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**The Art of Divine  
Contentment: An  
Exposition of  
Philippians 4:11**

**Thomas Watson**



## The Art of Divine Contentment: An Exposition of Philippians 4:11

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**Author(s):** Watson, Thomas

**Publisher:** Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

**Description:** The Apostle Paul, in Phil. 4:11, says "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Thomas Watson, an English Puritan preacher, wants to teach readers how to gain the same contentment as Paul. Living in the 16th century, Watson believed that discontentment was a sin, and so wrote the book *The Art of Divine Contentment: An Exposition of Philippians 4:11*. Watson spends the entire book on this one verse, and in doing so, presents Christians with a comprehensive method for becoming content. Centered on the idea that "A gracious spirit is a contented spirit," Watson believes that Christians *can* be and *should* be content because of God's wonderful promises to his people. "The way for a man to be contented," Watson says, "is not by raising his estate higher, but by bringing his heart lower." In our contemporary society where discontent is the norm, disillusioned readers will benefit from *The Art of Divine Contentment*. Watson's content is God-centered rather than focused on material possessions as so many Christians are today, so it is sure to bring comfort to those who strive to be happy in Christ.

Abby Zwart

CCEL Staff Writer

**Subjects:** Practical theology  
Practical religion. The Christian life  
Moral theology  
Virtues

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# **The Art of Divine Contentment**

## **An Exposition of [Philippians 4. 11](#)**

*“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”*

**THOMAS WATSON**

This etext is from an edition by Free Presbyterian Publications,

ISBN 0902506 269.

No year is indicated.

Permission granted to publish the book on the Internet.

A printed edition is available from any bookshop or directly from the publisher at

Free Presbyterian Publications

133 Woodlands Road

Glasgow G3 6LE

United Kingdom

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## FOREWORD

“Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward;” therefore we all need to learn the same lesson as Paul. “I have learned,” he said “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,” [Philippians 4. 11](#). Believers, especially, wish to attain to a holy equanimity in their tribulations and under the stresses caused by our increasingly secular society.

In this volume we have a full exposition, by the Puritan, Thomas Watson, of the above verse of Scripture, originally preached during his ministry as rector of St Stephen’s, Wallbrook, London. “Although Thomas Watson issued several most valuable books,” said C. H. Spurgeon, “comparatively little is known of him — even the dates of his birth and death are unknown. His writings are his best memorial; perhaps he needed no other, and therefore providence forbade the superfluity.”

Puritan preachers, having an eye to the practice of their hearers, built their heart-searching application of the truth upon sound biblical doctrine. This characteristic is evident in *The Art of Divine Contentment*; as is also the fact that Watson was the “master of a terse, vigorous style and of a beauty of expression. He could speak not only to win men’s understanding but also to secure a place for the truth in their memories.”

In reprinting the 1855 edition of *The Art of Divine Contentment* (the latest edition we know of) we wished to revise the layout and to add editorial notes for increased clarity. We regret, however, that lack of staff prevents us doing little more than adding a full table of contents.

We issue this little book with the prayerful hope that it will be useful in teaching the art of Godly contentment to many, enabling them, like David, to sincerely say to God in their troubles, “Thou art good, and doest good.”

***The Publishers***

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## CHAPTER I

### The Introduction to the Text.

These words are brought in by way of prolepsis to anticipate and prevent an objection. The apostle had, in the former verse, laid down many grave and heavenly exhortations: among the rest, “to be careful for nothing.” Not to exclude, 1. A *prudential* care; for, he that provideth not for his own house, “hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” (1 Ti. 5. 8) Nor, 2. a *religious* care; for we must give all “diligence to make our calling and election sure.” (2 Pe. 1. 10) But, 3. to exclude all *anxious* care about the issues and events of things; “take no thought for your life, what you shall eat.” (Mat. 6. 25) And in this sense it should be a Christian’s care not to be careful. The word careful in the Greek comes from the primitive, that signifies “to cut the heart in pieces,” a soul-dividing care; take heed of this. We are bid to “commit our way unto the Lord;” (Ps. 37. 5) the Hebrew word is, “roll thy way upon the Lord.” It is our work to cast away care; (1 Pe 5. 7) and it is God’s work to take care.

By our immoderacy we take his work out of his hand. Care, when it is eccentric, either distrustful or distracting, is very dishonourable to God; it takes away his providence, as if he sat in heaven and minded not what became of things here below; like a man that makes a clock, and then leaves it to go for itself. Immoderate care takes the heart off from better things; and usually while we are thinking how we shall do to live, we forget how to die. Care is a spiritual canker that doth waste and dispirit; we may sooner by our care add a furlong to our grief than a cubit to our comfort. God doth threaten it as a curse, “they shall eat their bread with carefulness.” (Ez. 12. 1) Better fast than eat of that bread. “Be careful for nothing.”

Now, lest any one should say, yea, Paul thou preachest that to us which thou hast scarce learned thyself; hast thou learned not to be careful? the apostle seemed tacitly to answer that, in the words of the text; “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content:” a speech worthy to be engraven upon our hearts, and to be written in letters of gold upon the crowns and diadems of princes.

The text doth branch itself into these two general parts. I. The scholar, Paul; “I have learned.” II. The lesson; “in every state to be content.”

## CHAPTER II

### **The First Branch of the Text, the Scholar, with the First Proposition.**

I begin with the first: The scholar, and his proficiency; “I have learned.” Out of which I shall by the bye, observe two things by way of paraphrase. 1. The apostle doth not say, I have *heard*, that in every estate I should be content: but, I have *learned*. Whence our first doctrine, that **it is not enough for Christians to hear their duty, but they must learn their duty**. It is one thing to hear and another thing to learn; as it is one thing to eat and another thing to concoct. St Paul was a practitioner. Christians hear much, but it is to be feared, learn little. There were four sorts of grounds in the parable, (Lu. 8. 5) and but one good ground: an emblem of this truth, many hearers, but few learners.

There are two things which keep us from learning. 1. *Slighting what we hear*. Christ is the pearl of price; when we disesteem this pearl, we shall never learn either its value, or its virtue. The gospel is a rare mystery; in one place, (Ac. 20. 24) it is called “the gospel of grace;” in another, (1 Cor. 4. 4) “the gospel of glory;” because in it, as in a transparent glass, the glory of God is resplendent. But he that hath learned to contemn this mystery, will hardly ever learn to obey it; he that looks upon the things of heaven as things by the bye, and perhaps the driving of a trade, or carrying on some politic design to be of greater importance, this man is in the high road to damnation, and will hardly ever learn the things of his peace. Who will learn that which he thinks is scarce worth learning? 2. *Forgetting what we hear*. If a scholar have his rules laid before him, and he forgets them as fast as he reads them, he will never learn. (Ja. 1. 25) Aristotle calls the memory the scribe of the soul; and Bernard calls it the stomach of the soul, because it hath a retentive faculty, and turns heavenly food into blood and spirits; we have great memories in other things, we remember that which is vain. Cyrus could remember the name of every soldier in his huge army. We remember injuries: this is to fill a precious cabinet with dung; but as Hierom saith, how soon do we forget the sacred truths of God? We are apt to forget three things: our faults, our friends, our instructions. Many Christians are like sieves; put a sieve into the water, and it is full; but take it forth of the water, and all runs out: so, while they are hearing a sermon, they remember something; but like the sieve out of the water, as soon as they are gone out of the church, all is forgotten. “Let these sayings, (saith Christ) sink down into your ears;” (Lu. 9. 44) in the original it is, “put these sayings into your ears,” as a man that would hide the jewel from being stolen, locks it up safe in his chest. Let them sink: the word must not fall only as dew that wets the leaf, but as rain which soaks to the root of the tree, and makes it fructify. O, how often doth Satan, that fowl of the air, pick up the good seed that is sown!

USE. Let me put you upon a serious trial. Some of you have heard much, — you have lived forty, fifty, sixty years under the blessed trumpet of the gospel, — what have you

learned? You may have heard a thousand sermons, and yet not learned one. Search your consciences.

1. You have heard much *against sin*: are you hearers; or are you scholars? How many sermons have you heard against covetousness, that it is the root, on which pride, idolatry, treason do grow? One calls it a metropolitan sin; it is a complex evil, it doth twist a great many sins in with it. There is hardly any sin, but covetousness is a main ingredient of it; and yet are you like the two daughters of the horse-leech, that cry, “give! give!” How much have you heard against rash anger, that is a short frenzy, a dry drunkenness; that it rests in the bosom of fools; and upon the least occasion do your spirits begin to take fire? How much have you heard against swearing: It is Christ’s express mandate, “swear not at all.” (Mat. 5. 34) This sin of all others may be termed the unfruitful work of darkness. It is neither sweetened with pleasure, nor enriched with profit, the usual vermilion wherewith Satan doth paint sin. Swearing is forbidden with a *subpaena*. While the swearer shoots his oaths, like flying arrows at God to pierce his glory, God shoots “a flying roll” of curses against him. And do you make your tongue a racket by which you toss oaths as tennisballs? do you sport yourselves with oaths, as the Philistines did with Samson, which will at last pull the house about your ears? Alas! how have they learned what sin is, that have not learned to leave sin! Doth he know what a viper is, that will play with it?

2. You have heard much *of Christ*: have you learned Christ? The Jews, as Jerom saith, carried Christ in their Bibles, but not in their heart; their sound “went into all the earth; (Ro. 10. 18) the prophets and apostles were as trumpets, whose sound went abroad into the world: yet many thousands who heard the noise of these trumpets, had not learned Christ, “they have not all obeyed.” (Ro. 10. 16) (1.) A man may *know* much of Christ, and yet not learn Christ: the devils knew Christ. (Mat. 1. 24) (2.) A man may *preach* Christ, and yet not learn Christ, as Judas and the pseudo-apostles. (Ph. 5. 15) (3.) A man may *profess* Christ, and yet not learn Christ: there are many professors in the world that Christ will profess against. (Mat. 7. 22, 23)

Q. *What it is then to learn Christ?*

1. To learn Christ is to be *made like Christ*, to have the divine characters of his holiness engraven upon our hearts: “we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.” (2 Cor. 3. 18) There is a metamorphosis made; a sinner, viewing Christ’s image in the glass of the gospel, is transformed into that image. Never did any man look upon Christ with a spiritual eye, but he went away quite changed. A true saint is a divine landscape picture, where all the rare beauties of Christ are lively portrayed and drawn forth; he hath the same spirit, the same judgment, the same will, with Jesus Christ.

2. To learn Christ, is to *believe in him*; “my Lord, and my God,” (Jno. 20. 28) when we do not only believe God, but in God, which is the actual application of Christ to ourselves,

and as it were the spreading of the sacred medicine of his blood upon our souls. You have heard much of Christ, and yet cannot with an humble adherence say, “my Jesus;” be not offended if I tell you, the devil can say his creed as well as you.

3. To learn Christ, is *to love Christ*. When we have Bible-conversations, our lives like rich diamonds cast a sparkling lustre in the church of God, and are, in some sense, parallel with the life of Christ, as the transcript with the original. So much for the first notion of the word.

## CHAPTER III

### Concerning the Second Proposition.

This word, "I have learned," is a word that imports difficulty; it shows how hardly the apostle came by contentment of mind; it was not bred in nature. St Paul did not come naturally by it, but he had learned it. It cost him many a prayer and tear, it was taught him by the Spirit. Whence our second doctrine: **good things are hard to come by**. The business of religion is not so facile as most do imagine. "I have learned," saith St Paul. Indeed you need not learn a man to sin; this is natural, (Ps. 58. 3) and therefore facile, it comes as water out of a spring. It is an easy thing to be wicked; hell will be taken without storm; but matters of religion must be learned. To cut the flesh is easy, but to prick a vein, and not to cut an artery is hard. The trade of sin needs not to be learned, but the art of divine contentment is not achieved without holy industry: "I have learned."

There are two pregnant reasons, why there must be so much study and exercitation: 1. Because *spiritual things are against nature*. Everything in religion is antipodes to nature. There are in religion two things, and both are against nature. (1.) Matters of faith: as, for men to be justified by the righteousness of another, to become a fool that he may be wise, to save all by losing all; this is against nature. (2.) Matters of practice: as, Self-denial; for a man to deny his own wisdom, and see himself blind; his own will, and have it melted into the will of God; plucking out the right eye, beheading and crucifying that sin which is the favourite, and lies nearest to the heart; for a man to be dead to the world, and in the midst of want to abound; for him to take up the cross, and follow Christ, not only in golden, but in bloody paths, to embrace religion, when it is dressed in night-clothes, all the jewels of honour and preferment being pulled of; this is against nature, and therefore must be learned. Self-examination; for a man to take his heart, as a watch, all in pieces; to set up a spiritual inquisition, or court of conscience, and traverse things in his own soul; to take David's candle and lantern, (Ps. 119. 105) and search for sin; nay, as judge, to pass the sentence upon himself. (2 Sa. 34. 17) this is against nature, and will not easily be attained to without learning. Self-reformation; to see a man, as Caleb, or another spirit, walking antipodes to himself, the current of his life altered, and running into the channel of religion: this is wholly against nature. When a stone ascends, it is not a natural motion, but a violent; the motion of the soul heaven-ward is a violent motion, it must be learned; flesh and blood is not skilled in these things; nature can no more cast out nature, than Satan can cast out Satan. 2. Because *spiritual things are above nature*. There are some things in nature that are hard to find out, as the cause of things, which are not learned without study. Aristotle, a great philosopher, whom some have called an eagle fallen from the clouds, yet could not find out the motion of the river Euripus, and therefore threw himself into it; what then are divine things, which are in sphere above nature, and beyond all human disquisition; as the Trinity, the hypostat-

ical union, the mystery of faith to believe against hope? Only God's Spirit can light our candle here. The apostle calls these "the deep things of God." The gospel is full of jewels, but they are locked up from sense and reason. The angels in heaven are searching into these sacred depths. (1 Pe. 22)

USE. Let us beg the Spirit of God to teach us; we must be "divinely taught;" the eunuch could read, but he could not understand, till Philip joined himself to his chariot. (Ac. 8. 29) God's Spirit must join himself to our chariot; he must teach, or we cannot learn: "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord". (Is. 54. 13) A man may read the figure on the dial, but he cannot tell how the day goes, unless the sun shines upon the dial: we may read the Bible over, but we can not learn the purpose, till the Spirit of God shines into our hearts. (2 Cor. 4. 6) O implore this blessed Spirit! It is God's prerogative-royal to teach: "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit." (Is. 48. 17) Ministers may tell us our lesson, God only can teach us; we have lost both our hearing and eye-sight, therefore are very unfit to learn. Ever since Eve listened to the serpent, we have been deaf; and since she looked on the tree of knowledge we have been blind; but when God comes to teach, he removes these impediments. (Is. 35. 5) We are naturally dead; (Ep. 2. 1) who will go about to teach a dead man? yet, behold, God undertakes to make dead men to understand mysteries! God is the grand teacher. This is the reason the word preached works so differently upon men; two in a pew, the one is wrought upon effectually, the other lies at the ordinances as a dead child at the breast, and gets no nourishment. What is the reason? Because the heavenly gale of the Spirit blows upon one, and not upon the other; one hath the anointing of God, which teacheth him all things, (1 Jno. 2. 27) the other hath it not. God's Spirit speaks sweetly, but irresistably. In that heavenly doxology, none could sing the new song, but those who were sealed in their foreheads, (Re. 14. 2) reprobates could not sing it. Those that are skilful in the mysteries of salvation, must have the seal of the Spirit upon them. Let us make this our prayer: Lord, breathe thy Spirit into thy word; and we have a promise, which may add wings to prayer; "if ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Lu. 11. 13) And thus much of the first part of the text, the scholar, which I intended only as a short gloss or paraphrase.

## CHAPTER IV

### **The Second Branch of the Text, the Lesson itself, with the Proposition.**

I come to the second, which is the main thing, the lesson itself, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Here was a rare piece of learning indeed, and is certainly more to be wondered at in St Paul, that he knew how to turn himself to every condition, than all the learning in the world besides, which hath been so applauded in former ages, by Julius Cæsar, Ptolemy, Xenophon, the great admirers of learning. The text hath but few words in it; “in every state content:” but if that be true, which once Fulgentius said, that the most golden sentence is ever measured by brevity and suavity, then, this is a most accomplished speech; the text is like a precious jewel, little in quantity, but great in worth and value.

The main proposition I shall insist upon, is this, **that a gracious spirit is a contented spirit.** The doctrine of contentment is very superlative, and till we have learned this, we have not learned to be Christians.

1. *It is a hard lesson.* The angels in heaven had not learned it; they were not contented. Though their estate was very glorious, yet they were still soaring aloft, and aimed at something higher; “the angels which kept not their first estate.” They kept not their estate, because they were not contented with their estate. Our first parents, clothed with the white robe of innocency in paradise, had not learned to be content; they had aspiring hearts, and thinking their human nature too low and home-spun, would be crowned with the Deity, and “be as gods.” Though they had the choice of all the trees of the garden, yet none would content them but the tree of knowledge which they supposed would have been as eye-salve to have made them omniscient. O then, if this lesson was so hard to learn in innocency, how hard shall we find it, who are clogged with corruption!

2. *It is of universal extent,* it concerns all. 1st. It concerns *rich* men. One would think it needless to press those to contentment whom God hath blessed with great estates, but rather persuade them to be humble and thankful; nay, but I say, be content. Rich men have their discontents as well as others! When they have a great estate, yet they are discontented that they have no more; they would make the hundred talents a thousand. A man in wine, the more he drinks, the more he thirsts; covetousness is a dry dropsy; an earthly heart is like the grave, that is “never satisfied;” therefore I say to you, rich men, be content. Rich men, if we may suppose them to be content with their estates, which is seldom; yet, though they have estate enough, they have not honour enough: if their barns are full enough, yet their turrets are not high enough. They would be somebody in the world, as Theudas, “who boasted himself to be somebody.” (Ac. 5. 36) They never go so cheerfully as when the wind of honour and applause fills their sails; if this wind be down they are discontented. One would think Haman had as much as his proud heart could desire; he was set above all the princes, advanced upon the pinnacle of honour, to be the second man in the kingdom; (Es.

