in the Branch, or Water in the Cistern; if the Communication be interrupted or the Dependency cut off, the Branch, though never so flourishing, soon withers; and the Cistern, though never so full, soon dries up; so it will fare with thy Grace, if thou cease to derive Supply from Christ by Dependance and Prayer, *John xv. 1.*

Direct. 6. Be watchful, not only against what is directly and in its Nature sinful, but also, that thy Mind be not clog'd or cloy'd, with excessive or unreasonable Exercises and Occupation, about Things lawful in themselves. The Cares and Pleasures of this Life, prove often a Snare to the Believer, by captivating and decoying his Affections; and so rendering them dead and languishing, as to spiri-
tual

ual Things. Its a very high Attainment, in my Judgment, practically to learn to use the World, and not abuse it: And to learn and practise this Lesson, would be of singular Use to the assured Christian, in order to preserve his Jewel and maintain his Comfort.

Direct. 7. Make strict and daily Observation and Remarks, on every Step of thy Walk, that no sinful Slip may pass without Repentance, and Application to the Blood of Christ for Pardon. O Christian, be tenderly strict in this particular, considering what depends upon it. One Sin, though comparatively small, indulged and not repented of, is sufficient to make dreadful Work in the Soul; it will introduce Hardness of Heart; it will pave the Way for more and greater Sins; it will marr and disturb thy inward Peace and Confidence towards God; it will grieve the holy Spirit, and consequently be a great Enemy to Assurance; it stands in the Way of obtaining it, and if continued in, will rob the Believer of it, even after he hath obtained it. Therefore, O Christian! if thou wouldst maintain thy Assurance of God's Love, or even any inferiour Degree of Hope, delay not to get the Guilt of any particular Sin, which thou art conscious of, removed by speedy Repentance and Application to the Blood of Christ; or else thou canst not expect to maintain thy Assurance, or to feed upon the Joys and Comforts flowing from thence.

Direct. 8. Be watchfully observant of the very Motions of Sin, especially thy predominant; strive to keep thy Feet upon these; which if thou do not, they will grow upon thee, like the Breaking in of Waters, and rob thee of thy Jewel; and cause thee perhaps to seek it long, with much Sorrow before thou find it. Watch against the Occasions

asions of Sin tho' remote; this will tend greatly to confirm and maintain thine Assurance; for the more thy general Conduct opposeth Sin, the clearer Evidence thou hast of true Grace.

Direct. 9. Strive still more and more, to search out the secret Wickedness and Deceits of thy Heart, in order to their being abandon'd and banished, or at least, oppos'd and suppressed; For there is such a Treasure of Sin and Deceit in the Heart, that it will never be search'd to the Bottom, While thou livest, thou wilt be finding out and discovering more and more Wickedness and Frauds. One Stratagem which our deceitful Hearts often useth, is to bask up Sin and sinful Motions, under the Appearance of Lawfulness and Duties; thy Care and Diligence in this Particular, will greatly confirm thy Assurance, inasmuch as hereby thou wilt shew thyself a stated Enemy to Sin.

Direct. 10. Be careful, that thy whole Time and Life be filled up with such Exercises and Employments, as in the Sight of God and thy Conscience, may be justly conceived under the Notion of Duty; or, which is much to the same Purpose, whether thou eatest or drinkest, or whatever thou doest, do all to the Glory of God: The Neglect of this, gives Satan and our Lusts many and great Advantages against the People of God. While our Time is wholly filled up with profitable and seasonable Employment, then Satan and Lust have not so easy Access to tempt; but when they observe the least Minute of our Time, vacant of profitable Business or Employment, they will not fail to occupy the same with some Temptation, to ensnare our Souls and destroy our Peace and Comfort.