3. 1) yet in the midst of all his pomp, because Mordecai would not uncover and kneel, he is discontented, and full of wrath, and there was no way to assuage this pleurisy of revenge, but by letting all the Jews' blood, and offering them up in sacrifice. The itch of honour is seldom allayed without blood; therefore I say to you rich men, be content. Rich men, if we may suppose them to be content with their honour and magnificent titles, yet they have not always contentment in their relations. She that lies in the bosom, may sometimes blow the coals; as Job's wife, who in a pet would have him fall out with God himself; "curse God, and die." Sometimes children cause discontent. How often is it seen that the mother's milk doth nourish a viper? and that he that once sucked her breast, goes about to suck her blood? Parents do often of grapes gather thorns, and of figs thistles. Children are sweet-briar; like the rose, which is a fragrant flower, but hath its prickles. Our relative comforts are not all pure wine, but mixed; they have in them more dregs than spirits, and are like that river Plutarch speaks of, where the waters in the morning run sweet, but in the evening run bitter. We have no charter of exemption granted us in this life; therefore rich men had need be called upon to be content. *2dly*. The doctrine of contentment concerns *poor* men. You that do suck so liberally from the breasts of providence, be content; it is an hard lesson, therefore it had need be set upon the sooner. How hard is it when the livelihood is even gone, a great estate boiled away almost to nothing, then to be contented. The means of subsistence is in Scripture called our life, because it is the very sinews of life. The woman in the gospel spent "all her living upon the physicians;" (Lu. 8. 43) in the Greek it is, she spent her *whole life* upon the physicians, because she spent her means by which she should live. It is much when poverty hath clipped our wings then to be content; but, though hard, it is excellent; and the apostle here had "learned in every state to be content". God had brought St Paul into as great variety of conditions as ever we read of any man, and yet he was content; else sure he could never have gone through it with so much cheerfulness. See into what vicissitudes this blessed apostle was cast: "we are troubled on every side," (2 Cor 4. 8) there was the sadness of his condition; "but not distressed," there was his content in that condition: "we are perplexed," there is his affliction; "but not in despair," there is his contentation. And, if we read a little further, "in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults," (2 Cor 6. 4,5) &c. there is his trouble: and behold his content, "as having nothing, yet possessing all things." When the apostle was driven out of all, yet in regard of that sweet contentment of mind which was like music in his soul, he possessed all. We read a short map or history of his sufferings; "in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft," (2 Cor. 11. 23, 24, 25) &c. yet behold the blessed frame and temper of his spirit, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Which way soever providence did blow, he had such heavenly skill and dexterity, that he knew how to steer his course. For his outward estate he was indifferent; he could be either on the top of Jacob's ladder, or the bottom; he could sing either the dirge or the anthem; he could be anything that God would have him: "I know

how to want, and how to abound.” Here is a rare pattern for us to imitate. Paul, in regard of his faith and courage, was like a cedar, he could not be stirred; but for his outward condition, he was like a reed bending every way with the wind of providence. When a prosperous gale did blow upon him, he could bend with that, “I know how to be full;” and when a boisterous gust of affliction did blow, he could bend in humility with that, “I know how to be hungry.” St Paul was, as Aristotle speaks, like a die that hath four squares; throw it which way you will, it falls upon a bottom: let God throw the apostle which way he would, he fell upon this bottom of contentment. A contented spirit is like a watch: though you carry it up and down with you yet the spring of it is not shaken, nor the wheels out of order, but the watch keeps its perfect motion: so it was with St Paul, though God carried him into various conditions, yet he was not lift up with the one, nor cast down with the other; the spring of his heart was not broken, the wheels of his affections were not disordered, but kept their constant motion towards heaven; still content. The ship that lies at anchor may sometimes be a little shaken, but never sinks; flesh and blood may have its fears and disquiets, but grace doth check them: a Christian, having cast anchor in heaven, his heart never sinks; a gracious spirit is a contented spirit. This is a rare art. Paul did not learn it at the feet of Gamaliel: “I am instructed,” (Ph. 4. 11) I am initiated into this holy mystery; as if he had said, I have gotten the divine art, I have the knack of it; God must make us right artists. If we should put some men to an art that they are not skilled in, how unfit would they be for it? put an husbandman to limning or drawing pictures, what strange work would he make? This is out of his sphere. Take a limner that is exact in laying of colours, and put him to plough, or set him to planting, or grafting of trees, this is not his art, he is not skilled in it: bid a natural man live by faith, and when all things go cross, be contented, you bid him do what he hath no skill in, you may as well bid a child guide the stern of a ship; to live contented upon God in the deficiency of outward comforts, is an art which “flesh and blood hath not learned;” nay, many of God’s own children, who excel in some duties of religion, when they come to this of contentment, how do they bungle? They have scarce commenced masters of this art.

## CHAPTER V

### **The resolving of some Questions.**

For the illustration of this doctrine, I shall propound these questions.

Q. 1. *Whether a Christian may not be sensible of his condition, and yet be contented?*

Yes; for else he is not a saint, but a stoic. Rachel did well to weep for her children, there was nature; but her fault was, she refused to be comforted, there was discontent. Christ himself was sensible, when he sweat great drops of blood, and said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" yet he was contented, and sweetly submitted his will: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The apostle bids us humble ourselves "under the mighty hand of God," (1 Pe. 5. 6) which we one is not capable of; perhaps he can use his estate better, he hath a public heart as well as a public place. The wise God sees that condition to be bad for one, which is good for another; hence it is he placeth men in different orbs and spheres; some higher, some lower. One man desires health, God sees sickness is better for him; God will work health out of sickness, by bringing the body of death, into a consumption. Another man desires liberty, God sees restraint better for him; he will work his liberty by restraint; when his feet are bound, his heart shall be most enlarged. Did we believe this, it would give a check to the sinful disputes and cavils of our hearts: shall I be discontented at that which is enacted by a decree, and ordered by a providence? Is this to be a child or a rebel?

## CHAPTER VIII

### **Use I. Shewing how a Christian may make his Life comfortable.**

It shows how a Christian may come to lead a comfortable life, even an heaven upon earth, be the times what they will: by Christian contentment. The comfort of life doth not stand in having much; it is Christ's maxim, "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he doth possess," (Lu. 12. 15) but it is in being contented. Is not the bee as well contented with feeding on the dew, or sucking from a flower, as the ox that grazeth on the mountains? Contentment lies within a man, in the heart; and the way to be comfortable, is not by having our barns filled, but our minds quiet. The contented man, saith Seneca, is the happy man.

Discontent is a fretting humour, which dries the brains, wastes the spirits, corrodes and eats out the comfort of life; discontent makes a man that he doth not enjoy what he doth possess. A drop or two of vinegar will sour a whole glass of wine. Let a man have the affluence and confluence of worldly comforts, a drop or two of discontent will embitter and poison all.

Comfort depends upon contentment; Jacob went halting, when the sinew upon the hollow of his thigh shrank: so, when the sinew of contentment begins to shrink, we go halting in our comforts. Contentation is as necessary to keep the life comfortable, as oil is necessary to keep the lamp burning; the clouds of discontent do often drop the showers of tears.

Would we have comfort in our lives? we may have it if we will: a Christian may carve out what condition he will to himself. Why dost thou complain of thy troubles? it is not trouble that troubles, but discontent; it is not the water without the ship, but the water that gets within the leak, which drowns it; it is not outward affliction that can make the life of a Christian sad; a contented mind would sail above these waters, — but when there's a leak of discontent open, and trouble gets into the heart, then it is disquieted and sinks. Do therefore as the mariners, pump the water out, and stop the spiritual leak in the soul, and no trouble can hurt thee.

## CHAPTER IX

### Use II. A Check to the discontented Christian.

Here is a just reproof to such as are discontented with their condition. This disease is almost epidemical. Some not content with the calling which God hath set them in, must be a step higher, from the plough to the throne; who like the spider in the Proverbs, will “take hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.” Others from the shop to the pulpit; (Nu. 12. 2) they would be in the temple of honour, before they are in the temple of virtue; who step into Moses’ chair, without Aaron’s bells and pomegranates; like apes, which do most shew their deformity when they are climbing. It is not enough that God hath bestowed gifts upon men, in private to edify; that he hath enriched them with many mercies? but, “seek ye the priesthood also?” (Nu. 16. 10) What is this but discontent arising from high flown pride? These do secretly tax the wisdom of God, that he hath not screwed them up in their condition a peg higher. Every man is complaining that his estate is no better, though he seldom complains that his heart is no better. One man commends this kind of life, another commends that; one man thinks a country-life best, another a city-life; the soldier thinks it best to be a merchant, and the merchant to be a soldier. Men can be content to be anything but what God would have them. How is it that no man is contented? Very few Christians have learned St Paul’s lesson: neither poor nor rich know how to be content, they can learn anything but this.

If men are *poor*, they learn to be *envious*; they malign those that are above them. Another’s prosperity is an eye-sore. When God’s candle shines upon their neighbour’s tabernacle, this light offends them. In the midst of wants, men can, in this sense, abound, namely, in envy and malice; an envious eye is an evil eye. They learn to be querulous, still complaining, as if God had dealt hardly with them; they are ever telling their wants, they want this and that comfort, whereas their greatest want is a contented spirit. Those that are well enough content with their sin, yet are not content with their condition.

If men are *rich*, they learn to be *covetous*; thirsting insatiably after the world, and by unjust means scraping it together; their “right hand is full of bribes,” as the Psalmist expresseth it. (Ps. 26. 10) Put a good cause in one scale, and a piece of gold in the other, and the gold weighs heaviest. There are, saith Solomon, four things that say, “it is not enough:” (Pr. 30. 15) I may add a fifth; the heart of a covetous man. So that neither poor nor rich know how to be content. Never certainly since the creation did this sin of discontent reign or rather rage more than in our times; never was God more dishonoured; you can hardly speak with any, but the passion of his tongue betrays the discontent of his heart; everyone lisps out his trouble, and here even the stammering tongue speaks too freely and fluently. If we have not what we desire, God shall not have a good look from us, but presently we are sick of discontent, and ready to die out of an humour. If God will not forgive the people of Israel

for their lusts, they bid him take their lives; they must have quails to their manna. Ahab, though a king, and one would think his crown-lands had been sufficient for him, yet is sullen and discontented for Naboth's vineyard. Jonah though a good man and a prophet, yet ready to die in a pet; and because God killed his gourd, kill me too, saith he. Rachel, "give me children, or I die;" she had many blessings, if she could have seen them, but wanted this contentation. God will supply our wants, but must he satisfy our lusts too? Many are discontented for a very trifle; another hath a better dress, a richer jewel, a newer fashion. Nero, not content with his empire, was troubled that the musician had more skill in playing than he. How fantastic are some, that pine away in discontent for the want of those things which if they had, would but render them more ridiculous!

## CHAPTER X

### Use III. A Suasive to Contentment.

It exhorts us to labour for contentation; this is that which doth beautify and bespangle a Christian, and as a spiritual embroidery, doth set him off in the eyes of the world.

But methinks I hear some bitterly complaining, and saying to me, Alas! how is it possible to be contented? “The Lord hath made “my chain heavy;” he hath cast me into a very sad condition.”

There is no sin, but labours either to hide itself under some mask; or, if it cannot be concealed, then to vindicate itself by some apology. This sin of discontent I find very witty in its apologies, which I shall first discover, and then make a reply. We must lay it down as a rule, that discontent is a sin; so that all the pretences and apologies wherewith it labours to justify itself, are but the painting and dressing of a strumpet.

The first apology which discontent makes is this; **I have lost a child.** Paulina, upon the loss of her children, was so possessed with a spirit of sadness, that she had liked to have entombed herself in her own discontent; our love to relations is oftentimes more than our love to religion.

1. We must be content, not only when God gives mercies, but when He takes away. If we must “in every thing give thanks,” (1 Th. 5. 18) then in nothing be discontented.

2. Perhaps God hath taken away the cistern, that he may give you the more of the spring; he hath darkened the starlight, that you may have more sun-light. God intends you shall have more of himself, and is not he better than ten sons? Look not so much upon a temporal loss, as a spiritual gain; the comforts of the world run dregs; those which come out of the granary of the promise, are pure and sweet.

3. Your child was not given but lent: “I have, saith Hannah, lent my son to the Lord;” (1 Sa. 1. 28) she lent him! the Lord hath lent him to her. Mercies are not entailed upon us, but lent; what a man lends he may call for again when he pleases. God hath put out a child to thee a while to nurse; wilt thou be displeased if he takes his child home again; O be not discontented that a mercy is taken away from you, but rather be thankful that it was lent you so long.

4. Suppose your child to be taken from you, either he was good or bad; if he was rebellious, you have not so much parted with a child, as a burden; you grieve for that which might have been a greater grief to you; if he was religious, then remember, he “is taken away from the evil to come,” and placed in his centre of felicity. This lower region is full of gross and hurtful vapours; how happy are those who are mounted into the celestial orbs! The righteous are *taken away*, in the original it is, *he is gathered*; a wicked child is cut off, but the pious child is gathered. Even as we see men gather flowers, and candy them, and preserve them by them, so hath God gathered thy child as a sweet flower that he may candy it with glory,

and preserve it by him forever. Why then should a Christian be discontented? why should he weep excessively? “Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for yourselves;” (Lu. 23. 28) so, could we hear our children speaking to us out of heaven, they would say, weep not for us who are happy; we lie upon a soft pillow, even in the bosom of Christ; the Prince of Peace is embracing us and kissing us with the kisses of his lips; be not troubled at our preferment; “weep not for us,” but weep for yourselves, who are in a sinful sorrowful world: you are in the valley of tears, but we are on the mountain of spices; we have gotten to our harbour, but you are still tossing upon the waves of inconstancy. O Christian! be not discontented that thou hast parted with such a child; but rather rejoice that thou hadst such a child to part with. Break forth into thankfulness. What an honour is it to be a parent to beget such a child, that while he lives increaseth the joy of the glorified angels, (Lu. 20. 10) and when he dies increaseth the number of the glorified saints.

5. If God hath taken away one of your children, he hath left you more, he might have stripped you of all. He took away Job’s comforts, his estate, his children; and indeed his wife was left, but as a cross. Satan made a bow of this rib, as Chrysostom speaks, and shot a temptation by her at Job, thinking to have him shot to the heart; “curse God and die.” but Job had upon him the breast-plate of integrity; and though his children were taken away, yet not his graces; still he is content, still he blesseth God. O think how many mercies you still enjoy; yet your base hearts are more discontented at one loss, than thankful for an hundred mercies! God hath plucked one bunch of grapes from you; but how many precious clusters are left behind?

You may object, But it was my only child, — the staff of my age, — the seed of my comfort, — and the only blossom out of which my ancient family did grow.

6. God hath promised you, if you belong to him, “a name better than of sons and daughters.” (Is. 56. 5) Is he dead that should have been the monument to have kept up the name of a family? God hath given you a new name, he hath written your name in the book of life; behold your spiritual heraldry; here is a name that can not be cut off. Hath God taken away thy only child? he hath given thee his only Son: this is a happy exchange. What needs he complain of losses, that hath Christ? He is his Father’s brightness, (He. 1. 3) his riches, (Col. 2. 9) his delight. (Ps. 42. 1) Is there enough in Christ to delight the heart of God? and is there not enough in him to ravish us with holy delight? He is wisdom to teach us, righteousness to acquit us, sanctification to adorn us; he is that royal and princely gift, he is the bread of angels, the joy and triumph of saints; he is all in all. (Col. 3. 10) Why then are thou discontented? Though thy child be lost, yet thou hast him for whom all things are loss.

7. Let us blush to think that nature should outstrip grace. Pulvillus, an heathen, when he was about to consecrate a temple to Jupiter, and news was brought him of the death of his son, would not desist from his enterprize, but with much composure of mind gave order for decent burial.

The second apology that discontent makes is, **I have a great part of my estate strangely melted away, and trading begins to fail.** God is pleased sometimes to bring his children very low, and cut them short in their estate; it fares with them as with that widow, who had nothing in her house, save a pot of oil: (2 Ki. 4. 2) but be content.

1. God hath taken away your estate, but not your portion. This is a sacred paradox, honour and estate are no part of a Christian's jointure; they are rather luxuries than essentials, and are extrinsical and foreign; therefore the loss of those cannot denominate a man miserable, still the portion remains; "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul." (La. 3. 24) Suppose one were worth a million of money, and he should chance to lose a pin off his sleeve, this is no part of his estate, nor can we say he is undone; the loss of sublunary comforts is not so much to a Christian's portion, as the loss of a pin is to a million. "These things shall be added to you," (Mat. 6. 33) they shall be cast in as overplus. When a man buys a piece of cloth he hath an inch or two given in to the measure; now, though he lose his inch of cloth, yet he is not undone, for still the whole piece remains: our outward estate is not so much in regard of the portion, as an inch of cloth is to the whole piece; why then should a Christian be discontented, when the title to his spiritual treasure remains? A thief may take away all the money that I have about me, but not my land; still a Christian hath a title to the land of promise. Mary hath chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her.

2. Perhaps, if thy estate had not been lost, thy soul had been lost; outward comforts do often quench inward heat. God can bestow a jewel upon us, but we fall so in love with it, that we forget Him that gave it. What pity is it that we should commit idolatry with the creature! God is forced sometimes to drain away an estate: the plate and jewels are often cast over-board to save the passenger. Many a man may curse the time that ever he had such an estate: it hath been an enchantment to draw away his heart from God; "they that will be rich, fall into a snare:" are thou troubled that God hath prevented a snare? Riches are thorns; (Mat. 13. 7) art thou angry because God hath pulled away a thorn from thee? Riches are compared to "thick clay;" (Ha. 2. 6) perhaps thy affections, which are the feet of the soul, might have stuck so fast in this golden clay that they could not have ascended up to heaven. Be content; if God dam up our outward comforts, it is, that the stream of our love may run faster another way.

3. If your estate be small, yet God can bless a little. It is not how much money we have, but how much blessing. He that often curseth the bags of gold, can bless the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruise. What if thou hast not the full fleshpots? yet thou hast a promise, "I will abundantly bless her provision," (Ps. 132. 15) and then a little goes a great way. Be content thou hast the dew of a blessing distilled; a dinner of green herbs, where love is, is sweet; I may add, where the love of God is. Another may have more estate than you, but, more care; more riches, less rest; more revenues, but with all more occasions of expense; he hath a greater inheritance, yet perhaps God doth not give "him power to eat thereof" (Ec.

6. 2) he hath the dominion of his estate, not the use; he holds more but enjoys less; in a word, thou hath less gold than he, perhaps less guilt.

4. You did never so thrive in your spiritual trade; your heart was never so low, as since your condition was low; you were never so poor in spirit, never so rich in faith. You did never run the ways of God's commandments so fast as since some of your golden weights were taken off. You never had such trading for heaven all your life; this is most abundant gain. You did never make such adventures upon the promise as since you left off your sea-adventures. This is the best kind of merchandize. O Christian, thou never hadst such incomes of the Spirit, such spring-tides of joy; and what though weak in estate, if strong in assurance? Be content: what you have lost one way, you have gained another.

5. Be your losses what they will in this kind, remember in every loss there is only a suffering, but in every discontent there is a sin, and one sin is worse than a thousand sufferings. What! because some of my revenues are gone, shall I part with some of my righteousness? shall my faith and patience go too? Because I do not possess an estate, shall I not therefore possess my own spirit? O learn to be content.

The third apology is, **it is sad with me in my relations:** where I should find most comfort, there I have most grief. This apology or objection brancheth itself into two particulars, whereto I shall give a distinct reply.