Direct. 11. Finally, and in Sum, strive like a valiant Soldier, in the Camp of Christ, to be still in a warlike Posture, having thy spiritual Armour on,

on, being ready to receive, that is, resist thy spiritual Enemies, from whatever Quarter they may assault thee: Consider, that thou sustaineſt the Character of a Servant and Soldier, and therefore muſt ſtudy to approve thyſelf to thy Lord and Captain in both Reſpects, if thou would maintain and retain the Assurance of his Favour.

Thus, O aſſur'd Christian, I have laid before thee, the beſt and moſt ſuitable Directions I could fall upon, to aſſiſt thee to keep thy precious Jewel of Assurance. It may be, that the Multiplicity and Difficulty of ſo many Directions, may raiſe ſome diſcouraging Thoughts in thy Mind, whereby thou mayeſt be diſquieted and weakened in thy Purpoſes and Endeavours, to obſerve and praſtiſe according to them. But in Order to prevent or remove ſuch Diſcouragements, I would briefly ſay:

1ſt. The Jewel is precious, and well worth all thy Pains, both in ſeeking and keeping. 2dly. Altho' thou art not ſufficient of thyſelf, for ſo difficult a Work, yet by the Help of the Spirit thou ſhalt be rendered able for it. 3dly, The ſame Work in all its Parts, would lie upon thee, altho' thou hadſt not this Jewel of Assurance in thy View. 4thly, The ſpiritual Health and Comfort, which doth accompany a vigorous Practice of theſe Particulars, compared with the Droopings, Languishings, Sorrows, Sinkings of Spirit, Deſertions, and often dreadful Terrors, which are the native Conſequents of the Neglect of them, ſhould, I think; rouse every Christian to reſolve againſt all Oppoſition, to perſiſt and perſevere in them. To which I may add, 5thly, That if in the main, and habitually, thou endeavour to do what is incumbent, thou ſerveſt an indulgent and forgiving Maſter, who will not narrowly mark thine Iniquity; and will allow thee to keep thy Jewel, even when often,
 thou

thou deservest to have it taken from thee. And therefore, *Be of good Courage, and he will give Strength unto thine Heart; and wit, I say, on the Lord. Psal. xxvii. 14.* But I proceed in the

VI. Sixth Place, to enquire, why so few attain the Faith of Assurance? And why so many true and sincere Believers go so long without it?

Reason 1. I am afraid, that the greater Part of Professors, content themselves with an historical or temporary Faith; and its not possible, that any such should attain the Faith of Assurance, which presupposeth saving, justifying Faith, besides other saving Graces. There is one practical Mistake, which, I'm afraid, ruins Numbers of Orthodox Professors, and defrauds them of their eternal Salvation; and it is this, they are instructed and firmly believe, that a Sinner is justified in the Sight of God, not by Works, but for the Righteousness of Christ; this is so far right: And so, as to themselves, they renounce all Dependance upon their own Righteousness, and rely only upon the Righteousness of Christ for Justification and Salvation. One would think that this is a great Length, when done in Sincerity; and yet I'm afraid, that Multitudes come this Length, at least with a moral Sincerity, who never receive any saving Benefit by Jesus Christ; and the grand Defect lies in this, tho' they rely only on the Righteousness of Christ; yet they never receive him as a compleat Saviour, as he is offered to them in the Gospel: I mean, tho' they trust in him as their High Priest, to atone and interceed for them; yet they never receive him as their great Prophet and King; nor with their whole Hearts, give themselves up to him, to be taught and instructed, to be conquered and ruled by him, even by his Word and Spirit; to have their Understandings, Wills, Affections and Conversations conformed

to his Image and Laws : Such are so far from having any rational Prospect of the Faith of Assurance, that until they see their Mistake, they are quite out of the Way of attaining the true Faith of Adherence.

Reas. 2. Another Reason is, what I touched before, that many think, that the Faith of Assurance is such an arduous and difficult Thing to attain; and withal, that its not necessary, but that a Person may be, and many are actually saved without it; and therefore they think it needless to puzzle themselves about it, seeing they may be safe without it. I doubt not, but by this very Delusion, many are so fatally deceived, that they never arrive to the Faith of Adherence, and so are deluded out of their Salvations.