*1st. My child goes on in rebellion;* I fear I have brought forth a child for the devil. It is indeed, sad to think, that hell should be paved with the skulls of any of our children; and certainly the pangs of grief which the mother hath in this kind, are worse than her pangs of travail; but though you ought to be humbled, yet not discontented; for, consider, 1. You may pick something out of your child's undutifulness; the child's sin is sometimes the parent's sermon; the undutifulness of children to us, may be a *memento* to put us in mind of our undutifulness once to God. Time was when we were rebellious children; how long did our heart stand out as garrisons against God? How long did he parley with us and beseech us, ere we would yield? He walked in the tenderness of his heart towards us, but we walked in the frowardness of our hearts towards him; and since grace hath been planted in our souls, how much of the wild olive is still in us? How many motions of the Spirit do we daily resist? How many unkindnesses and affronts have we put upon Christ? Let this open a spring of repentance; look upon your child's rebellion and mourn for your own rebellion. 2. Though to see him undutiful is your grief, yet not always your sin. Hath a parent given the child, not only the milk of the breast, but "the sincere milk of the word?" hast thou seasoned his tender years with religious education? Thou canst do no more; parents can only work knowledge, God must work grace; they can only lay the wood together, it is God who must make it burn; a parent can only be a guide to show his child the way to heaven, the Spirit of God must be a loadstone to draw his heart into that way. "Am I in God's stead," saith Jacob, "who hath withheld the fruit of the womb?" (*Ge. 30. 2*) Can I give children? So, is a parent

in God's stead to give grace? who can help it, if a child having the light of conscience, Scripture, education, these three torches in his hand, yet runs wilfully into the deep ponds of sin? Weep for thy child, pray for him; but do not sin for him by discontent. 3. Say not, you have brought forth a child for the devil; God can reduce him; he hath promised "to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4. 6) and "to open springs of grace in the desert." (Is. 35. 6) When thy child is going full sail to the devil, God can blow with a contrary wind of his Spirit and alter his course. When Paul was breathing out persecution against the saints, and was sailing hellward, God turns him another way; before he was going to Damascus, God sends him to Ananias; before a persecutor, now a preacher. Though our children are for the present fallen into the devil's pond, God can turn them from the power of Satan, and bring them in the twelfth hour. Monica was weeping for her son Augustine: at last God gave him in upon prayer, and he became a famous instrument in the church of God.

2. The second branch of the objection is, but *my husband takes ill courses*; where I looked for honey, behold a sting.

It is sad to have the living and the dead tied together; yet, let not your heart fret with discontent; mourn for his sins, but do not murmur. For, 1. God hath placed you in your relation, and you cannot be discontented but you quarrel with God. What! for every cross that befalls us, shall we call the infinite wisdom of God into question? O the blasphemy of our hearts! 2. God can make you a gainer by your husband's sin; perhaps you had never been so good, if he had not been so bad. The fire burns hottest in the coldest climate. God often by a divine *antiperistasis* turns the sins of others to our good, and makes our maladies our medicines. The more profane the husband is, oft the more holy the wife grows; the more earthly he is, the more heavenly she grows; God makes sometimes the husband's sin a spur to the wife's grace. His exorbitances are as a pair of bellows to blow up the flame of her zeal and devotion the more. Is it not thus? Doth not thy husband's wickedness send thee to prayer? thou perhaps hadst never prayed so much, if he had not sinned so much. His deadness quickens thee the more, the stone of his heart is an hammer to break thy heart. The apostle saith, "the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband;" (1 Cor. 7. 14) but in this sense, the believing wife is sanctified by the unbelieving husband; she grows better, his sin is a whetstone to her grace, and a medicine for her security.

The next apology that discontent makes is, **but my friends have dealt very unkindly with me, and proved false.**

It is sad, when a friend proves like a brook in summer. (Job 6. 15) The traveller being parched with heat, comes to the brook, hoping to refresh himself, but the brook is dried up, yet be content.

1. Thou art not alone, others of the saints have been betrayed by friends; and when they have leaned upon them, they have been as a foot out of joint. This was true in the type

David; “it was not an enemy that reproached me, but it was thou, O man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance; we took sweet counsel together: (Ps. 55. 12, 13, 14) and in the antitype Christ; he was betrayed by a friend: and why should we think it strange to have the same measure dealt out to us as Jesus Christ had? “the servant is not above his master”.

2. A Christian may often read his sin in his punishment: hath not he dealt treacherously with God? How oft hath he grieved the Comforter, broken his vows, and through unbelief sided with Satan against God? how oft abused love, taken the jewels of God’s mercies, and made a golden calf of them, serving his own lusts? how oft made the free grace of God, which would have been a bolt to keep out sin, rather a key to open the door to it? These wounds hath the Lord received in the house of his friends. Look upon the unkindness of thy friend, and mourn for thy own unkindness against God; shall a Christian condemn that in another, which he hath been too guilty of himself?

3. Hath thy friend proved treacherous? Perhaps you did repose too much confidence in him. If you lay more weight upon a house than the pillars will bear, it must needs break. God saith, “trust ye not in a friend:” (Mi. 7. 5) perhaps you did put more trust in him, than you did dare to put in God. Friends are as Venice-glasses, we may use them, but if we lean too hard upon them, they will break; behold matter of humility, but not of sullenness and discontent.

4. You have a friend in heaven who will never fail you; “there is a friend” — saith Solomon — “that sticketh closer than a brother:” (Pr. 18. 24) such a friend is God; he is very studious and inquisitive on our behalf; he hath a debating with himself, a consulting and projecting how he may do us good; he is the best friend which may give contentment in the midst of all discourtesies of friends. Consider, (1.) He is a *loving* friend. “God is love;” (1 Jno. 4. 16) hence he is said sometimes to engrave us on the “palm of his hand,” (Is. 49. 16) that we may never be out of his eye; and to carry us in his bosom, (Is. 40. 11) near to his heart. There is no stop or stint in his love; but as the river Nilus, it overflows all the banks; his love is as far beyond our thoughts, as it is above our deserts. O the infinite love of God, in giving the Son of his love to be made flesh, which was more than if all the angels had been made worms! God in giving Christ to us gave his very heart to us: here is love penciled out in all its glory, and engraven as with the “point of a diamond.” All other love is hatred in comparison of the love of our Friend. (2.) He is a *careful* friend: “He careth for you”. (1 Pe. 5. 7) He minds and transacts our business as his own, he accounts his people’s interests and concerns as his interest. He provides for us, grace to enrich us, glory to ennoble us. It was David’s complaint, “no man careth for my soul:” (Ps. 142. 4) a Christian hath a friend that cares for him. (3.) He is a *prudent* friend. (Da. 2. 20) A friend may sometimes err through ignorance or mistake, and give his friend poison instead of sugar; but “God is wise in heart; (Job 9. 4) he is skilful as well as faithful; he knows what our disease is, and what physic is most proper to apply; he knows what will do us good, and what wind will be best to carry us to heaven.

(4.) He is a *faithful* friend. And he is faithful in his promises; “in hope of eternal life which God that cannot lie hath promised.” (Tit. 1. 2) God’s people are “children that will not lie;” (Is. 63. 8) but God is a God that cannot lie; he will not deceive the faith of his people; nay, he cannot: he is called “the Truth;” he can as well cease to be God as cease to be true. The Lord may sometimes change his promise, as when he converts a temporal promise into a spiritual; but he can never break his promise. (5.) He is a *compassionate* friend, hence in Scripture we read of the yearning of his bowels. (Jer. 31. 20) God’s friendship is nothing else but compassion; for there is naturally no affection in us to desire his friendship, nor no goodness in us to deserve it; the loadstone is in himself. When we were full of blood, he was full of bowels; when we were enemies, he sent an embassy of peace; when our hearts were turned back from God, his heart was turned towards us. O the tenderness and sympathy of our Friend in heaven! We ourselves have some relentings of heart to those which are in misery; but it is God who begets all the mercies and bowels that are in us, therefore he is called “the Father of mercies.” (2 Cor. 1. 3) (6.) He is a *constant* friend: “his compassions fail not.” (La. 3. 22) Friends do often in adversity drop off as leaves in autumn; these are rather flatterers than friends. Joab was for a time faithful to king David’s house; he went not after Absalom’s treason; but within a while proved false to the crown, and went after the treason of Adonijah. (1 Ki. 1. 7) God is a friend forever: “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (Jno. 13. 1) What though I am despised? yet God loves me. What though my friends cast me off? yet God loves me; he loves to the end, and there is no end of that love. This methinks, in case of discourtesies and unkindnesses, is enough to charm down discontent.

The next apology is, **I am under great reproaches.**

Let not this discontent: for, 1. It is a sign there is some good in thee; saith Socrates, what evil have I done, that this bad man commends me? The applause of the wicked usually denotes some evil, and their censure imports some good. (Ps. 38. 20) David wept and fasted, and that was turned to his “reproach”. (Pe. 4. 14) As we must pass to heaven through the spikes of suffering, so through the clouds of reproach. 2. If your reproach be for God, as David’s was, “for thy sake I have born reproach; (Ps. 69. 7) then it is rather matter of triumph, than dejection. Christ doth not say, when you are reproached be discontented; but rejoice: (Mat. 5. 12) Wear your reproach as a diadem of honour, for now a spirit of “glory and of God rests upon you.” (1 Pe. 4. 14) Put your reproaches into the inventory of your riches; so did Moses. (He. 11. 26) It should be a Christian’s ambition to wear his Saviour’s livery, though it be sprinkled with blood and sullied with disgrace. 3. God will do us good by reproach: as David of Shimei’s cursing; “it may be the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.” (2 Sa. 16. 12) This puts us upon searching our sin: a child of God labours to read his sin in every stone of reproach that is cast at him; besides, now we have an opportunity to exercise patience and humility. 4. Jesus Christ was content to be reproached by us; he despised the

shame of the cross. (He. 12. 2) It may amaze us to think that he who was God could endure to be spit upon, to be crowned with thorns, in a kind of jeer; and when he was ready to bow his head upon the cross, to have the Jews in scorn, wag their heads and say, “he saved others, himself he cannot save.” The shame of the cross was as much as the blood of the cross; his name was crucified before his body. The sharp arrows of reproach that the world did shoot at Christ, went deeper into his heart than the spear; his suffering was so ignominious, that as if the sun did blush to behold, it withdrew its bright beams, and masked itself with a cloud; (and well it might when the Sun of Righteousness was in an eclipse;) all this contumely and reproach did the God of glory endure or rather despise for us. O then let us be content to have our names eclipsed for Christ; let not reproach lie at our heart, but let us bind it as a crown about our head! Alas, what is reproach? this is but small shot, how will men stand at the mouth of a cannon? These who are discontented at a reproach, will be offended at a faggot. 5. Is not many a man contented to suffer reproach for maintaining his lust? and shall not we for maintaining the truth? Some glory in that which is their shame, (Ph. 3. 19) and shall we be ashamed of that which is our glory? Be not troubled at these petty things. He whose heart is once divinely touched with the loadstone of God’s Spirit, doth account it his honour to be dishonoured for Christ, (Ac. 15. 4) and doth as much despise the world’s censure, as he doth their praise. 6. We live in an age wherein men dare reproach God himself. The divinity of the Son of God is blasphemously reproached by the Socinian; the blessed Bible is reproached by the Antiscripturist, as if it were but a legend of lies, and every man’s faith a fable; the justice of God is called to the bar of reason by the Arminians; the wisdom of God in his providential actings, is taxed by the Atheist; the ordinances of God are decried by the Familists, as being too heavy a burden for a free-born conscience, and too low and carnal for a sublime seraphic spirit; the ways of God, which have the majesty of holiness shining in them, are calumniated by the profane; the mouths of men are open against God, as if he were an hard master, and the path of religion too strict and severe. If men cannot give God a good word, shall we be discontented or troubled that they speak hardly of us? Such as labour to bury the glory of religion, shall we wonder that “their throats are open sepulchres,” (Ro. 3. 13) to bury our good name? O let us be contented, while we are in God’s scouring-house, to have our names sullied a little; the blacker we seem to be here, the brighter shall we shine when God hath set us upon the celestial shelf.

The sixth apology that discontent makes is **disrespect in the world. I have not that esteem from men as is suitable to my quality and grace.**

And doth this trouble? Consider, 1. The world is an unequal judge; as it is full of change so of partiality. The world gives her respects, as she doth her places of preferment; more by favour often, than desert. Hast thou the ground of real worth in thee; that is best worth that is in him that hath it; honour is in him that gives it; better deserve respect, and not have it, than have it and not deserve it. 2. Hast thou grace? God respects thee, and his judgment is

best worth prizing. A believer is a person of honour, being born of God: since thou wast precious in mine eyes, "thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." (Is. 43. 4) Let the world think what they will of you; perhaps in their eyes you are a cast-away, in God's eyes, a dove, (Ca. 2. 14) a spouse, (Ca. 5. 1) a jewel. (Mal. 3. 17) Others account you the dregs of offscouring of the world, (1 Cor. 4. 14) but God will give whole kingdoms for your ransom. (Is. 43. 3) Let this content: no matter with what oblique eyes I am looked upon in the world, if God thinks well of me. It is better that God approve, than man applaud. The world may put us in their rubric and God put us in his black book. What is a man the better that his fellow-prisoners commend him, if his judge condemn him? O labour to keep in with God; prize his love! Let my fellow-subjects frown, I am contented, being a favourite of the king of heaven. 3. If you are a child of God, you must look for disrespect. A believer is in the world, but not of the world; we are here in a pilgrim condition, out of our own country, therefore must not look for the respects and acclamations of the world; it is sufficient that we shall have honour in our own country. (He. 13. 14) It is dangerous to be the world's favourite. 4. Discontent arising from disrespect, savours too much of pride; an humble Christian hath a lower opinion of himself than others can have of him. He that is taken up about the thoughts of his sins, and how he hath provoked God, cries out, as Agur, "I am more brutish than any man," (Pr. 30. 2) and therefore is contented, though he be set among "the dogs of my flock." (Job 30. 1) Though he be low in the thoughts of others, yet he is thankful that he is not laid in "the lowest hell." (Ps. 86. 13) A proud man sets an high value upon himself; and is angry with others, because they will not come up to his price: take heed of pride! O had others a window to look into their breast, as Crates once expressed it, or did thy heart stand where thy face doth, thou wouldst wonder to have so much respect.

The next apology is, **I meet with very great sufferings for the truth.**

Consider, 1. Your sufferings are not so great as your sins: put these two in the balance, and see which weighs heaviest; where sin lies heavy, sufferings lie light. A carnal spirit makes more of his sufferings, and less of his sins; he looks upon one at the great end of the perspective, but upon the other at the little end of the perspective. The carnal heart cries out, take away the frogs: but a gracious heart cries out, "take away the iniquity." (2 Sa. 24. 10) The one saith, never any one suffered as I have done; but the other saith, never one sinned as I have done. (Mi. 7. 7) 2. Are thou under sufferings: thou hast an opportunity to show the valour and constancy of thy mind. Some of God's saints would have accounted it a great favour to have been honoured with martyrdom. One said, "I am in prison till I be in prison". Thou countest that a trouble, which others would have worn as an ensign of their glory. 3. Even those who have gone only upon moral principles, have shown much constancy and contentment in their sufferings. Curtius, being bravely mounted and in armour, threw himself into a great gulf, that the city of Rome might, according to the oracle, be delivered from the pestilence; and we, having a divine oracle, "that they who kill the body cannot hurt

the soul," shall we not with much constancy and patience devote ourselves to injuries for religion, and rather suffer for the truth than the truth suffer for us? The Decii among the Romans, vowed themselves to death, that their legions and soldiers might be crowned with the honour of the victory. O what should we be content to suffer, to make the truth victorious! Regulus having sworn that he would return to Carthage, though he knew there was a furnace heating for him there, yet not daring to infringe his oath, he did adventure to go; we then who are Christians, having made a vow to Christ in baptism, and so often renewed in the blessed sacrament, should with much contentation rather choose to suffer, than violate our sacred oath. Thus the blessed martyrs, with what courage and cheerfulness did they yield up their souls to God? and when the fire was set to their bodies, yet their spirits were not at all fired with passion or discontent. Though others hurt the body, let them not the mind through discontent; show by your heroic courage, that you are above those troubles which you cannot be without.

The next apology is, **the prosperity of the wicked**. I confess it is so often, that the evil enjoy all the good, and the good endure all the evil, that David, though a good man, stumbled at this, and had like to have fallen. (Ps. 73. 2)

Well, be contented; for remember, 1. These are not the only things, nor the best things; they are mercies without the pale; these are but acorns with which God feeds swine; ye who are believers have more choice fruit, the olive, the pomegranate, the fruit which grows on the true vine Jesus Christ; others have the fat of the earth, you have the dew of heaven; they have a south-land, you have those springs of living water which are clarified with Christ's blood, and indulcerated with his love. 2. To see the wicked flourish is matter rather of pity than envy; it is all the heaven they must have; "woe to you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation." (Lu. 6. 24) Hence it was that David made it his solemn prayer, "deliver me from the wicked, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure. (Ps. 17. 15) The word (methinks) are David's lityny; from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, "good Lord, deliver me." When the wicked have eaten of their dainty dishes, there comes in a sad reckoning which will spoil all. The world is first musical and then tragical; if you would have a man fry and blaze in hell, let him have enough of the fat of the earth. O remember, forever sand of mercy that runs out of the wicked, God puts a drop of wrath into his vial! Therefore as that soldier said to his fellow, "do you envy my grapes? they cost me dear, I must die for them;" so I say, do you envy the wicked? alas their prosperity is like Haman's banquet before execution. If a man were to be hanged, would one envy to see him walk to the gallows through pleasant fields and fine galleries, or to see him go up the ladder in clothes of gold? The wicked may flourish in their bravery a while; but, when they flourish as the grass, "it is, that they shall be destroyed for ever; (Ps. 92. 7) the proud grass shall be mown down. Whatever a sinner enjoys, he hath a curse with it, (Mal. 2. 2) and shall we envy? What if poisoned bread be

given the dogs? The long furrows in the backs of the godly have a seed of blessing in them, when the table of the wicked becomes a snare, and their honour their halter.