Reas. 3. As to true, tho' weak Believers, one Thing that stands in the Way of their Assurance, is their Ignorance of the Nature of it, and of the Scripture Way of attaining it; apprehending it to be such an arduous and supernatural Thing, that it cannot be attained but by immediate Revelation, or something like it; and so are discouraged from seeking it in good earnest. If the Lord would bless this weak Essay, and particularly the foregoing Directions, as a mean to remove this Mistake, and animate as well as direct them in their Pursuit of it, both they and I should have great Reason to be thankful to God for it.

Reas. 4. Tho' in all true Believers Grace doth increase, and Sin doth gradually decrease; yet the Steps and Degrees by which Sin decays, and Grace grows, in many, are so small and undiscernable, besides the undiscernable Beginnings of Grace in many, that its long before they arrive to such a Degree of discernable Grace, as is necessary to found the Faith of Assurance upon.

Reas. 5. Some Believers are much afflicted with Doubts, Fears and unbelieving Suggestions, from Satan and a melancholy Temper, &c. which hinder their

their Assurance; and that, even when their tender and circumspect holy Walk, and even their declared Experiences, do constrain all that know or observe them, to believe firmly that they are true Christians.

Reas. 6. Prevailing Sloth and Laziness, and Want of a vigorous Endeavour to grow in Grace and Holiness, and watch against Sin; which even a true Believer may be guilty of, doth so far hinder the Increase of Grace in many, as to keep them back from Assurance.

Reas. 7. Want of due Care to observe and remark the Exercise and Increase of Grace in their own Hear and Lives. may hinder many from coming to the Assurance of their gracious State.

Reas. 8. Want of that Degree of Tenderness of Conscience, with Respect to Sin and Duty, in Thoughts, Words and Actions, about Matters of smaller Moment, which in due Time, might be a Ground of Assurance to the true Believer. *Psal. cxix. first Part, Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have Respect to all thy Commandments. And Psal. xxxix. 1. I said, I will look to my Ways, that I sin not with my Tongue.*

Let every sincere Christian, who is panting and longing after Assurance, in the Way of commanded Duty, labour to remove those Impediments out of their own Way, lest they continue too long, and labour in vain for it.

VII. I now come to the Seventh and last Head which I proposed to speak to, *viz.* To shew the Greatness, both of the Sin and Disadvantage, that is in neglecting to seek and endeavour after this great and comfortable Attainment of Assurance.

The Sinfulness of this Neglect will appear, if the following Particulars be considered.

1. Its a direct Disobedience to the Commands of the Gospel in our Text, and elsewhere.

2. It implies most base Ingratitude towards God, for his great Love and tender Condescension to us, in that he is willing to allow us in this Life, so sweet and comfortable a Benefit, if we will be at due Pains to obtain it.

3. It implies Disobedience to all Gospel Precepts, yea, to the whole Law of God; inasmuch as our Endeavour to attain it, doth consist in a constant and careful Endeavour to exercise and grow in Grace and Holiness, as I shewed before.

4. It includes Ingratitude for, and a Dis-esteem and Contempt of all the saving Benefits of the Gospel, in that we do not think it worth our while, to be at Pains to secure our Interest in them; which shews, that we do not prize them according to their true Worth and Value.

2. The Loss and Disadvantage which true Believers are at, by this Neglect, is also very great; which will appear, by considering

1. Hereby their Hands are kept weak, and their Hearts are discouraged, in the Discharge of every Duty; while they are still at an uncertainty, whether their Performances are accepted or not; and whether they may not lose their Reward, for Want of true Grace in their Hearts, and an Interest in the Righteousness of Christ, which is the alone Foundation of all the Believer's Claim. Hence

2. By this Negligence, the lazy slothful Believer deprives and debars himself from that inward, heavenly, pure, serene Peace, Comfort and Joy in the Holy Ghost, which are the ordinary Concomitants and native Fruits of a well-grounded Assurance: For by thus assuredly believing, we rejoice with Joy un-speakable and full of Glory.

3. While

3. While the true Believer is short of Assurance, especially if his Sloth and Negligence be the Cause of it, he is exposed as an easier Prey to all Temptations; especially to Unbelief and Discouragement, and sometimes to some Degrees of Despair.

Thus I have endeavoured, according to my Measure, to speak something to the several Heads at first proposed. I will now add to what hath been said, some Inferences from the whole.

1. From what hath been said, we may see the wonderful Wisdom and Goodness of God to his own People, in the Dispensations of his Grace to them, in that he so orders Matters, as may be at once to the Glory of his Grace, and the greatest Advantage and Comfort of his own People: As he hath inseparably connected true Grace and eternal Salvation together, so hath he also joined the high Degrees of Comfort, natively arising from Assurance, not with the Being, but rather with the advanced Degrees of Grace; thereby keeping the Believer under the continual Influence of his own spiritual Self-Interest, in order to prompt him still to persevere and increase in Grace and Holiness; herein observing a bountiful, yea, and a beautiful Analogy and Proportion between the Duties required of us, and the Reward promised: I say, a Proportion, not of Value but of Degrees, rewarding them, not for, but according to their Works. For if the Believer could reasonably expect the high Privilege and Comfort of Assurance, while Grace is low and feeble, and Corruption strong and Captivating, they might be easily tempted to think, that God is as well pleased with weak Grace as with strong: But when the Believer observes, that his Degrees of Comfort are, for the most Part in proportion to Degrees of sanctifying Grace and Holiness, this ob-

lives him still to Diligence and Watchfulness in his Endeavours to grow in Grace and Holiness.

2. We may learn, that for the most Part it is the Believer's own Fault, that he goes so long in the Dark, without Assurance of God's Love: The Benefit is attainable, and we are directed how to attain it; but alas! the Body of Sin so clogs us; Sloth and Diffidence, Laziness and Despondency, so dispirit our Hearts and weaken our Hands in the Ways of Holiness, that oftentimes its long e'er we arrive at such a Degree of Grace, as to put us beyond all Doubt concerning our gracious State. The Snares and Temptations of the World, the Pleasures and Cares of it, not only keep many out of Heaven, but also cause many to walk heavily, slowly and haltingly in their Way to it.

3. We may also learn, that it is the Believer's own Sin and Mismanagement, in some Sort or other, that robs him of this precious Jewel, after he hath obtained and enjoyed it for some time: For a Body of Sin and Death still cleaving to the Believer, when spiritual Pride, carnal Security and Unwatchfulness creep in upon him, as too often they do, then he becomes an easy Prey to Temptation; and consequently the lively, vigorous, sensible Exercise of Grace is interrupted, and contrary Lust get the Ascendant. The Believer loses the felt Sense of his own Grace; and of Course his Assurance, which is built thereupon, must fall to Ground; and he often in such a Case, falls under many Doubts and Fears, as if all his former Experiences had been nothing but Flash and Counterfeit.

4. We may learn, that let a Person's Profession and Attainments in Religion, be what they will; yet if he hath no Desires, nor makes any Endeavours after Assurance, by striving to grow in Grace and Holiness, it is a dreadful Sign, that such a Person is
yet

yet altogether destitute of true Grace; for as every Thing strives after Perfection in its Kind, so doth Grace in a particular Manner. The true Believer can never be satisfied fully of his own Condition, while any Corruption remains, or any Defect in his Grace: You may as soon expect, that the covetous Worldling will be fully satisfied with the Increase of his Wealth, so as not to desire more, as that the true Believer will be fully content with the Measure of Grace which he hath attained, so as not to desire and endeavour after further Advancement therein; and for this Reason as much as any, he longs for Heaven, because, then he knows he shall be made perfectly holy as well as happy; yea, he reckons the perfect Holiness of that State a chief Part of its Happiness. And therefore, whosoever think that they have attained as much Grace or Religion, as may suffice to bring them to Heaven, and therefore they'll be content and seek no more; such may assuredly conclude, that they have no Grace at all; yea, they neither know what true Grace, or the Happiness of Heaven are.