The next apology that discontent makes for itself, is **the evils of the times**. The times are full of heresy and impiety, and this is that which troubles me. This apology consists of two branches, to which I shall answer *in specie*; and,

Branch 1. The times are full of *heresy*. This is indeed sad; when the devil cannot by violence destroy the church, he endeavours to poison it, when he cannot with Samson's foxtails set the corn on fire, then he sows tares; as he labours to destroy the peace of the church by vision, so the truth of it by error; we may cry out, we live in times wherein there is a sluice open to all novel opinions, and every man's opinion is his Bible. Well; this may make us mourn, but let us not murmur through discontent: consider, 1. *Error makes a discovery of men*. Bad men; error discovers such as are tainted and corrupt. When the leprosy brake forth in the forehead, then was the leper discovered. Error is a spiritual bastard; the devil is the father, and pride the mother; you never knew an erroneous man but he was a proud man. Now, it is good that such men should be laid open, to the intent, first, that God's righteous judgment upon them may be adored; secondly, that others, who are free, be not infected. If a man have the plague, it is well it breaks forth; for my part, I would avoid an heretic, as I would avoid the devil, for he is sent on his errand. I appeal unto you; if there were a tavern in this city, where under a pretence of selling wine, many hogsheads of poison were to be sold, were it not well that others should know of it, that they might not buy? It is good that those that have poisoned opinions should be known, that the people of God may not come near either the scent or the taste of that poison. Error is a touch-stone to discover good men: it tries the gold: "there must be heresies, that they which are approved, may be made manifest." (1 Cor. 11. 19) Thus our love to Christ, and zeal for truth doth appear. God shows who are the living fish; such as swim against the stream: who are the sound sheep; such as feed in the green pastures of the ordinances: who are the doves; such as live in the best air, where the spirit breathes: God sets a garland of honour upon these, "these are they which came out of great tribulation; (Re. 7. 14) so these are they that have opposed the errors of the times, these are they that have preserved the virginity of their conscience, who have kept their judgment sound and their heart soft. God will have a trophy of honour set upon some of his saints, they shall be renowned for their sincerity, being like the cypress, which keeps its greenness and freshness in the winter-season. 2. Be not sinfully discontented, for *God can make the errors of the church advantageous to truth*. Thus the truths of God have come to be more beaten out and confirmed; as it is in the law, one may lay a false title to a piece of land, the true title hath by this means been the more searched into and ratified; some had never so studied to defend the truth by Scripture, if others had not endeavoured to overthrow it by sophistry; all the mists and fogs of error that have risen out of the bottomless pit, have made the glorious Sun of truth to shine so much the brighter. Had not Arius

and Sabellius broached their damnable error, the truth of those questions about the blessed Trinity had never been so discussed and defended by Athanasius, Augustine, and others; had not the devil brought in so much of his princely darkness, the champions for truth had never run so fast to Scripture to light their lamps. So that God with a wheel within a wheel, over-rules these things wisely, and turns them to the best. Truth is a heavenly plant, that settles by shaking. 3. *God raiseth the price of his truth the more*; the very shreds and filings of truth are venerable. When there is much counterfeit metal abroad, we prize the true gold the more; pure wine of truth is never more precious, than when unsound doctrines are broached and vented. 4. Error makes us more thankful to God for the jewel of truth. When you see another infected with the plague, how thankful are you that God hath freed you from the infection? When we see others have the leprosy in the head, how thankful are we to God that he hath not given us over to believe a lie and so be damned? It is a good use that may be made even of the error of the times when it makes us more humble and thankful, adoring the free grace of God, who hath kept us from drinking of that deadly poison.

Branch 2. The second branch of the apology that discontent makes, is the *impiety* of the times; I live and converse among the profane: “O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest.” (Ps. 55. 6)

It is indeed sad, to be mixed with the wicked. David beheld “transgressors and was grieved:” and Lot (who was a bright star in a dark night) was vexed, or, as the word in the original may bear, wearied out with the unclean conversation of the wicked; he made the sins of Sodom spears to pierce his own soul. We ought, if there be any spark of divine love in us, to be very sensible of the sins of others, and to have our hearts bleed for them; yet let us not break forth into mourning and discontent, knowing that God in his providence hath permitted it, and surely not without some reasons; for, 1<sup>st</sup>. The Lord makes the wicked an hedge to defend the godly; the wise God often makes those who are wicked and peacable, a means to safeguard his people from those who are wicked and cruel. The king of Babylon kept Jeremiah, and gave special order for his looking to, that he did want nothing. (Jer. 39. 11,12) God sometimes makes brazen sinners to be brazen walls to defend his people. 2<sup>d</sup>. God doth but interline and mingle the wicked with the godly, that the godly may be a means to save the wicked; such is the beauty of holiness that it hath a magnetical force in it to allure and draw even the wicked. Sometimes God makes a believing husband a means to convert an unbelieving wife, and *e contra*: “what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? (1 Cor. 7. 16) The godly living among the wicked, by their prudent advice and pious example, have won them to the embracing of religion; if there were not some godly among the wicked, how in a probable way, without a miracle, can we imagine that the wicked should be converted? those who are now shining saints in heaven, sometimes served diverse lusts. (Ti. 3. 3) Paul

once a persecutor; Augustine once a manichee; Luther once a monk; but by the severe and holy carriage of the godly, were converted to the faith.

The next apology that discontent makes, is, **lowness of parts and gifts**; I cannot (saith the Christian) discourse with that fluency, nor pray with that elegancy, as others.

1. Grace is beyond gifts; thou comparest thy grace with another's gifts, there is a vast difference; grace without gifts is infinitely better than gifts without grace. In religion, the vitals are best; gifts are a more extrinsical and common work of the Spirit, which is incident to reprobates; grace is a more distinguishing work, and is a jewel hung only upon the elect. Hast thou the seed of God, the holy anointing? be content. (1.) Thou sayest, Thou canst not discourse with that fluency as others. Experiments in religion are beyond notions, and impressions beyond expressions. Judas (no doubt) could make a learned discourse on Christ, but well-fared the woman in the gospel that felt virtue coming out of him, (Lu. 8. 47) a sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue. There is as much difference between gifts and graces, as between a tulip painted on the wall, and one growing in the garden. (2.) Thou sayest, thou canst not pray with that elegancy as others. Prayer is a matter more of the heart than the head. In prayer it is not so much fluency that prevails, as fervency, (Ja. 5. 16) nor is God so much taken with the elegancy of speech, as the efficacy of the Spirit. Humility is better than volubility; here the mourner is the orator; sighs and groans are the best rhetoric.

2. Be not discontented, for God doth usually proportion a man's parts to the place to which he calls him; some are set in an higher sphere and function, their place requires more parts and abilities; but the most inferior member is useful in its place, and shall have a power delegated for the discharge of its peculiar office.

The next apology is, **the troubles of the church**. Alas, my disquiet and discontent is not so much for myself, as the public! The church of God suffers.

I confess it is sad and we ought for this "to hang our harps upon the willows." He is a wooden leg in Christ's body, that is not sensible of the state of the body. As a Christian must not be proud flesh, so neither dead flesh. When the church of God suffers, he must sympathise; Jeremiah wept for the virgin daughter of Sion. We must feel our brethren's hard cords through our soft beds. In music, if one string be touched, all the rest sound: when God strikes upon our brethren, our "bowels must sound like an harp". Be sensible, but give not way to discontent. For consider, 1. *God sits at the stern of his church.* (Ps. 46. 5) Sometimes it is a ship tossed upon the waves, "afflicted and tossed!" (Is. 54. 11) but cannot God bring this ship to haven, though it meet with a storm upon the sea? This ship in the gospel was tossed because sin was in it; but it was not overwhelmed, because Christ was in it. Christ is in the ship of this church, fear not sinking; the church's anchor is cast in heaven. Do not we think God loves his church, and takes as much care of it as we can? The names of the twelve tribes were on Aaron's breast, signifying how near to God's heart his people are; they are his portion, (De. 27. 9) and shall that be lost? his glory, (Is. 46. 13) and shall that be finally

eclipsed? No certainly. God can deliver his church, not only from, but by opposition; the church's pangs shall help forward her deliverance. 2. *God hath always propagated religion by sufferings.* The foundation of the church hath been laid in blood, and these sanguine showers have ever made it more fruitful. Cain put the knife to Abel's throat, and ever since the church's veins had bled: but she is like the vine, which by bleeding grows, and like the palm-tree, which the more weight is laid upon it, the higher it riseth. The holiness and patience of the saints, under their persecutions, hath much added both to the growth of religion, and the crown. Basil and Tertullian observe of the primitive martyrs, that divers of the heathens seeing their zeal and constancy turned Christians: religion is that Phoenix which hath always revived and flourished in the ashes of holy men. Isaiah sawn asunder, Peter crucified at Rome with his head downwards, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and Polycarp of Smyrna, both martyred for religion; yet evermore the truth hath been sealed by blood, and gloriously dispersed; whereupon Julian did forbear to persecute, not out of pity, but envy, because the church grew so fast, and multiplied, as Nazianzen well observes.

The twelfth apology that discontent makes for itself, is this, it is not my trouble that troubles me, **but it is my sins that do disquiet and discontent me.**

Be sure it be so; do not prevaricate with God and thy own soul; in true mourning for sin when the present suffering is removed, yet the sorrow is not removed. But suppose the apology be real, that sin is the ground of your discontent; yet I answer, a man's disquiet about sin may be beyond its bounds, in these three cases. 1. When it is *disheartening*, that is, when it sets up sin above mercy. If Israel had only pored upon their sting, and not looked up to the brazen serpent, they had never been healed. That sorrow for sin which drives us away from God, is not without sin, for there is more despair in it than remorse; the soul hath so many tears in its eyes, that it cannot see Christ. Sorrow, as sorrow, doth not save, that were to make Christ of our tears, but is useful, as it is preparatory in the soul, making sin vile, and Christ precious. O look up to the brazen serpent, the Lord Jesus! A sight of his blood will revive, the plaster of his merits is broader than our sore. It is Satan's policy, either to keep us from seeing our sins, or, if we will needs see them that we may be swallowed up of sorrow; (2 Cor. 2. 7) either he would stupify us, or affright us; either keep the glass of the law from our eyes, or else pencil out our sins in such crimson colours, that we may sink in the quicksands of despair. 2. When sorrow is *indisposing*, it untunes the heart for prayer, meditation, holy conference; it cloisters up the soul. This is not sorrow but rather sullenness, and doth render a man not so much penitential as cynical. 3. When it is *out of season*. God made us rejoice, and we hang up our harps upon the willows; he bids us trust and we cast ourselves down, and are brought even to the margin of despair. If Satan cannot keep us from mourning, he will be sure to put us upon it when it is least in season. When God calls us in a special manner to be thankful for mercy, and put on our white robes, Satan will be putting us into mourning, and instead of a garment of praise, clothe us with a spirit of

heaviness; so God loseth the acknowledgement of mercy, and we the comfort. If thy sorrow hath turned and fitted thee for Christ, if it hath raised in thee high prizings of him, strong hungerings after him, sweet delight in him; this is as much as God requires, and a Christian doth but sin to vex and torture himself further upon the rack of his own discontent.

And thus I hope I have answered the most material objections and apologies which this sin of discontent doth make for itself. I see no reason why a Christian should be discontented, unless for his discontent. Let me, in the next place, propound something which may be both as a loadstone and a whet-stone to contentation.

## CHAPTER XI

### Divine Motives to Contentment.

#### SECT. 1. *The first argument to contentation.*

1. **Consider the excellency of it.** Contentment is a flower that doth not grow in every garden; it teacheth a man how in the midst of want to abound. You would think it were excellent if I could prescribe a receipt or antidote against poverty: but behold here is that which is more excellent, for a man to want, and yet have enough, this alone contentment of spirit doth bring. Contentation is a remedy against all our trouble, an alleviation to all our burdens, it is the cure of care. Contentation, though it be not properly a grace (it is rather a disposition of mind,) yet in it there is a happy temperature and mixture of all the graces: it is a most precious compound, which is made up of faith, patience, meekness, humility, &c. which are the ingredients put into it. Now there are in species these seven rare excellencies in contentment.

1st. excellency. *A contented Christian carries heaven about him:* for, what is heaven, but that sweet repose and full contentment that the soul shall have in God? In contentment there are the first fruits of heaven. There are two things in a contented spirit, which make it like heaven. (1.) God is there; something of God is to be seen in that heart. A discontented Christian is like a rough tempestuous sea; when the water is rough you can see nothing there; but when it is smooth and serene, then you may behold your face in the water. (Pr. 27. 19) When the heart rageth through discontent, it is like a rough sea, you can see nothing there, unless passion and murmuring; there is nothing of God, nothing of heaven in that heart: but by virtue of contentment, it is like the sea when it is smooth and calm, there is a face shining there; you may see something of Christ in that heart, a representation of all the graces. (2.) Rest is there. O what a Sabbath is kept in a contented heart! What an heaven! A contented Christian like Noah in the ark; though the ark were tossed with waves, Noah could sit and sing in the ark. The soul that is gotten into the ark of contentment, sits quiet, and sails above all the waves of trouble; he can sing in this spiritual ark; the wheels of the chariot move, but the axle-tree stirs not; the circumference of the heavens is carried about the earth, but the earth moves not out of its centre. When we meet with motion and change in the creatures round about us, a contented spirit is not stirred nor moved out of its centre. The sails of a mill move with the wind, but the mill itself stands still, an emblem of contentment; when our outward estate moves with the wind of providence, yet the heart is settled through holy contentment; and when others are like quicksilver, shaking and trembling through disquiet, the contented spirit can say, as David, "O God my heart is fixed." (Ps. 57. 7) what is this but a piece of heaven?

2nd. excellency. *Whatever is defective in the creature is made up in contentment.* A Christian may want the comforts that others have, the land, and possessions; but God hath

instilled into his heart that contentment which is far better: in this sense that is true of our Saviour, “he shall receive a hundred fold.” (Mat. 19. 29) Perhaps he that ventured all for Christ, never hath his house or land again: aye, but God gives him a contented spirit, and this breeds such joy in the soul, as is infinitely sweeter than all his houses and lands which he left for Christ. It was sad with David in regard of his outward comforts, he being driven as some think from his kingdom; yet in regard of that sweet contentment he found in God, he had more comfort than men use to have in the time of harvest and vintage. (Ps. 4. 7) One man hath house and lands to live upon, another hath nothing, only a small trade; yet even that brings in a livelihood. A Christian may have little in the world, but he drives the trade of contentment; and so he knows as well how to want, as to abound. O the rare art, or rather miracle of contentment! Wicked men are often disquieted in the enjoyment of all things; the contented Christian is well in the want of all things. But how comes a Christian to be contented in the deficiency of outward comforts? A Christian finds contentment distilled out of the breasts of the promises. He is poor in purse, but rich in promise. There is one promise that brings much sweet contentment into the soul: “they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” (Ps. 34. 10) If the thing we desire be good for us, we shall have it; if it be not good, then the not having is good for us. The resting satisfied with the promise gives contentment.

3rd. excellency. *Contentment makes a man in tune to serve God*; it oils the wheels of the soul and makes it more agile and nimble; it composeth the heart, and makes it fit for prayer, meditation, &c. How can he that is in a passion of grief, or discontent, “attend upon the Lord without distraction?” Contentment doth prepare and tune the heart. First you prepare the viol, and wind up the strings, ere you play a fit of music: when a Christian’s heart is wound up to this heavenly frame of contentment, then it is fit for duty. A discontented Christian is like Saul, when the evil spirit came upon him: O what jarrings and discords doth he make in prayer! When an army is put into a disorder, then it is not fit for battle; when the thoughts are scattered and distracted about the cares of this life, a man is not fit for devotion. Discontent takes the heart wholly of from God, and fixeth it upon the present trouble, so that a man’s mind is not upon his prayer, but upon his cross. Discontent doth disjoint the soul; and it is impossible now that a Christian should go so steadily and cheerfully in God’s service. O how lame is his devotion! The discontented person gives God but a half-duty, and his religion is nothing but bodily exercise, it wants a soul to animate it. David would not offer that to God that cost him nothing.” (2 Sa. 24. 24) Where there is too much worldly care, there is too little spiritual cost in a duty. The discontented person doth his duties by halves; he is just like Ephraim, ” a cake not turned;” (Ho. 7. 8) he is a cake baked on one side; he gives God the outside but not the spiritual part; his heart is not in duty; he is baked on one side, but the other side dough; and what profit is there of such raw indigested services? He that gives God only the skin of worship, what can he expect more than the shell

of comfort? Contentation brings the heart into frame, and then only do we give God the flower and spirits of a duty, when the soul is composed. Now a Christian's heart is intent and serious. There are some duties which we cannot perform as we ought without contentment: as, (1.) to rejoice in God. How can he rejoice that is discontented? he is fitter for re-  
pinning, than rejoicing. (2.) To be thankful for mercy. Can a discontented person be thankful? he can be fretful, not thankful. (3.) To justify God in his proceedings. How can he do this who is discontented with his condition? he will sooner censure God's wisdom, than clear his justice. O then, how excellent is contentation, which doth prepare, and as it were, string the heart for duty? Indeed contentment doth not only make our duties light and agile, but acceptable. It is this that puts beauty and worth into them; for contentation settles the soul. Now, as it is with milk, when it is always stirring, you can make nothing of it, but let it settle a while, and then it turns to cream: when the heart is overmuch stirred with disquiet and discontent, you can make nothing of those duties. How thin, how fleeting and jejune are they! but when the heart is once settled by holy contentment, now there is some worth in our duties, now they turn to cream.

4th. excellency. *Contentment is the spiritual arch, or pillar of the soul; it fits a man to bear burdens;* he whose heart is ready to sink under the least sin, by virtue of this hath a spirit invincible under sufferings. A contented Christian is like the camomile, the more it is trodden upon the more it grows: as physic works disease out of the body, so doth contentment work trouble out of the heart. Thus it argues, "if I am under reproach, God can vindicate me; if I am in want, God can relieve me." "Ye shall not see wind, neither shall you see rain, yet the valley shall be filled with water:" (2 Ki. 3. 17) thus holy contentment keeps the heart from fainting. In the autumn, when the fruit and leaves are blown off, still there is sap in the root: when there is an autumn upon our external felicity, the leaves of our estate drop off, still there is the sap of contentment in the heart: a Christian hath life inwardly, when his outward comforts do not blossom. The contented heart is never out of heart. Contentation is a golden shield, that doth beat back discouragements. Humility is like the lead to the net which keeps the soul down when it is rising through passion; and contentment is like the cork which keeps the heart up when it is sinking through discouragements. Contentment is the great under-prop; it is like the beam which bears whatever weight is laid upon it; nay, it is like a rock that breaks the waves. It is strange to observe the same affliction lying upon two men, how differently they carry themselves under it. The contented Christian is like Samson, that carried away the gates of the city upon his back; he can go away with his cross cheerfully, and makes nothing of it: the other is like Issachar, couching down under his burden: (Ge. 49. 14) the reason is, the one is discontent, and that breeds fainting. Discontent swells the grief, and grief breaks the heart. When this sacred sinew of contentment begins to shrink, we go limping under our afflictions; we know not what burdens God may exercise us with; let us therefore preserve contentment; as is our contentment, such will be our

courage. David with his five stones and his sling defied Goliath, and overcame him. Get but contentment into the sling of your heart; and with this sacred stone you may both defy the world and conquer it; you may break those afflictions, which else would break you.

5th. excellency. *Contentment prevents many sins and temptations.*

*First*, It prevents many sins. Where there wants contentment, there wants no sin; discontentedness with our condition is a sin that doth not go along, but is like the first link of the chain which draws all the other links along with it. In particular, there are two sins which contentment prevents: (1.) Impatience. Discontent and impatience are twins: “this evil is of the Lord, why should I wait on the Lord any longer?” (2 Ki. 6. 33) as if God were so tied, that he must give us the mercy just when we desire it. Impatience is no small sin; as will appear if you consider whence it ariseth. It is for want of faith. Faith gives a right notion of God; it is an intelligent grace; it believes that God’s wisdom tempers, and his love sweetens all ingredients; this works patience: “shall I not drink the cup which my Father hath given me?” Impatience is the daughter of infidelity. If a patient have an ill opinion of the physician, and conceits that he comes to poison him, he will take none of his receipts: when we have a prejudice against God, and conceit that he comes to kill us, and undo us, then we storm and cry out, like a foolish man, (it is Chrysostom’s similie) that cries out “away with the plaster!” though it be in order to a cure; is it not better that the plaster smart a little, than the wound fester and rankle? Impatience is for want of love of God. We will bear his reproofs whom we love not only patiently, but thankfully; “love thinketh no evil;” (1 Cor. 13. 5) it puts the fairest, and most candid gloss upon the actions of a friend; “love covers evil.” If it were possible for God in the least manner to err, which were blasphemy to think, love would cover that error; love takes everything in the best sense, it makes us bear any stroke “it endureth all things.” (1 Cor. 13. 7) Had we love to God, we should have patience. Impatience is for want of humility. An impatient man was never humbled under the burden of sin; he that studies his sins, the numberless number of them, how they are twisted together, and sadly accented; is patient and saith, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.” The greater noise drowns the lesser; when the sea roars the rivers are still; he that lets his thoughts expatiate about sin, is both silent and amazed, he wonders it is no worse with him. How great then is this sin of impatience! And how excellent is contentment, which is a counterpoise against this sin? The contented Christian believing that God doth all in love, is patient, and hath not one word to say, unless to justify God. That is the sin that contentment prevents. (2.) It prevents murmuring, a sin which is a degree higher than the other; murmuring is quarrelling with God, and enveighing against him; “they spake against God.” (Nu. 21. 5) The murmurer saith interpretatively, that God hath not dealt well with him, and he hath deserved better from him. The murmurer chargeth God with folly: this is the language, or rather blasphemy of a murmuring spirit; God might have been a wiser and better God. The murmurer is a mutineer. The Israelites are called in

the same text murmurers and rebels: (Nu. 17. 10) and is not rebellion as the sin of witchcraft? Thou that art a murmurer art in the account of God as a witch, a sorcerer, as one that deals with the devil: this is a sin of the first magnitude. Murmuring oft ends in cursing; Micah's mother fell to cursing when the talents of silver were taken away, (Ju. 17. 2) so doth the murmurer when a part of his estate is taken away. Our murmuring is the devil's music; this is that sin which God cannot bear: "how long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmur against me?" (Nu. 14. 7) It is a sin which whets the sword against a people: it is a land-destroying sin; "neither murmur ye as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." (1 Cor. 10. 10) It is a ripening sin this; without mercy it will hasten England's funerals. O then how excellent is contentation, which prevents this sin! To be contented, and yet murmur is a solecism: a contented Christian doth acquiesce in his present condition, and doth not murmur, but admire. Herein appears the excellency of contentation; it is a spiritual antidote against sin.

*Secondly.* Contentment prevents many temptations; discontent is a devil that is always tempting. *1st.* It puts a man upon indirect means. He that is poor and discontented, will attempt any thing; he will go to the devil for riches; he that is proud and discontented, will hang himself, as Ahithophel did when his counsel was rejected. Satan takes great advantage of discontent; he loves to fish in these troubled waters. Discontent doth both eclipse reason and weaken faith; and it is Satan's policy; he doth usually break over the hedge where it is weakest; discontent makes a breach in the soul, and usually at this breach the devil enters by a temptation, and storms the soul. How easily can the devil by his logic dispute a discontented Christian into sin? He forms such a syllogism as this, "he that is in want must study self-preservation: but you are now in want; therefore you ought to study self-preservation." Hereupon to make good his conclusion, he tempts to the forbidden fruit, not distinguishing between what is needful, and what is lawful. "What?" saith he, "dost thou want a livelihood? never be such a fool as starve; take the rising side at a venture, be it good or bad; "eat the bread of deceit, drink the wine of violence." Thus you see how the discontented man is a prey to that sad tentation, to steal and take God's name in vain. Contentment is a shield against tentation; for he that is contented, knows as well how to want as to abound. He will not sin to get a living; though the bill of fare grows short, he is content. He lives as the birds of the air upon God's providence, and doubts not but he shall have enough to pay for his passage to heaven. *2d.* Discontent tempts a man to atheism and apostacy. Sure there is no God to take care of things here below; would he suffer them to be in want who "have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" saith discontent: throw off Christ's livery, desist from the religion! Thus Job's wife being discontented with her condition, saith to her husband, "dost thou still retain thy integrity?" As if she had said, "dost thou not see, Job, what is become of all thy religion? thou fearest God and eschewest evil, and what are thou the better? see how God turns his hand against thee; he hath smitten thee in thy body, estate, relations,

and dost thou still retain thy integrity? What! still devout? still weep and pray for him? thou fool, cast off religion, turn atheist!" Here was a sore tentation that the devil did hand over to Job by his discontented wife; only his grace, as a golden shield, did ward off the blow from his heart: "thou speakest as one of the foolish women". "What profit is it," saith the discontented person, "to serve the Almighty? those that never trouble themselves about religion, are the prosperous men, and I in the meanwhile suffer want: as good give over driving the trade of religion, if this be all my reward. This is a sore tentation, and oft it prevails; atheism is the fruit that grows out of the blossom of discontent. O then, behold the excellency of contentment! It doth repel this tentation. "If God be mine," saith the contented spirit, "it is enough; though I have no lands or tenements, his smile makes heaven; his loves are better than wine; better is the gleanings of Ephraim than the vintage of Abiezar; (Ju. 8. 2) I have little in hand, but much in hope; my livelihood is short, but this is his promise, even eternal life; I am persecuted by malice, but better is persecuted godliness, than prosperous wickedness." Thus divine contentment is a spiritual antidote both against sin and tentation.

6th. excellency. *Contentment sweetens every condition.* Christ turned the water into wine; so contentment turns the waters of Marah into spiritual wine. Have I but little? yet it is more than I can deserve or challenge. This modicum is in mercy; it is the fruit of Christ's blood, it is the legacy of free grace: a small present sent from a king is highly valued. This little I have is with a good conscience; it is not stolen waters; guilt hath not muddied or poisoned it; it runs pure. This little is a pledge of more: this bit of bread is an earnest of that bread which I shall eat in the kingdom of God; this little water in the cruise is an earnest of that heavenly nectar which shall be distilled from the true vine. Do I meet with some crosses? my comfort is, if they be heavy, I have not far to go; I shall but carry my cross to Golgotha and there I shall leave it; my cross is light in regard of the weight of glory. Hath God taken away my comforts from me? it is well, the Comforter still abides. Thus contentment, as a honey-comb, drops sweetness into every condition. Discontent is a leaven that sours every comfort; it puts aloes and wormwood upon the breast of the creature; it lessens every mercy, it trebles every cross; but the contented spirit sucks sweetness from every flower of providence; it can make a treacle of poison. Contentment is full of consolation.

7th. excellency. *Contentment hath this excellency, it is the best commentator upon providence;* it makes a fair interpretation of all God's dealings. Let the providence of God be never so dark or bloody, contentment doth construe them ever in the best sense. I may say of it, as the apostle of charity, "it thinketh no evil." (1 Cor. 13. 5) Sickness (saith contentment) is God's furnace to refine his gold, and make it sparkle the more: the prison is an oratory, or house of prayer. What if God melts away the creature from it? he saw perhaps my heart grew so much in love with it; had I been long in that fat pasture I should have surfeited, and the better my estate had been, the worse my soul would have been. God is wise; he hath done this either to prevent some sin or to exercise some grace. What a blessed

frame of heart is this! A contented Christian is an advocate for God against unbelief and impatience: whereas discontent takes every thing from God in the worst sense; it doth implead and censure God: this evil I feel is but a symptom of greater evil: God is about to undo me: the Lord hath brought us hither into the wilderness to slay us. The contented soul takes all well; and when his condition is ever so bad, he can say, “truly God is good.” (Ps. 73. 1)

**Sect. II. The second argument to contentment.**

**A Christian hath that which may make him content.** 1. Hath not God given thee Christ? in him there are “unsearchable riches;” (Ep. 3. 8) he is such a golden mine of wisdom and grace, that all the saints and angels can never dig to the bottom. As Seneca said to his friend Polybius, never complain of thy hard fortune as long as CÆsar is thy friend: so I say to a believer, never complain as long as Christ is thy friend; he is an enriching pearl, a sparkling diamond; the infinite lustre of his merits makes us shine in God’s eyes. (Ep. 1. 7) In him there is both fulness and sweetness; he is unspeakably good. Screw up your thoughts to the highest pinnacle, stretch them to the utmost period, let them expatiate to their full latitude and extent; yet they fall infinitely short of these ineffable and inexhaustable treasures which are locked up in Jesus Christ; and is not here enough to give the soul content? A Christian that wants necessaries, yet having Christ, he hath the “one thing needful.” 2. Thy soul is exercised and enamelled with the graces of the Spirit, and is not here enough to give contentment? Grace is of a divine birth, it is the new plantation, it is the flower of the heavenly paradise, it is the embroidery of the Spirit, it is the seed of God, (1 Jno. 3. 9) it is the sacred unction, (Jno. 2. 20) it is Christ’s portraiture in the soul; it is the very foundation on which superstructure of glory is laid. O, of what infinite value is grace! what a jewel is faith! Well may it be called “precious faith.” (2 Pe. 1. 1) What is love, but a divine sparkle in the soul? A soul beautified with grace, is like a room richly hung with arras, or tapestry, or the firmament bespangled with glittering stars. These are the “true riches,” (Lu. 16. 11) which cannot stand with reprobation: and is not here enough to give the soul contentment? what are all other things but like wings of a butterfly, curiously painted? but they defile our fingers. Earthly riches, saith Augustine, are full of poverty; so indeed they are, for, they cannot enrich the soul: oftentimes under silken apparel there is a thread-bare soul. They are corruptible: “riches are not forever,” as the wise man saith. (Pr. 27. 24) Heaven is a place where gold and silver will not go. A believer is rich towards God: (Lu. 12. 21) why then are thou discontented? hath not God given thee that which is better than the world? What if he doth not give thee the box, if he gives thee the jewel? what if he denies thee farthings, if he pays thee in a better coin? he gives thee gold; spiritual mercies. What if the water in the bottle be spent? thou hast enough in the fountain. What need he complain of the world’s emptiness, that hath God’s fulness? The Lord is my portion, saith David, (Ps. 16. 5) then let the lines fall where they will, in a sick-bed or prison, I will say, “the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage.” Are thou not heir to all the promises? Hast

thou not a reversion of heaven? When thou lettest go thy hold of natural life, art thou not sure of eternal life? Hath not God given thee the earnest and first fruits of glory? Is not here enough to work the heart to contentment?

**Sect III. *The third argument is,***

**Be content, for else we confute our own prayers.** We pray, “thy will be done:” it is the will of God that we should be in such a condition; he hath decreed it, and he sees it best for us; why then do we murmur, and are discontent at that which we pray for? either we are not in good earnest in our prayer, which argues hypocrisy; or we contradict ourselves which argues folly.

**Sect IV. *The fourth argument to contentment is,***

**Because now God hath his end, and Satan misseth of his end.** 1. God hath his end. God’s end in all his providences is to bring the heart to submit and be content; and indeed this pleaseth God much, he loves to see his children satisfied with that portion he doth carve and allot them; it contents him to see us contented; therefore let us acquiesce in God’s providence, now God hath his end. 2. Satan misseth of his end. The end why the devil, though by God’s permission, did smite Job in his body and estate, was to perplex his mind; he did vex his body on purpose that he might disquiet his spirit. He hoped to bring Job into a fit of discontent; and then that he would in a passion break forth against God: but Job being so well-contented with his condition as that he falls to blessing of God, he did disappoint Satan of his hope. “The devil will cast some of you into prison; (Re. 2. 10) why doth the devil throw us into prison? It is not so much the hurting our body, as the molesting our mind, that he aims at; he would imprison our contentment, and disturb the regular motion of our souls, this is his design. It is not so much the putting us into a prison, as the putting us into a passion, that he attempts; but by holy contentation, Satan loseth his prey, he misseth of his end. The devil hath often deceived us; the best way to deceive him, is by contentation in the midst of temptation; our contentment will discontent Satan. O, let us not gratify our enemy! discontent is the devil’s delight; now it is as he would have it, he loves to warm himself at the fire of our passions. Repentance is the joy of the angels, and discontent is the joy of the devils; as the devil danceth at discord, so he sings at discontent. The fire of our passions makes the devil a bonfire; it is a kind of heaven to him to see us torturing ourselves with our own troubles; but by holy contentment, we frustrate him of his purpose, and do as it were put him out of countenance.

**Sect. V. *The fifth argument is,***

**By contentment a Christian gains a victory over himself.** For a man to be able to rule his own spirit, this of all others is the most noble conquest. Passion denotes weakness; to be discontented is suitable to flesh and blood; but to be in every state content, reproached,

yet content, imprisoned, yet content; this is above nature; this is some of that holy valour and chivalry which only a divine spirit is able to infuse. In the midst of the affronts of the world to be patient, and in the changes of the world to have the spirit calmed, this is a conquest worthy indeed of the garland of honour. Holy Job, divested and turned out of all, leaving his scarlet, and embracing the dunghill, (a sad catastrophe!) yet had learned contentment. It is said, “he fell down upon the ground and worshipped.” (Job 1. 20) One would have thought he should have fallen upon the ground and blasphemed! no, he fell and worshipped. He adored God’s justice and holiness. Behold the strength of grace! here was an humble submission, yet a noble conquest; he got the victory over himself. It is no great matter for a man to yield to his own passions, this is facile and feminine; but to content himself in denying of himself, this is sacred.

**Sect. VI. *The sixth great argument to work the heart to contentment is,***

**The consideration that all God’s providences, how cross or bloody soever, shall do a believer good;** “and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” (Ro. 8. 28) Not only all good things, but all evil things work for good; and shall we be discontented at that which works for our good? Suppose our troubles are twisted together, and sadly accented: what if sickness, poverty, reproach, law-suits, &c, do unite and muster their forces against us? all shall work for good; our maladies shall be our medicines; and shall we repine at which shall undoubtedly do us good? “Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness.” (Ps. 112. 4) Affliction may be baptized Marah; it is bitter, but physical. Because this is so full of comfort, and may be a most excellent catholicon against discontent, I shall a little expatiate.

It will be inquired how the evils of affliction work for good? Several ways.

*First*, They are *disciplinary*; they teach us. The Psalmist having very elegantly described the church’s trouble, (Ps. 74) prefixed this title to the psalm, *Maschil*, which signifies a psalm giving instruction; that which seals up instruction, works for good. God puts us sometimes under the black rod; but it is a rod of discipline; “hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” (Mi. 6. 9) God makes our adversity our university. Affliction is a preacher; “blow the trumpet in Tekoa:” (Je. 6. 1) the trumpet was to preach to the people; “be thou instructed, O Jerusalem.” (Je. 6. 8) Sometimes God speaks to the minister to lift up his voice like a trumpet, (Is. 58. 1) and here he speaks to the trumpet to lift up its voice like a minister. Afflictions teach us humility. Commonly prosperous, and proud, corrections are God’s corrosives to eat out the proud flesh. Jesus Christ is the lily of the valleys, (Can. 2. 1) he dwells in an humble heart: God brings us into the valley of tears, that He may bring us into the valley of humility; “remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall; my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. (La. 3. 19,20) When men are grown high, God hath no better way with them, than to brew them a cup of wormwood. Afflictions are compared to thorns, (Ho. 2. 6) God’s thorns are to prick the bladder of pride.

Suppose a man run at another with a sword to kill him; accidentally, it only lets out his imposthume of pride; this doth him good: God's sword is to let out the imposthume of pride; and shall that which makes us humble, make us discontented? Afflictions teach us repentance; "thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised: I repented, and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh." (Je. 31. 18,19) Repentance is the precious fruit that grows upon the cross. When the fire is put under the still, the water drops from the roses; fiery afflictions make the waters of repentance drop and distil from the eyes; and is here any cause of discontent? Afflictions teach us to pray better, "they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them;" (Is. 26. 16) before, they would say a prayer; now they poured out a prayer. Jonah was asleep in the ship, but awake and at prayer in the whale's belly. When God puts under the fire-brands of affliction, now our hearts boil over the more; God loves to have his children possessed with a spirit prayer. Never did David, the sweet singer of Israel, tune his harp more melodiously, never did he pray better, than when he was upon the waters. Thus afflictions do in discipline; and shall we be discontent at that which is for our good?

*Secondly*, Afflictions are *probatory*. (Ps. 66. 10,11) Gold is not the worse for being tried, or corn for being fanned. Affliction is the touchstone of sincerity, it tries what metal we are made of; affliction is God's fan and his sieve. It is good that men be known; some serve God for a livery; they are like the fisherman, that makes use of the net, only to catch the fish; so they go a-fishing with the net of religion, only to catch preferment: affliction discovers these. The Donatists went to the Goths when the Arians prevailed: hypocrites will fail in a storm, true grace holds out in the winter-season. That is a precious faith which, like the stars, shines brightest in the darkest night. It is good that our graces should be brought to trial; thus we have the comfort, and the gospel the honour, and why then be discontented?

*Thirdly*, Afflictions are *expurgatory*, these evils work for our good, because they work out sin, and shall I be discontented at this? What if I have more trouble, if I have less sin? The brightest day hath its clouds; the purest gold its dross; the most refined soul hath some less of corruption. The saints lose nothing in the furnace but what they can well spare; their dross: is not this for our good? Why then should we murmur? "I am come to send fire on the earth." (Lu. 12. 49) Tertullian understands it of the fire of affliction. God makes this like the fire of the three children, which burned only their bonds and set them at liberty in the furnace, so the fire of affliction serves to burn the bonds of iniquity: "by this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged: and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin." (Is. 27. 9) When affliction or death comes to a wicked man, it takes away his soul; when it comes to a godly man, it only takes away his sin; is there any cause why we should be discontented? God steeps us in the brinish waters of affliction that he make take out our spots. God's people are his husbandry; (1 Cor. 3. 9) the ploughing of the ground kills the weeds, and the harrowing of the earth breaks the hard clods: God's ploughing of us by affliction, is to kill the weeds

of sin; his harrowing of us is to break the hard clouds of impenitency that the heart may be fitter to receive the seeds of grace; and if this be all, why should we be discontented?