I will conclude with a Word of Exhortation.

O Christians then! be exhorted, to *give Diligence, to make your Calling and Election sure*; and watchfully keep this lovely Jewel when you obtain it. And for Motives consider,

Its a commanded Duty, instampt with divine Authority.

If you be sincerely diligent, you shall succeed in some Measure, if not to a full Assurance, yet to higher Degrees of a well-grounded rational Probability.

Its well worth all your Pains, it will more than compensate all your Labours.

Nothing is required of you in order to it, which is not your Duty; abstracting from all Views thereunto

it would be your indispensable Duty to do the same Things, altho' Assurance were not attainable.

When attained, it will fill your Souls with the purest Joys and Comforts that you are capable of, on this side Heaven.

It will make all Duties exceedingly delightful, it will render Mercies doubly sweet, and Afflictions and Crosses easy and tolerable.

It will fortify you against Temptations to Sin of every Sort,

It will arm you against all Fears and Terrors of Persecution ; it will make you bold Vouchers for the Truth, in the Face of most cruel Persecutors ; that you'll be neither afraid nor ashamed to own Christ and his Cause before Men.

It will cause you to leave the World in a Chariot of triumphant Faith, over all your Enemies ; and as it were, to die with this Song of Triumph in your Mouth, *O Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory?* The very Thoughts of so great and many Advantages, should certainly excite us, with the greatest Vigour and Chearfulness, to seek and press after this Earnest of our Inheritance, which would anticipate, in some Measure, the Joys of the Saints above.

APPENDIX.

WHEN I had almost finished the foregoing Essay, there occurred two Queries or Cases unto my Thought, relative to the same Subject, the Solution whereof, I conceived might be of some Use to exercised Christians; and therefore I have concluded, to subjoin a modest Endeavour to answer them by Way of Appendix.

The Cases are these.

Case 1. Whether the spiritual Joys and Comforts of the assured Christian, do always bear Proportion to the Measure of Assurance which he is possessed of?

Case 2. Whether and how far it is the Duty of the assured Christian, to publish his Attainment of this Privilege to others?

Case 1. Whether the spiritual Joys and Comforts of the assured Christian, do always bear Proportion to the Measure of Assurance which he is possessed of?

I conceive, that a satisfying Solution of this Case, may be of Use to some exercised Christians, who are sometimes tempted to doubt of their spiritual State and Interest in the Favour of God, meerly because they enjoy not the comforting Influences of the Spirit as at some times past.

Before I come to give a direct Answer or Solution to this Case, it may be needful to premise two Things.

1. We would distinguish between that Assurance that is produced in the Believer, by an inward Irradiation upon the Soul, coming in an unexpected Manner, and which seems to be designed to answer some present Necessity, *viz.* either for Relief under some heavy Pressure of Doubts and Fears, or to enable

enable and encourage him to some difficult Task which is before him, either by doing or suffering; which Kind of Assurance is commonly transient and of short Continuance, unless as it is established by further Evidence, in a rational Way, by Reflection and Self-Examination, according to the Word. I say, we would distinguish between such an Assurance, and that Assurance which is obtained in the ordinary Way, of which in the foregoing Essay.

2. We would distinguish between the Assurance which a Christian is possessed of, being built upon the clear and evident Discovery of Grace in exercise for the present; and that Assurance, which is built upon the evident and clear Remembrance, which the Believer may have of the Exercise of his Grace in Time past; while Grace for the present, may be fallen under Languishing and Decay.

According to these Distinctions, I would humbly offer an Answer to this Case, in the following Propositions.

Proposition 1. I conceive that the Believer's Joy and Comfort, doth for ordinary, bear Proportion to the Measure of Assurance of the first Sort, while the Irradiation or spiritual Inlightning, unto which it is owing, doth last. *Cant. vi. 12.*
Or ever I was aware, &c.

Prop. 2. These Joys and Comforts also do, for ordinary, bear Proportion to the Measure of Assurance, which is built upon the clear discerning of the vigorous Exercise of Grace for the present. *Psal. xxiii. 6. lxxiii. 24.*

Prop. 3. That altho' the Believer may continue possessed of his Assurance, upon clear and sure Remembrance of what is past, either as to sudden Irradiation, or past Experience of evident Exercise of Grace; while at present, his Grace is much abated, weakened or interrupted, through Temptations or Corruptions; Yet, in such a Case, his Joys and Comforts will readily abate, in Proportion to the present languishing of his Grace. *Cant. v. 8. ---Tell my Beloved that I am Sick of Love. Yet,*

Prop. 4. I conceive, that in such a Case, the Believer is secured against Discouragement and Fears, in Proportion unto his Assurance, which he is possessed of, altho', by the Prevalency of Temptation and Corruption, he is rendered incapable of

of exercising the spiritual Affections of Joy, Comfort, Gratitude and Love, in such lively Manner as sometimes he hath done.

Prop. 5. These spiritual Joys and Comforts of Believers, being an Effect of the Spirit's Office, as a Comforter, they may be very low, even when Assurance is strong, and sanctifying Grace in lively Exercise: The Spirit, for his own holy Ends, thinking fit to withhold his comforting Influences, in order to draw forth the Believer's Patience and Faith into Exercise; something like as it was with our Saviour on the Cross; his Faith and Assurance remained in full Strength, but his Comfort was gone; something like this also, seems to have been the Case of the Psalmist, *Psal. xlii. 11. xliii. 5.* Yet, still he is kept from sinking under Impatience or murmuring Discontent.

Prop. 6. The true Believer may be in Possession of this precious Jewel of Assurance, as founded on a clear and sure Remembrance of what spiritual Communications have passed between God and his Soul in time past, accompanied with a remaining, habitual, strong and firm Purpose to cleave unto his covenanted God, in a Way of Obedience, Dependance and Submission to his Will; and yet may be, in the mean time, as it were, almost swallowed up with Grief and Trouble, Fears and Perplexities, on various Accounts, so as not to be able to take that Comfort, in reflecting upon his Interest in a covenanted God, that he hath done, and that still he both might and ought to do, were it not that the sensible Pressure of his present Trouble, together with a sinful Weakness, Impatience and Diffidence, &c. render him unable to do it; yea, to drive him to considerable Degrees of Murmuring, and Mistrust of the Goodness of God, and Care of his Providence towards him, as to temporal Concerns, either of his own Person, or of the Church of God; while still his Assurance, as to his spiritual gracious State and Interest in eternal Life, may remain habitually firm, like the Stump of *Nebuchadnezzar's* Tree, which remained sere with a Band of Iron and Brass. This seems to have been the Case of *David*, when he said in his Haste, *All Men are Lyars, Psal. cxvi.* And elsewhere, *I shall one Day fall by the Hand of Saul. Psal. lxxix.* throughout, and *Jeremiah* in his *Lamentations*.

Such Pressures may arise from various Causes: As,

1. From outward Afflictions of various Kinds, which may greatly try the Believer's Faith and Patience.

2. From inward Desertions, reviving of various Lusts and Corruptions, which sometimes may and do receive great Strength, through the Believer's Unwatchfulness, besides strong Temptations from Satan; and Fears and Apprehensions lest God, in his righteous, fatherly Displeasure, should yet further leave him to fall into some gross Sin, and so become an Offence unto the Generation of God's Children, because of his Misimprovement of former Mercies of an high and spiritual Nature.