*Fourthly*, Afflictions do both *exercise and increase our grace*. They exercise grace; affliction doth breathe our graces; every thing is most in its excellency when it is most in its exercise. Our grace, though it cannot be dead, yet it may be asleep, and hath need of awakening. What a dull thing is the fire when it is hid in the embers, or the sun when it is masked with a cloud! A sick man is living, but not lively; afflictions quicken and excite grace. God doth not love to see grace in the eclipse. Now faith puts forth its purest and most noble acts in times of affliction: God makes the fall of the leaf the spring of our graces. What if we are more passive, if graces be more active. Afflictions do increase grace; as the wind serves to increase and blow up the flame, so doth the windy blasts of affliction augment and blow up our graces; grace spends not in the furnace, but it is like the widow's oil in the cruise, which did increase by pouring out. The torch, when it is beaten burns brightest, so doth grace when it is exercised by sufferings. Sharp frosts nourish the good corn, so do sharp afflictions grace. Some plants grow better in the shade than in the sun, as the bay and the cypress; the shade of adversity is better for some than the sun-shine of prosperity. Naturalists observe that the colewort thrives better when it is watered with salt water than with fresh, so do some thrive better in the salt water of affliction; and shall we be discontented at that which makes us grow and fructify more?

*Fifthly*, These afflictions *do bring more of God's immediate presence into the soul*. When we are most assaulted, we shall be most assisted; "I will be with him in trouble." (Ps. 91. 15) It cannot be ill with that man with whom God is, by his powerful presence in supporting, and his gracious presence in sweetening the present trial. God will be with us in trouble, not only to behold us, but to uphold us, as he was with Daniel in the lion's den, and the three children in the fiery furnace. What if we have more trouble than others, if we have more of God with us than others have? We never have sweeter smiles from God's face than when the world begins to look strange: thy statutes have been my song; where? not when I was upon the throne, but "in the house of my pilgrimage." (Ps. 119. 54) We read, the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire: (1 Ki. 19. 11) but in a metaphorical and spiritual sense, when the wind of affliction blows upon a believer, God is in the wind; when the fire of affliction kindles upon him, God is in the fire, to sanctify, to support, to sweeten. If God be with us, the furnace shall be turned into a festival, the prison into a paradise, the earthquake into a joyful dance. O why should I be discontented, when I have more of God's company!

*Sixthly*, These evils of affliction are for good, *as they bring with them certificates of God's love*, and are evidences of his special favour. Affliction is the saint's livery; it is a badge and cognizance of honour: that the God of glory should look upon a worm, and take so much notice of him, as to afflict him rather than lose him, is an high act of favour. God's rod is a

sceptre of dignity, Job calls God's afflicting of us, his magnifying of us. (Job 7. 17) Some men's prosperity hath been their shame, when others afflictions have been their crown.

*Seventhly*, These afflictions work for our good, because *they work for us a far exceeding weight of glory.* (2 Cor. 4. 17) That which works for my glory in heaven, works for my good. We do not read in Scripture that any man's honour or riches do work for him a weight of glory, but afflictions do; and shall a man be discontented at that which works for his glory? The heavier the weight of affliction, the heavier the weight of glory; not that our sufferings do merit glory, (as the papists do wickedly gloss,) but though they are not the cause of our crown, yet they are the way to it; and God makes us, as he did our captain, "perfect through sufferings." (He. 2. 10) And shall not all this make us contented with our condition? O I beseech you, look not upon the evil of affliction, but the good! Afflictions in Scripture are called "visitations." (Job 7. 18) The word in the Hebrew, to visit, is taken in a good sense, as well as a bad: God's afflictions are but friendly visits. Behold here God's rod, like Aaron's rod blossoming; and Jonathan's rod, it hath honey at the end of it. Poverty shall starve out our sins; the sickness of the body cures a sin-sick soul; O then, instead of murmuring and being discontented, bless the Lord! Hadst thou not met with such a rub in the way, thou mightest have gone to hell and never stopped.

**Sect. VII. *The seventh argument to contentation is,***

**Consider the evil of discontent.** Malcontent hath a mixture of grief and anger in it, and both of these must needs raise a storm in the soul. Have you not seen the posture of a sick man? Sometimes he will sit up on his bed, by and by he will lie down, and when he is down he is not quiet; first he turns on the one side and then on the other; he is restless; this is just the emblem of a discontented spirit. The man is not sick, yet he is never well; sometimes he likes such a condition of life but is soon weary; and then another condition of life; and when he hath it, yet he is not pleased; this is an evil under the sun. Now the evil of discontent appears in three things.

*Evil 1st.* The sordidness of it is *unworthy* of a Christian. (1.) It is unworthy of his *profession*. It was the saying of an heathen, bear thy condition quietly; "know thou art a man;" so I say, bear thy condition contentedly, "know thou art a Christian." Thou professteth to live by faith: what? and not content? Faith is a grace that doth substantiate things not seen; (He. 11. 1) faith looks beyond the creature, it feeds upon promises; faith lives not by bread alone; when the water is spent in the bottle, faith knows whither to have recourse; now to see a Christian dejected in the want of visible supplies and recruits, where is faith? "O," saith one, "my estate in the world is down." Ay, and which is worse, the faith is down. Wilt thou not be contented unless God let down the vessel to thee, as he did to Peter, "wherein were all manner of beasts of the earth, and fowls of the air?" Must you have the first and second course? This is like Thomas, "unless I put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe;" so, unless thou hast a sensible feeling of outward comforts, thou wilt not be content.

True faith will trust God where it cannot trace him, and will adventure upon God's bond though it hath nothing in view. You who are discontented because you have not all you would, let me tell you, either your faith is a nonentity, or at best but an embryo; it is a weak faith that must have stilts and crutches to support it. Nay, discontent is not only below faith, but below reason: why are you discontented? Is it because you are dispossessed of such comforts? Well, and have you not reason to guide you? Doth not reason tell you that you are but tenants at will? And may not God turn you out when he pleases? You hold not your estate by juridical right, but upon favour and courtesy. (2.) It is unworthy of *the relation we stand in to God*. A Christian is invested with the title and privilege of sonship, (Ep. 1. 5) he is an heir of the promise. O consider the lot of free-grace that is fallen upon thee; thou art nearly allied to Christ, and of the blood royal; thou art advanced in some sense, above the angels: "why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?" (2 Sa. 13. 4) why art thou discontented? O, how unworthy is this! as if the heir to some great monarch should go pining up and down because he may not pick such a flower.

*Evil 2nd.* Consider the *sinfulness* of it; which appears in three things; the causes, the concomitants, the consequences of it.

(1.) It is sinful in the *causes*; such as *pride*. He that thinks highly of his deserts, usually esteems meanly of his condition: a discontented man is a proud man, he thinks himself better than others, therefore finds fault with the wisdom of God that he is not above others. Thus the things formed saith to him that formed it, "why hast thou made me thus?" (Ro. 9. 20) why am I not higher? Discontents are nothing else but the estuations, and boilings over of pride. The second cause of discontent is, *envy*, which Augustine calls the sin of the devil. Satan envied Adam the glory of paradise, and the robe of innocency: he that envies what his neighbour hath, is never contented with that portion which God's providence doth parcel out to him. As envy stirs up strife, (this made the Plebeian faction so strong among the Romans) so it creates discontent: the envious man looks so much upon the blessings which another enjoys, that he cannot see his own mercies, and so doth continually vex and torture himself. Cain envied that his brother's sacrifice was accepted, and his rejected; hereupon he was discontented, and presently murderous thoughts began to arise in his heart. The third cause is *covetousness*. This is a radical sin. Whence are vexing law-suits, but from discontent? and whence is discontent, but from covetousness? Covetousness and contentedness cannot dwell in the same heart. Avarice is an helluo<sup>1</sup>, that is never satisfied. The covetous man is like Behemoth, "behold he drinketh up a river, he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth." (Job 40. 23) "There are four things (saith Solomon) that say not, it is enough." I may add a fifth, the heart of a covetous man; he is still craving. Covetousness is like a wolf in the breast, which is ever feeding; and because a man is not

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1 glutton

satisfied, he is never content. The fourth cause of discontent is, *jealousy*, which is sometimes occasioned through melancholy, and sometimes misapprehension. The spirit of jealousy causeth the evil spirit. "Jealousy is the rage of a man." (Pr. 6. 34) And oft this is nothing but suspicion and fancy: yet such as creates real discontent. the fifth cause of discontent is *distrust*, which is a great degree of Atheism. The discontented person is ever distrustful. The bill of provision grows low; I am in these straits of exigencies, can God help me? "can he prepare a table in the wilderness?" sure he cannot. My estate is exhausted, can God recruit me? my friends are gone, can God raise me up more? sure the arm of his power is shrunk. I am like the dry fleece, can any water come upon this fleece? "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Ki. 7. 2) Thus the anchor of hope, and the shield of faith, being cast away, the soul goes pining up and down. Discontent is nothing else but the echo of unbelief: and remember, distrust is worse than distress.

(2.) Discontent is evil in its *concomitants* of it, which are two:

1. Discontent is joined with a *sullen melancholy*. A Christian of a right temper should be ever cheerful in God: "serve the Lord with gladness;" (Ps. 100. 2) a sign the oil of grace hath been poured into the heart when the oil of gladness shines in the countenance. Cheerfulness credits religion; how can the discontented person be cheerful? Discontent is a dogged, sullen humour; because we have not what we desire God shall not have a good work or look from us; as the bird in the cage, because he is pent up, and cannot fly in the open air, therefore beats herself against the cage, and is ready to kill herself. Thus that peevish prophet; "I do well to be angry even unto death." (Jon. 4. 9)

2. Discontent is accompanied with *unthankfulness*; because we have not all we desire, we never mind the mercies which we have. We deal with God as the widow of Sarepta did with the prophet: the prophet Elijah had been a means to keep her alive in the famine, for it was for his sake, that her meal in the barrel, and her oil in the cruise failed not; but as soon as ever her son dies, she falls into a passion, and begins to quarrel with the prophet: "what have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and slay my son?" (1 Ki. 17. 18) So ungratefully do we deal with God: we can be content to receive mercies from God, but if he doth cross us in the least thing, then, through discontent, we grow touchy and impatient, and are ready to fly upon God; thus God loseth all his mercies. We read in Scripture of the thank-offering; the discontented person cuts God short of this; the Lord loseth his thank-offering. A discontented Christian repines in the midst of mercies, as Adam who sinned in the midst of paradise. Discontent is a spider that sucks the poison of unthankfulness out of the sweetest flower of God's blessing, and is a devilish chemistry that extracts dross out of the most refined gold. The discontented person thinks every thing he doth for God too much, and every thing God doth for him too little. O what a sin is unthankfulness! it is an accumulative sin. What Cicero said of parricide, I may say of ingratitude: "there are many sins bound up in this one sin." It is a voluminous wickedness; and how full

of this sin is discontent? A discontented Christian, because he hath not all the world, therefore dishonours God with the mercies which he hath. God made Eve out of Adam's rib, to be an helper, but the devil hath made an arrow of this rib, and shot Adam to the heart: so doth discontent take the rib of God's mercy, and ungratefully shoot at him; estate, liberty shall be employed against God. Thus it is oftentimes. Behold then how discontent and ingratitude are interwoven and twisted one within the other: thus discontent is sinful in its concomitants. (3.) It is sinful in its *consequences*, which are these. 1. It makes a man very *unlike the Spirit of God*. The Spirit of God is a meek Spirit. The Holy Ghost descended in the likeness of a dove, (Mat. 3. 16) a dove is the emblem of meekness; a discontented spirit is not a meek spirit. 2. It makes a man *like the devil*; the devil being swelled with the poison of envy and malice, is never content: just so is the malcontent. The devil is an unquiet spirit, he is still "walking about," (1 Pe. 5. 8) it is his rest to be walking. And herein is the discontented person like him; for he goes up and down vexing himself, "seeking rest, and finding none;" he is the devil's picture. 3. Discontent *disjoins the soul*, it untunes the heart for duty. "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray." (Ja. 5. 13) But, is any man discontented? how shall he pray? "Lift up holy hands without wrath." (1 Ti. 2. 8) Discontent is full of wrath and passion; the malcontent cannot lift up pure hands; he lifts up leprous hands, he poisons his prayers; will God accept a poisoned sacrifice? Chrysostom compares prayer to a fine garland; those, saith he, that make a garland, their hands had need to be clean; prayer is a precious garland, the heart that makes it had need to be clean. Discontent throws poison into the spring, which was dealt among the Romans, discontent puts the heart into a disorder and mutiny, and such as one cannot serve the Lord "without distraction." 4. Discontent *sometimes unfits for the very use of reason*. Jonah, in a passion of discontent, spake no better than blasphemy and nonsense: "I do well to be angry even unto death." (Jon. 4. 9) What? to be angry with God! and to die for anger! Sure he did not know well what he said. When discontent transports, then, like Moses, we speak unadvisedly with our lips. This humour doth even suspend the very acts of reason. 5. Discontent doth not only disquiet a man's self, but *those who are near him*. This evil spirit troubles families, parishes, &c. If there be but one string out of tune, it spoils all the music: one discontented spirit makes jarrings and discords among others. It is this ill-humour that breeds quarrels and law-suits. Whence are all our contentions, but for want of contentation? "From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts?" (Ja. 4. 1) in particular from the lust of discontent. Why did Absalom raise a war against his father, and would have taken off not only his crown but his head? was it not his discontent? Absalom would be king. Why did Ahab stone Naboth? was it not discontent about the vineyard? Oh this devil of discontent! Thus you have seen the sinfulness of it.

*Evil. 3d.* Consider the *simplicity* of it. I may say, as the

Psalmist, “surely they are disquieted in vain:” (Ps. 39. 6) which appears thus, 1. Is it not a vain simple thing to be troubled at the loss of that which is in its own nature *perishing and changeable*? God hath put a vicissitude into the creature; all the world rings changes; and for me to meet with inconstancy here, to lose a friend, estate, to be in constant fluctuation; is no more than to see a flower wither or a leaf drop off in autumn: there is an autumn upon every comfort, a fall of the leaf; now it is extreme folly to be discontented at the loss of those things which are in their own nature loseable. What Solomon saith of riches, is true of all things under the sun, “they take wings.” Noah’s dove brought an olive-branch in its mouth, but presently flew out of the ark, and never returned more: such a comfort brings to us honey in its mouth, but it hath wings; and to what purpose should we be troubled, unless we had wings to fly after and overtake it? 2. Discontent is a *heart-breaking*: “by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken.” (Pr. 15. 13) It takes away the comfort of life. There is none of us but may have many mercies if we can see them; now because we have not all we desire, therefore we will lose the comfort of that which we have already. Jonah having his gourd smitten, a withering vanity, was so discontented, that he never thought of his miraculous deliverance out of the whale’s belly; he takes no comfort of his life, but wisheth that he might die. What folly is this? We must have all or none; herein we are like children, that throw away the piece which is cut them because they may have no bigger. Discontent eats out the comfort of life. Besides, it were well if it were seriously weighed how prejudicial this is even to our health; for discontent, as it doth discriciate the mind, so it doth pine the body. It frets as a moth; and by wasting the spirits, weakens the vitals. The pleurisy of discontent brings the body into a consumption; and is not this folly? 3. Discontent *does not ease us of our burden*, but it makes the cross heavier. A contented spirit goes cheerfully under its affliction. Discontent makes our grief as unsupportable as it is unreasonable. If the leg be well, it can endure a fetter and not complain; but if the leg be sore, then the fetters trouble. Discontent of mind is the sore that makes the fetters of affliction more grievous. Discontent troubles us more than the trouble itself, it steeps the affliction in wormwood. When Christ was upon the Cross, the Jews brought him gall and vinegar to drink, that it might add to his sorrow. Discontent brings to a man in affliction, gall and vinegar to drink; this is worse than the affliction itself. Is it not folly for a man to embitter his own cross? 4. Discontent *spins out our troubles the longer*. A Christian is discontented because he is in want, and therefore he is in want because he is discontented; he murmurs because he is afflicted, and therefore he is afflicted, because he murmurs. Discontent doth delay and adjourn our mercies. God deals herein with us, as we use to do with our children; when they are quiet and cheerful, they shall have any thing; but if we see them cry and fret, then we withhold from them: we get nothing from God by our discontent but blows; the more the child struggles, the more it is beaten: when we struggle with God by our sinful passions, he doubles and trebles his strokes; God will tame our curst hearts. What got Israel by their peevishness? they were

within eleven days journey to Canaan; and now they were discontented and began to murmur, God leads them a march of forty years long in the wilderness. Is it not folly for us to adjourn our own mercies? Thus you have seen the evil of discontent.

**Sect. VIII. *the eighth argument to contentation is this:***

**Why is not a man content with the competency which he hath?** Perhaps if he had more he would be less content; covetousness is a dry drunkenness. The world is such that the more we have the more we crave; it cannot fill the heart of man. When the fire burns, how do you quench it? not by putting oil in the flame, or laying on more wood, but by withdrawing the fuel. When the appetite is inflamed after riches, how may a man be satisfied? not by having just what he desires, but by withdrawing the fuel, &c. moderating and lessening his desires. He that is contented hath enough. A man in a fever or dropsy thirsts; how do you satisfy him? not by giving him liquid things, which will inflame his thirst the more; but by removing the cause, and so curing the distemper. The way for a man to be contented, is not by raising his estate higher, but by bringing his heart lower.

**Sect. IX. *The ninth argument to contentation is,***

**The shortness of life.** It is “but a vapour,” saith James. (Ja. 4. 14) Life is a wheel ever-running. The poets painted time with wings to show the volubility and swiftness of it. Job compares it to a swift post, (Job 9. 25) our life rides post; and to a day, not a year. It is indeed like a day. Infancy is as it were the day-break, youth is the sun-rising, full growth is the sun in the meridian, old age is sun-setting, sickness is the evening, then comes the night of death. How quickly is this day of life spent! Oftentimes this sun goes down at noon-day; life ends before the evening of old age comes. Nay, sometimes the sun of life sets presently after sun-rising. Quickly after the dawning of infancy the night of death approaches. O, how short is the life of man! The consideration of the brevity of life may work the heart to contentment. Remember thou art to be here but a day; thou hast but a short way to go, and what needs a long provision for a short way? If a traveller hath but enough to bring him to his journey’s end he desires no more. We have but a day to live, and perhaps we may be in the twelfth hour of the day; why if God gives us but enough to bear our charges, till night, it is sufficient, let us be content. If a man had the lease of a house, or farm, but for two or three days, and he should fall a building and planting, would he not be judged very indiscreet? so, when we have but a short time here, and death calls us presently off the stage, to thirst immoderately after the world, and pull down our souls to build up an estate, is an extreme folly. Therefore, as Esau said once, in a profane sense, concerning his birth-right, “lo, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birth-right do me?” so let a Christian say in a religious sense, “lo, I am even at the point of death, my grave is going to be made, and what good will the world do me? If I have but enough till sun-setting, I am content.”

**Sect. X. The tenth argument to contentation is,**

**Consider seriously the nature of a prosperous condition.** There are in a prosperous estate three things,

1. *More trouble.* Many who have abundance of all things to enjoy, yet have not so much content and sweetness in their lives, as some that go to their hard labour. Sad, solicitous thoughts do often attend a prosperous condition. Care is the evil spirit which haunts the rich man, and will not suffer him to be quiet. When his chest is full of gold, his heart is full of care, either how to manage, or how to increase, or how to secure what he hath gotten. O the troubles and perplexities that do attend prosperity! The world's high seats are very uneasy; sunshine is pleasant, but sometimes it scorcheth with its heat; the bee gives honey, but sometimes it stings: prosperity hath its sweetness and also its sting; "competency with contentment is far more eligible." Never did Jacob sleep better than when he had the heavens for his canopy, and a hard stone for his pillow. A large voluminous estate is but like a long trailing garment, which is more troublesome than useful.

2. In a prosperous condition there is *more danger*; and that two ways: First, in respect of a man's self. The rich man's table is oft his snare; he is ready to ingulf himself too deep in these sweet waters. In this sense it is hard to know how to abound. It must be a strong brain that bears heady wine; he had need have much wisdom and grace, that knows how to bear an high condition; either he is ready to kill himself with care, or to surfeit himself with luscious delights. O the hazard of honour, the damage of dignity! Pride, security, rebellion, are the three worms that breed of plenty. (De. 32. 15) The pastures of prosperity are rank and surfeiting. How soon are we broken upon the soft pillow of ease? Prosperity is often a trumpet that sounds a retreat, it calls men off from the pursuit of religion. The sun of prosperity oft dulls and puts out the fire of zeal; how many souls hath the pleurisy of abundance killed? They that "will be rich, fall into snares." (1 Ti. 6. 9) The world is birdlime at our feet, it is full of golden sands, but they are quick-sands. Prosperity, like smooth Jacob, will supplant and betray; a great estate, without much vigilancy, will be a thief to rob us of heaven; such as are upon the pinnacle of honour are in most danger of falling. A lower estate is less hazardous; the little pinnacle rides safe by the shore, when the gallant ship advancing with its mast and top-sail, is cast away. Adam in paradise was overcome, when Job on the dung-hill was a conqueror. Samson fell asleep in Delilah's lap: some have fallen so fast asleep on the lap of ease and plenty, that they have never awaked till they have been in hell. The world's fawning is worse than its frowning, and it is more to be feared when it smiles than when it thunders. Prosperity, in Scripture, is compared to a candle; "his candle shined upon my head;" (Job 29. 3) how many have burnt their wings about this candle! "The corn being over-ripe, sheds; and fruit, when it mellows, begins to rot; when men do mellow with the sun of prosperity, commonly their souls begin to rot in sin. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Lu. 18. 24) His golden weights keep him from as-

ending up the hill of God; and shall we not be content, though we are placed in a lower orb? What if we are not in so much bravery and gallantry as others? we are not in so much danger; as we want the honour of the world, so the temptations. O the abundance of danger that is in abundance! We see, by common experience, that lunatics, when the moon is declining, and in the wane, are sober enough, but when it is full they are wild and more exorbitant: when men's estates are in the wane, they are more serious about their souls, more humble, but when it is the full of the moon, and they have abundance, then their hearts begin to swell with their estates, and are scarcely themselves. Those that write concerning the several climates, observe, that such as live in the northern parts of the world, if you bring them into the south part, lose their stomachs, and die quickly: but those that live in the more southern and hot climates, bring them into the north, and their stomachs mend, and they are long-lived; give me leave to apply it. Bring a man from the cold, starving climate of poverty, into the hot southern climate of prosperity, and he begins to lose his appetite to good things, he grows weak, and a thousand to one if all his religion doth not die; but bring a Christian from the south to the north, from a rich flourishing estate into a jejune low condition, let him come into a more cold and hungry air, and then his stomach mends, he hath a better appetite after heavenly things, he hungers more after Christ, he thirsts more for grace, he eats more than at one meal of the bread of life, than at six before; this man is now like to live and hold out in his religion. Be content then with a modicum; if you have but enough to pay for your passage to heaven, it sufficeth. Secondly, a prosperous condition is dangerous in regard of others. A great estate, for the most part, draws envy to it, whereas in little there is quiet. David a shepherd was quiet, but David a courier was pursued by his enemies; envy cannot endure a superior; an envious man knows not how to live but upon the ruins of his neighbours; he raiseth himself higher by bringing others lower. Prosperity is an eye-sore to many. Such sheep as have most wool are soonest fleeced. The barren tree grows peaceably; no man meddles with the ash or willow, but the apple-tree and the damasin shall have many rude suitors. O then be contented to carry a lesser sail! He that hath less revenues hath less envy; such as bear the fairest frontispiece and make the greatest show in the world, are the white for envy and malice to shoot at.

3. A prosperous condition hath in it a *greater reckoning*; every man must be responsible for his talents. Thou that hast great possessions in the world, dost thou trade thy estate for God's glory? art thou rich in good works? Grace makes a private person a common good. Dost thou disburse thy money for public uses? It is lawful, in this sense, to put out our money to use. O let us all remember an estate is a depositum; we are but stewards; and our Lord and Master will ere long say, "give an account of your stewardship:" the greater our estate, the greater our charge, the more our revenues, the more our reckonings. You that have a lesser mill going in the world, be content: God will expect less from you, where He hath sowed more sparingly.

**Sect. XI. The eleventh argument to contentation is,**

**The example of those who have been eminent for contentation.** Examples are usually more forcible than precepts. Abraham being called out to hot service, and such as was against flesh and blood, was content. God bid him offer up his son Isaac. This was great work: Isaac was the son of his old age; the son of his love; the son of the promise; Christ the Messiah was to come of his line, “in Isaac shall thy seed be called:” so that to offer up Isaac seemed not only to oppose Abraham’s reason, but his faith too; for, if Isaac die, the world for ought he knew, must be without a Mediator. Besides, if Isaac be sacrificed, was there no other hand to do it but Abraham’s? must the father needs be the executioner? must he that was the instrument of giving Isaac his being, be the instrument of taking it away? Yet Abraham doth not dispute or hesitate, but believes “against hope,” and is content with God’s prescription: so, when God called him to leave his country, he was content. Some would have argued thus: “what! leave my friends, my native soil, my brave situation, and go turn pilgrim?” Abraham is content. Besides Abraham went blindfolds, “he knew not whither he went.” God held him in suspense; he must go wander he knows not where; and when he doth come to the place God hath laid out for him, he knows not what oppositions he shall meet with there. The world doth seldom cast a favourable aspect upon strangers. Yet he is content, and obeys; “he sojourned in the land of promise.” (He. 11. 9) Behold a little his pilgrimage. First, he goes to Charran, a city in Mesopotamia. When he had sojourned there a while, his father dies. Then he removed to Sichem, then to Bethlehem in Canaan; there a famine ariseth; then he went down to Egypt; after that he returns to Canaan. When he comes there, it is true he had a promise, but he found nothing to answer expectation; he had not there one foot of land, but was an exile. In this time of his sojourning he buried his wife: and as for his dwellings, he had no sumptuous buildings, but led his life in poor cottages: all this was enough to have broken any man’s heart. Abraham might think thus with himself: “is this the land I must possess? here is no probability of any good; all things are against me.” Well, is he discontented? no; God saith to him, “Abraham, go, leave thy country,” and this word was enough to lead him all the world over; he is presently upon his march. Here was a man that had learned to be content. But let us descend a little lower, to heathen Zeno, of who Seneca speaks, who had once been very rich, hearing of a shipwreck, and that all his goods were drowned at sea: “Fortune,” saith he, (he spake in a heathen dialect) “hath dealt with me, and would have me now study philosophy.” He was content to change his course of life, to leave off being a merchant, and turn a philosopher. And if a heathen said thus, shall not a Christian much more say, when the world is drained from him, God would have me leave off following the world, and study Christ more, and how to get to heaven? Do I see an heathen contented, and a Christian disquieted? How did heathens vilify those things which Christians did magnify? Though they knew not God, or what true happiness meant; yet, they would speak very sublimely of a numen or deity, and of the life to come, as Aristotle

and Plato; and for those elysian delights, which they did but fancy, they undervalued and condemned the things here below! It was the doctrine they taught their scholars, and which some of them practised, that they should strive to be contented with a little; they were willing to make an exchange, and have less gold, and more learning; and shall not we be content then to have less of the world, so we may have more of Christ? May not Christians blush to see the heathens content with a *viaticum*, so much as would recruit nature; and to see themselves so transported with the love of earthly things, that if they begin a little to abate, and the bill of provision grows short, they murmur, and are like Mich, Have ye taken away my gods, and do you ask me what aileth me? (Ju. 18. 24) Have heathens gone so far in contentation, and is it not sad for us to come short of heaven? These heroes of their time, how did they embrace death itself! Socrates died in prison; Hercules was burnt alive; Cato, who Seneca calls the lively image and portraiture of virtue, thrust through with a sword; but how bravely, and with contentment of spirit did they die? “Shall I (said Seneca) weep for Cato, or Regulus, or the rest of those worthies, that died with so much valour and patience?” Did not cross providence make *them* to alter their countenance? and do I see a Christian appalled and amazed? Did not death affright them? and doth it distract us? Did the spring-head of nature rise so high? and shall not grace, like the waters of the sanctuary, rise higher; We that pretend to live by faith, may we not go to school to them who had no other pilot but reason to guide them? Nay, let me come a step lower, to creatures void of reason; we see every creature is contented with its allowance; the beasts with their provender, the birds with their nests; they live only upon providence: and shall we make ourselves below them? Let a Christian go to school to the ox and the ass to learn contentedness; we think we never have enough, and are still laying up: the fowls of the air do not lay up, they reap not, nor gather into barns. (Mat. 6. 26) It is an argument which Christ brings to make Christians contented with their condition; the birds do not lay up, yet they are provided for, and are contented; are ye not, saith Christ, “much better than they?” but if you are discontented, are you not much worse than they? Let these examples quicken us.

**Sect. XII. The twelfth argument to contentation is,**

**Whatever change of trouble a child of God meets with, it is all the hell he shall have.**

Whatever eclipse may be upon his name or estate, I may say of it, as Athanasius of his banishment, it is a little cloud that will soon be blown over, and then his gulf is shot his hell is past. Death begins a wicked man’s hell, but it puts an end to a godly man’s hell. Think with thyself, what if I endure this? It is but a temporary hell: indeed if all our hell be here, it is but an easy hell. What is the cup of affliction to the cup of damnation? Lazarus could not get a crumb; he was so diseased that the dogs took pity on him, and as if they had been his physicians, licked his sores: but this was an easy hell, the angels quickly fetched him out of it. If all our hell be in this life, in the midst of this hell we may have the love of God, and then it is no more hell but paradise. If our hell be here, we may see to the bottom of it; it is

but skindeep, it cannot touch the soul, and we may see to the end of it; it is an hell that is short-lived; after a wet night of affliction, comes the bright morning of the resurrection; if our lives are short, our trials cannot be long; as our riches take wings and fly, so do our sufferings; then let us be contented.

**Sect. XIII. *The thirteenth argument to contentation is this;***

**To have competency, and to want contentment, is a great judgement.** For a man to have a huge stomach, that whatever meat you give him he is still craving and never satisfied, you use to say, this is a great judgement upon the man: thou who art a devourer of money, and yet never hast enough, but still criest, give, give, this is a sad judgement: “They shall eat, and not have enough.” (Ho. 4. 10) The throat of a malicious man is an open sepulchre, (Ro. 3. 13) so is the heart of a covetous man. Covetousness is not only a sin, but the punishment of a sin. It is a secret curse upon a covetous person; he shall thirst, and thirst, and never be satisfied: “he that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver. (Ec. 5. 10) And is not this a curse? What was it but a severe judgement upon the people of Judah? “Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink. (Ha. 1. 6) O let us take heed of this plague! Did not Esau say to his brother, “I have abundance, my brother,” (Go. 37. 9) or, as we translate it, I have enough; and shall not a Christian say so much more. It is sad that our hearts should be dead to heavenly things, and a sponge to suck in earthly. Yet all that hath been said, will not work our minds to heavenly contentation.

## CHAPTER XII

### Three things inserted by way of Caution.

In the next place, I come to lay down some necessary cautions. Though I say a man should be content in every estate, yet there are three estates in which he must not be contented.

1st. **He must not be contented in a natural estate:** here we must learn not to be content. A sinner in his pure naturals is under the wrath of God, (Jno. 3. 16) and shall he be content when that dreadful vial is going to be poured out? Is it nothing to be under the scorplings of divine fury? “who can dwell with everlasting burnings?” A sinner, as a sinner, is under the power of Satan, (Ac. 26. 18) and shall he in his estate be contented? Who would be contented to stay in the enemies’ quarters? While we sleep in the lap of sin, the devil doth to us as the Philistines did to Samson, cut out the lock of our strength, and put out our eyes. Be not content, O sinner, in this estate! For a man to be in debt, body and soul; in fear every hour to be arrested and carried prisoner to hell, shall he now be content? Here I preach against contentation,. Oh get out of this condition! I would hasten you out of it as the angel hastened lot out of Sodom; (Gen. 19. 15) there is the smell of the fire and brimstone upon you. The longer a man stays in his sin, the more sin doth strengthen. It is hard to get out of sin, when the heart as a garrison is victualled and fortified. A young plant is easily removed, but when the tree is once rooted, there is no stirring of it: thou who art rooted in thy pride, unbelief, impenitency, it will cost thee many a sad pull ere thou art plucked out of thy natural estate. (Jer. 6. 16) It is an hard thing to have a brazen face and a broken heart; “he travaileth with iniquity;” (Ps. 7. 14) be assured, the longer you travail with your sins, the more and the sharper pangs you must expect in the new birth. O be not contented with your natural estate! David saith, “why art thou cast down, O my soul?” (Ps. 43. 5) But a sinner should say to himself, why art thou not disquieted, O my soul? Why is it that thou layest afflictions so to heart, and canst not lay sin to heart? It is a mercy when we are disquieted about sin. A man had better be at the trouble of setting a bone, than to be lame, and in pain all his life; blessed is that trouble that brings the soul to Christ. It is one of the worst sights to see a bad conscience quiet; of the two, better is a fever than a lethargy. I wonder to see a man in his natural estate content. What! content to go to hell?

2d. Though, in regard of externals, a man should be in every estate content, yet **he must not be content is such a condition wherein God is apparently dishonoured.** If a man’s trade be such that he can hardly use it, but he must trespass upon a command, and so make a trade of sin, he must not content himself in such a condition; God never called any man to such a calling as is sinful; a man in this case, had better knock off and divert, better lose some of his gain, so he may lessen some of his guilt. So, for servants that live in a profane family, the suburbs of hell, where the name of God is not called upon, unless when it is taken

in vain, they are not to content themselves in such a place, they are to come out of the tents of these sinners; there is a double danger in living among the profane.

1. *Lest we come to be infected with the poison of their ill example.* Joseph, living in Pharaoh's court, had learned to swear "by the life of Pharaoh." (Ge. 42. 15) We are prone to suck in example: men take in deeper impressions by the eye than the ear. Dives was a bad pattern, and he had many brethren that seeing him sin, trode just in his steps, therefore saith he, "I pray thee send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." (Lu. 16. 27,28) Dives knew which way they went; it is easy to catch a disease from another, but not to catch health. The bad will sooner corrupt the good, than the good will convert the bad. Take an equal quantity and proportion, so much sweet wine with so much sour vinegar; the vinegar will sooner sour the wine than the wine will sweeten the vinegar. Sin is compared to the plague, (1 Ki. 8. 37) and to leaven, (1 Cor. 5. 7) to show of what a spreading nature it is. A bad master makes a bad servant. Jacob's cattle, by looking on the rods which were speckled and ring-straked conceived the rods. We do as we see others do before us, especially those that are above us. If the head be sick, the other parts of the body are distempered. If the sun shines not upon the mountains, it must needs set in the valleys. We pray, "lead us not into temptation:" Lot was the world's miracle, who kept himself fresh in Sodom's salt water.

2. By living in an evil family, *we are liable to incur their punishment:* "pour out thy wrath upon the families that call not upon thy name. (Jer. 10. 25) For want of pouring out of prayer, the wrath of God was ready to be poured out. It is dangerous living in the tents of Kedar. When God sends his flying roll, written within and without with curses, it enters into the house of the thief and the perjurer, "and consumes the timber and the stones thereof." (Ze. 5. 4) Is it not of sad consequence to live in a profane perjured family, when the sin of the governor pulls his house about his ears? If the stones and timber be destroyed, how shall the servant escape? And suppose God send not a temporal roll of curses in the family, there is a "spiritual roll, and that is worse." (Pr. 3. 33) Be not content to live where religion dies. "Salute the brethren, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." (Col. 4. 15) The house of the godly is a little church, the house of the wicked a little hell. (Pr. 7. 27) Oh, incorporate yourselves into a religious family; the house of a good man is perfumed with a blessing. (Pr. 3. 33) When the holy oil of grace is poured on the head, the savour of this ointment sweetly diffuseth itself, and the virtue of it runs down upon the skirts of the family. Pious examples are very magnetical and forcible. Seneca said to his sister, though I leave you not wealth, yet I leave you a good example. Let us ingraft ourselves among the saints; by being often among the spices, we come to smell of them.

3d. The third caution is, though in every condition we must be content, yet **we are not to content ourselves with a little grace.** Grace is the best blessing. Though we should be contented with a competency of estate, yet not with a competency of grace. It was the end

of Christ's assension to heaven, to give gifts; and the end of those gifts, "that we may grow up into him in all things who is the head, even Christ. (Ep. 4. 15) Where the apostle distinguisheth between our being in Christ, and our growing in him; our ingratiating, and our flourishing; be not content with a modicum in religion.