3. Such Troubles may arise from the Consideration of the melancholy, perplexed, sinking State of Religion and the Church of God, by Persecutions, Divisions, Degeneracy in Principles, Practice or the Power of Godliness.

And when all these three meet together, it's no wonder that the poor Believer finds himself greatly distressed; even altho' his personal eternal Interest be sure and certain. I now come to

Case 2. Whether and how far it is a Believer's Duty to publish his Assurance of his own gracious State to others?

I conceive, that a rational well-grounded Solution of this Case, might be also of some Use, to direct the assured Christian in his Conduct towards others, in conversing with them, to Edification. I will humbly offer my Thoughts upon it, hoping that they may be of Use to some. And First I will premise some Things.

Premise 1. It is one thing to declare our Experience about spiritual Matters plainly and simply, for their Edification, and another thing to declare the Judgment which we form of our Spiritual State, as founded upon such Experiences: The former may be to Edification, when the latter may not. The Person we confer with, will think or judge of us, according to the Apprehension which he hath of our Practice and Experiences, compared together, rather than according to the Opinion which we have of ourselves, good or bad.

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Prem. 2. It's one Thing to declare our comfortable Hopes of our good Estate, which every true tho' weak Believer ought to have; and another Thing to declare our Assurance, which is only the Attainment of some, and which is not possible to be had, but upon clear and certain Evidence of Grace in ourselves: The former may be done by every true Christian, without Suspicion of Hypocrisy or Vain-Glory; but the other cannot, except only to such as have conceived an high Opinion of us, on other Accounts, whereby they are the more easily induced, to believe and give Credit to such a Declaration.

Prem. 3. It's one Thing to declare our Assurance to a particular chosen bosom christian Friend, or to a small select chosen Company of such; and another Thing to declare it to any that comes in our Way, or to proclaim it on the House Top. The former may be to Edification, but the latter favours of a vain-glorious Disposition: It will only be credited according to the Opinion which every Hearer hath of the Person declaring, on other Accounts.

Prem. 4. It is one Thing to declare our Assurance upon some certain Occasions, as at the apparent near Approaches of Death, or upon Occasion of Suffering for the Truth, which many heroic Believers have done, after having concealed it for many Years before, until, by such a Call of Providence, they were obliged to declare what God had done for their Souls, for the strengthening and comforting of others; and another Thing to be making a Declaration of this Assurance, upon every slight Occasion, without any particular Call of Providence, more than common, thereunto. The former hath been of great Use, but the latter is liable to be suspected by all, who either have no Acquaintance or Knowledge of us, or have conceived but a mean Opinion of us.

Having laid down these Premises, which I forbear at length to prove, conceiving that they carry their own Evidence along with them; I will, by Way of Inference, humbly offer my Opinion in this Matter, in the following Propositions.

Proposition 1. That the Faith of Assurance is so much a personal Favour, the immediate and peculiar Design the

being for ordinary, peculiar to the Person who hath it ; it is, I conceive, not to be published or made known, except to some peculiar Bosom-Friends, or on some singular Occasion.

Prop. 2. That in order to such a Declaration's being of any Use for Edification, it is necessary, that the Person or Persons, to whom such a Declaration is made, have such a favourable Opinion of the Person declaring, that his Grace and Attainments in Religion, do bear Proportion to his Assurance. For the Edification following such a Declaration, cannot exceed the Credit that's given to it ; nor can the Credit given to it, exceed the Opinion which is entertained of the Person declaring.

Besides what is couched in the above Premises, I would here subjoin a short Word for Illustration and Confirmation.

The Design of such a Declaration, when it is duly made, must be the Edification of Hearers. The Believer who hath this Assurance, hath and enjoyeth all the Benefits of it peculiar to himself. Without such a Declaration, a Stranger cannot intermeddle with this Joy. If this Declaration be made only or chiefly to raise the Person's Esteem, it's sinful Vain-gloriousness. Now, as was noted before, the Edification of Hearers by such a Declaration, will still be bounded and limited by the Measure of Credit that's given to it ; and the Credit given to it, will also be in like Manner bounded by the Esteem, which, on other Accounts, the Hearers have conceived concerning the Person declaring, as to his Attainments in Religion ; so that if the Hearers have conceived but a low Esteem of him, then such a Declaration will but raise and increase their Jealousies concerning him, as being either an Hypocrite, or under some Delusion. For altho' for Instance, I myself know that I am well assured of my gracious State ; yet it is not possible for me, to make another Person sure concerning my Assurance ; because there is a two-fold Weakness and Uncertainty in my Testimony : *First*, None can be sure but I am under a Delusion ; And *Secondly*, 't's equally uncertain, whether I do not play the Hypocrite in a vain-glorious Manner. And therefore, the Person to whom I thus declare myself, must have an high Esteem of me, as to my Attainments in Religion.

edified by such a Declaration, which supposeth a considerable Degree of Knowledge or Acquaintance one Way or other; which can never be the Case of a Multitude, made up mostly of Strangers, who should be guilty of a culpable Credulity, if they should trust the bare Word of a Stranger in such a Matter; that being more than Christ himself required, who confirmed his Doctrine and Mission by Miracles, and required not his Hearers to take his bare Word, tho' in itself infallible: Saith he, *John v. 31. If I bear Witness of myself, my Witness is not true.*

And accordingly it's observable upon this Head, that, except some of the inspired Saints recorded in Scripture, it hath never been the ordinary Practice of any of the most eminent and faithful Ministers of the Gospel, to recommend themselves to their Hearers, by Declarations of this Kind; altho' they have sometimes communicated themselves to some particular bosom Friends; and sometimes something hath been found among their Writings, designed at first for their own private Use, which, after their Death, hath been published for the good of others. They have for ordinary studied an holy Modesty, as being desirous to conceal their own particular Attainments from the World, excepting some particular Cases: And even then sometimes, they have industriously endeavoured, to conceal their own personal Interest in what they related, as did the Apostle *Paul*, and Mr. *Flavel* in his *Pneumatologia*.

There is one Thing more, which also seems to be of some Weight in this Matter, *viz.* That seeing the strongest Christians are still the Subjects of remaining Corruption, and liable to Temptation: If we should suppose the unlearned Christian, which is not impossible, to be overtaken in some scandalous Sin after such Declaration of his Assurance; would not this open the Mouths of Enemies, to reproach; Yea, and would it not cast such a Person's Integrity more into Question, if he had never pretended to Assurance, than if he had I know no Assurance, and I know no Assurance, that he

as above, I think it's still the Duty of assured Christians, to study Modesty in such Declarations, as the most eminent Saints, in former Generations, have done; seeing, to act otherwise, favours so much of a vain-glorious Sounding of a Person's own Praise.

I will here briefly propole and remove one Objection, which is or may be advanced against what hath been said; and that is the Practice of the Psalmist, *Psal. lxxvi. 16. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell what he hath done for my Soul.* Besides other Texts, which may be alledged to contain either Precepts or Precedents: To which briefly I would answer.

1. The Psalmist, by being inspired, was put beyond all Suspicion of Delusion or Hypocrisy.

2. None will or reasonably can alledge, that by this Text Believers are obliged to publish all that passeth between God and their Souls: Surely, it would not be to Edification, to publish the many Victories in particular, which, by the Help of the Spirit, Believers obtain over many secret Temptations and sinful Motions. The Apostle *Paul* conceals the particular Thorn in the Flesh by which he was tempted.

3. The Psalmist's Publication was to such as feared God.

4. The Psalmist, by his holy Life publicly known, had gained such a Character of a true Saint, that none could be reasonably expected, to suspect his Declaration as disingenuous.