It is not enough that there be life, but there must be fruit. Barrenness in the law was accounted a curse: the farther we are from the fruit, the nearer we are to cursing. (He. 6. 8) It is a sad thing when men are fruitful only in the unfruitful works of darkness. Be not content with a drachm or two of grace; next to a still-born, a starveling in Christ is worse. O covet more grace! never think thou hast enough. We are bid to covet the best things. (1 Cor. 12. 31) It is an heavenly ambition when we desire to be high in God's favour, a blessed contentation when all the strife is who shall be most holy. St Paul, though he was content with a little of the world, yet not with a little grace: "he reached forward, and pressed towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Ph. 3. 13,14) A true Christian is a wonder; he is the most contented, and yet the least satisfied; he is contented with a morsel of bread, and a little water in the cruise, yet never satisfied with grace; he doth pant and breath after more; this is his prayer, "Lord, more conformity to Christ, more communion with Christ; he would fain have Christ's image more lively pictured upon his soul. True grace is always progressive; as the saints are called lamps and stars, in regard of their light, so trees of righteousness, (Is. 61. 3) for their growth: they are indeed like the tree of life, bringing forth several sorts of fruit.

A true Christian grows in *beauty*. Grace is the best complexion of the soul; it is at the first plantation, like Rachel, fair to look upon; but still the more it lives, the more it sends forth its rays of beauty. Abraham's faith was at first beautiful; but at last did shine in its orient colours, and grew so illustrious, that God himself was in love with it, and makes his faith a pattern to all believers.

A true Christian grows in *sweetness*. A poisonous weed may grow as much as the hyssop or rosemary, the poppy in the field as the corn, the crab as the pearmain; but the one hath a harsh sour taste, the other mellows as it grows: an hypocrite may grow in outward dimensions, as much as a child of God, he may pray as much, profess as much: but he grows only in magnitude, he brings forth only sour grapes, his duties are leavened with pride; the other ripens as he grows; he grows in love, humility, faith, which do mellow and sweeten his duties, and make them come off with a better relish. The believer grows as the flower, he casts a fragrancy and perfume.

A true Christian grows in *strength*: he grows still more rooted and settled. The more the tree grows, the more it spreads its root in the earth: a Christian who is a plant of the heavenly Jerusalem, the longer he grows, the more he incorporates into Christ, and sucks spiritual juice and sap from him; he is a dwarf in regard of humility, but a giant in regard of strength, — he is strong to do duties, to bear burdens, resist temptations.

He grows in *the exercise of his grace*; he hath not only oil in his lamp, but his lamp is also burning and shining. Grace is agile and dexterous. Christ's vine do flourish; (Ca. 6. 11) hence we read of "a lively hope, (1 Pe. 1. 3) and "a fervent love;" (1 Pe. 1. 22) here is the activity of grace. Indeed sometimes grace is a sleepy habit of the soul, like sap in the vine, not exerting its vigour, which may be occasioned through spiritual sloth, or by reason of falling into some sin; but this is only for a while: the spring of grace will come, "the flowers will appear, and the fig tree put forth her green figs." The fresh gales of the Spirit do sweetly revive and refacilitate grace. The church of Christ, whose heart was a garden, and her graces as precious spices, prays for the heavenly breathings of the Spirit, that her sacred spices might flow out. (Ca. 6. 16)

A true Christian grows *both in the kind and in the degree of grace*. To his spiritual living he gets an augmentation, he adds to "faith, virtue: to virtue, knowledge: to knowledge, temperance," &c. (2 Pe. 1. 5,6) Here is grace growing in its kind. And he goes on "from faith to faith;" (Ro. 1. 17) there is grace growing in the degree; "we are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because your faith groweth exceedingly;" (2 Th. 1. 3) it increaseth over and above. And the apostle speaks of those spiritual plants which were laden with gospel-fruit. (Ph. 1. 11) A Christian is compared to the vine, (an emblem of fruitfulness) he must bear full clusters: we are bid to perfect that which is lacking in our faith. (1 Th. 3. 10) A Christian must never be so old as to be past bearing; he brings forth fruit in his old age. (Ps. 92. 14) An heaven-born plant is ever growing; he never thinks he grows enough; he is not content unless he add every day one cubit to his spiritual stature. We must not be content just with so much grace as will keep life and soul together, a drachm or two will not suffice, but we must be still increasing, "with the increase of God." (Col. 2. 19) We had need renew our strength as the eagle. (Is. 40. 31) Our sins are renewed, our wants are renewed, our temptations are renewed, and shall not our strength be renewed? O be not content with the first *embryo* of grace; grace in its infancy and minority! You look for degrees of glory, be ye Christians of degrees. Though a believer should be contented with a *modicum* on his estate, yet not with a *modicum* in religion. A Christian of the right breed labours still to excel himself, and come nearer to that holiness in God, who is the original, the pattern, and prototype of all holiness.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Use IV. Showing how a Christian may know whether he hath learned this Divine Art.

Thus having laid down these three cautions, I proceed, in the next place, to an use of trial. How may a Christian know that he hath learned this lesson of contentment? I shall lay down some characters by which you shall know it.

*Character 1st.* A contented spirit is a *silent* spirit; he hath not one word to say against God; "I was dumb and silent, because thou didst it." (Ps. 39. 9) Contentment silenceth all dispute: "he sitteth alone and keepeth silence." (La. 3. 28) There is a sinful silence; when God is dishonoured, his truth wounded, and men hold their peace, this silence is a loud sin; and there is a holy silence, when the soul sits down quiet and content with its condition. When Samuel tells Eli that heavy message from God, that he would "judge his house, and that the iniquity of his family should not be purged away with sacrifice forever," (1 Sa. 3. 13,14) doth Eli murmur or dispute? no, he hath not one word to say against God: "it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." A discontented spirit saith as Pharaoh, "who is the Lord?" why should I suffer all this? why should I be brought into this low condition? "who is the Lord?" But a gracious heart saith, as Eli, "it is the Lord," let him do what he will with me. When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had offered up strange fire, and fire went from the Lord and devoured them, (Le. 10. 1) is Aaron now in a passion of discontent? no, "Aaron held his peace." A contented spirit is never angry unless with himself for having hard thoughts of God. When Jonah said, "I do well to be angry," this was not a contented spirit, it did not become a prophet.

*Character 2d.* A contented spirit is a *cheerful* spirit; the Greeks call it *euthema*. Contentment is something more than patience; for patience denotes only submission, contentment denotes cheerfulness. A contented Christian is more than passive; he doth not only bear the cross, but take up the cross. (Mat. 6. 24) He looks upon God as a wise God; and whatever he doth, though it be not willingly, yet sensibly, it is in order to a cure. Hence the contented Christian is cheerful, and with the apostle, "takes pleasure in infirmities, distresses," &c. (2 Cor. 12. 10) He doth not only submit to God's dealings, but rejoice in them; he doth not only say, "just is the Lord in all that hath befallen me," but "good is the Lord." This is to be contented. A sullen melancholy is hateful. It is said, "God loveth a cheerful giver," (2 Cor. 9. 7) aye and God loves a cheerful liver. We are bid in Scripture, "not to be careful," but we are not bid not to be cheerful. He that is contented with his condition, doth not abate of his spiritual joy; and indeed he hath that within him which is the ground of cheerfulness; he carries a pardon sealed in his heart. (Mat. 9. 2)

*Character 3d.* A contented spirit is a *thankful* spirit. This is a degree above the other; "in every thing giving thanks." (1 Th. 5. 18) A gracious heart spies mercy in every condition,

therefore hath his heart screwed up to thankfulness; others will bless God for prosperity, he blesseth him for affliction. Thus he reasons with himself; am I in want? God sees it better for me to want than to abound; God is now dieting of me, he sees it better for my spiritual health sometimes to be kept fasting; therefore he doth not only submit but is thankful. The malcontent is ever complaining of his condition; the contented spirit is ever giving thanks. O what height of grace is this! A contented heart is a temple where the praises of God are sung forth, not a sepulchre wherein they are buried. A contented Christian in the greatest straits hath his heart enlarged and dilated in thankfulness; he oft contemplates God's love in election; he sees that he is a monument of mercy, therefore desires to be a pattern of praise. There is always gratulatory music in a contented soul; the Spirit of grace works in the heart like new wine, which under the heaviest pressures of sorrow will have a vent open for thankfulness: this is to be content.

*Character 4th.* He that is content, *no condition comes amiss to him*; so it is in the text, "in whatever state I am." A contented Christian can turn himself to anything; either want or abound. The people of Israel knew neither how to abound, nor yet how to want; when they were in want they murmured; "can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" and when they ate, and were filled, then they lifted up the heel. Paul knew how to manage every state; he could be either a note higher or lower; he was in this sense an universalist, he could do anything that God would have him: if he were in prosperity, he knew how to be thankful; if in adversity, he knew how to be patient; he was neither lifted up with the one, nor cast down with the other. He could carry a greater sail, or lesser. Thus a contented Christian knows how to turn himself to any condition. We have those who can be contented in some condition, but not in every estate; they can be content in a wealthy estate, when they have the streams of milk and honey; while Gods candle shines upon their head, now they are content, but if the wind turn and be against them, now they are discontented. While they have a silver crutch to lean upon, they are contented; but if God breaks this crutch, now they are discontented. But Paul had learned in every estate to carry himself with an equanimity of mind. Others could be content with their affliction, so God would give them leave to pick and choose. They could be content to bear such a cross; they could better endure sickness than poverty, or bear loss of estate than loss of children; if they might have such a man's cross they could be content. A contented Christian doth not go to choose his cross, but leaves God to choose for him; he is content both for the kind and the duration. A contented spirit saith, "let God apply what medicine he pleaseth, and let it lie on as long as it will; I know when it hath done its cure, and eaten the venom of sin out of my heart, God will take it off again."

In a word, a contented Christian, being sweetly captivated under the authority of the word, desires to be wholly at God's disposal, and is willing to live in that sphere and climate where God has set him. And if at any time he hath been an instrument of doing noble and

brave service in the public, he knows he is but a rational tool, a servant to authority, and is content to return to his former condition of life. Cincinnatus, after he had done worthily, and purchased to himself great fame in his dictatorship, did notwithstanding afterwards voluntary return to till and manure his four acres of ground: thus should it be with Christians, professing godliness with contentment, having served Mars, daring to offend Jupiter; lest otherwise they discover only to the world a brutish valour, being so untamed and headstrong, that when they had conquered others, yet they are not able to rule their own spirits.

*Character 5th.* He that is contented with his condition, *to rid himself out of trouble, will not turn himself into sin.* I deny not but a Christian may lawfully seek to change his condition: so far as God's providence doth go before, he may follow. But when men will not follow providence but run before it, as he that said, "this evil is of the Lord, why should I wait any longer. (2 Ki. 6. 33) If God doth not open the door of his providence, they will break it open, and wind themselves out of affliction by sin; bringing their souls into trouble; this is far from holy contentation, this is unbelief broken into rebellion. A contented Christian is willing to wait God's leisure, and will not stir till God open a door. As Paul said in another case, "they have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily? nay, verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out:" (Ac. 16. 37) so, with reverence, saith the contented Christian, God hath cast me into this condition; and though it be sad, and troublesome, yet I will not stir, till God by a clear providence fetch me out. Thus those brave spirited Christians; "they accepted not deliverance," (He. 11. 35) that is, upon base dishonourable terms. They would rather stay in prison than purchase their liberty by carnal compliance. Estius observes on the place, "they might not only have had their enlargements, but been raised to honour, and put into offices of trust, yet the honour of religion was dearer to them, than either liberty or honour." A contented Christian will not remove, till as the Israelites he sees a pillar of cloud and fire going before him. "It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. (La. 3. 26) It is good to stay God's leisure and not to extricate ourselves out of trouble, till we see the star of God's providence pointing out a way to us.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Use V. Containing a Christian Directory, or Rules about Contentment.

I proceed now to an use of direction, to show Christians how they may attain to this divine art of contentation. Certainly it is feasible, others of God's saints have reached to it. St Paul here had it; and what do we think of those we read of in that little book of martyrs, (He. 11) who had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, who wandered about in deserts and caves, yet were contented; so that it is possible to be had. And here I shall lay down some rules for holy contentment.

**Rule 1. Advance faith.** All our disquiets do issue immediately from unbelief. It is this that raiseth the storm of discontent in the heart. O set faith a-work! It is the property of faith to silence our doubtings, to scatter our fears, to still the heart when the passions are up. Faith works the heart to a sweet serene composure; it is not having food and raiment, but having faith, which will make us content. Faith chides down passion; when reason begins to sink, let faith swim.

*How doth faith work contentment?* 1. Faith shows the soul that whatever its trials are yet it is from the hand of a father; it is indeed a bitter cup, but "shall I not drink the cup which my father hath given me to drink?" It is in love to my soul: God corrects me with the same love he crowns me; God is now training me up for heaven; he carves me, to make me a polished shaft. These sufferings bring forth patience, humility, even the peaceful fruits of righteousness. (He. 12. 11) And if God can bring such sweet fruit out of our stock, let him graft me where he pleases. Thus faith brings the heart to holy contentment. 2. Faith sucks the honey of contentment out of the hive of the promise. Christ is the vine, the promises are the clusters of grapes that grow upon this vine, and faith presseth the sweet wine of contentment out of these spiritual clusters of the promises. I will show you but one cluster, "the Lord will give grace and glory;" (Ps. 84. 11) here is enough for faith to live upon. The promise is the flower out of which faith distills the spirits and quintessence of divine contentment. In a word, faith carries up the soul, and makes it aspire after more generous and noble delights than the earth affords, and to live in the world above the world. Would ye live contented lives? Live up to the height of your faith.

**Rule 2. Labour for assurance.** O let us get the interest cleared between God and our souls! Interest is a word much in use, — a pleasing word, — interest in great friends, — interest-money. O, if there be an interest worth looking after, it is an interest between God and the soul! Labour to say, "my God." To be without money, and without friends, and without God too, is sad; but he whose faith doth flourish into assurance, that can say, "I know whom I have believed," (2 Ti. 1. 2) that man hath enough to give his heart contentment. When a man's debts are paid, and he can go abroad without fear of arresting, what contentment is this! O, let your title be cleared! If God be ours, whatever we want in the creature,

is infinitely made up in him. Do I want bread? I have Christ the bread of life. Am I under defilement? his blood is like the trees of the sanctuary; not only for meat, but medicine. (Ez. 47. 12) If any thing in the world be worth labouring for, it is to get sound evidences that God is ours. If this be once cleared, what can come amiss? No matter what storms I meet with, so that I know where to put in for harbour. He that hath God to be his God, is so well contented with his condition, that he doth not much care whether he hath anything else. To rest in a condition where a Christian cannot say God is his God, is matter of fear; and if he can say so truly, and yet is not contented, it is a matter of shame. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." (1 Sa. 30. 6) It was sad with him, Ziklag burnt, his wives taken captive, his all lost, and like to have lost his soldiers' hearts too, (for they spake of stoning him,) yet he had the ground of contentment within him; an interest in God, and this was a pillar of supportment to his spirit. He that knows God is his, and all that is in God is for his good, if this doth not satisfy, I know nothing that will.

**Rule 3. Get an humble spirit.** The humble man is the contented man; if his estate be low, his heart is lower than his estate, therefore be content. If his esteem in the world be low, he that is little in his own eyes will not be much troubled to be little in the eyes of others. He hath a meaner opinion of himself, than others can have of him. The humble man studies his own unworthiness; he looks upon himself as "less than the least of God's mercies;" (Ge. 32. 10) and then a little will content him: he cries out with Paul, that he is the chief of sinners, (1 Ti. 1. 15) therefore doth not murmur, but admire. He doth not say his comforts are small, but his sins are great. He thinks it is mercy he is out of hell, therefore he is contented. He doth not go to carve out a more happy condition to himself; he knows the worst piece God cuts him is better than he deserves. A proud man is never contented; he is one that hath an high opinion of himself; therefore under small blessings is disdainful, under small crosses impatient. The humble spirit is the contented spirit; if his cross be light, he reckons it the inventory of his mercies; if it be heavy, yet he takes it upon his knees, knowing that when his estate is worse, it is to make him the better. Where you lay humility for the foundation, contentment will be the superstructure.

**Rule 4. Keep a clear conscience.** Contentment is the manna that is laid up in the ark of a good conscience: O take heed of indulging any sin! it is as natural for guilt to breed disquiet, as for putrid matter to breed vermin. Sin lies as Jonah in the ship, it raiseth a tempest. If dust or motes be gotten into the eye, they make the eye water, and cause a soreness in it; if the eye be clear, then it is free from that soreness; if sin be gotten into the conscience, which is as the eye of the soul, then grief and disquiet breed there; but keep the eye of conscience clear, and all is well. What Solomon saith of a good stomach, I may say of a good conscience, "to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet;" (Pr. 27. 7) so to a good conscience every bitter thing is sweet; it can pick contentment out of the cross. A good conscience turns the waters of Marah into wine. Would you have a quiet heart? Get a smiling conscience. I

wonder not to hear Paul say he was in every state content, when he could make that triumph, “I have lived in all good conscience to this day.” When once a man’s reckonings are clear, it must needs let in abundance of contentment into the heart. Good conscience can suck contentment out of the bitterest drug, under slanders; “our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.” (2 Cor. 1. 12) In case of imprisonment, Paul had his prison songs, and could play the sweet lessons of contentment, when his feet were in the stocks. (Ac. 16. 25) Augustine calls it “the paradise of a good conscience;” and if it be so, then in prison we may be in paradise. When the times are troublesome, a good conscience makes a calm. If conscience be clear, what though the days be cloudy? is it not a contentment to have a friend always by to speak a good word for us? Such a friend is conscience. A good conscience, as David’s harp, drives away the evil spirit of discontent. When thoughts begin to arise, and the heart is disquieted, conscience saith to a man, as the king did to Nehemiah, “why is thy countenance sad?” so saith conscience, hast not thou the seed of God in thee? art not thou an heir of the promise? hast not thou a treasure that thou canst never be plundered of? why is thy countenance sad? O keep conscience clear, and you shall never want contentment! For a man to keep the pipes of his body, the veins and arteries, free from colds and obstructions, is the best way to maintain health: so, to keep conscience clear, and to preserve it from the obstructions of guilt, is the best way to maintain contentment. First, conscience is pure, and then peaceable.

**Rule 5. Learn to deny yourselves.** Look well to your affections, bridle them in. Do two things: mortify your desires; moderate your delights.

1. *Mortify your desires.* We must not be of the dragon’s temper, who, they say, is so thirsty, that no water will quench his thirst: “mortify therefore your inordinate affections.” (Col. 3. 5) In the Greek it is, your evil affections; to show that our desires, when they are inordinate, are evil. Crucify your desires; be as dead men; a dead man hath no appetite.

*How should a Christian martyr his desires?*

(1.) Get a right judgment of the things here below; they are mean beggarly things; “wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?” (Pr. 23. 5) The appetite must be guided by reason; the affections are the feet of the soul; therefore they must follow the judgment, not lead it.

(2.) Often seriously meditate of mortality: death will soon crop these flowers which we delight in, and pull down the fabric of those bodies which we so garnish and beautify. Think, when you are looking up your money in your chest, who shall shortly lock you up in your coffin.

2. *Moderate your delights.* Set not your heart too much upon any creature, (Is. 62. 10) what we over-love, we shall over-grieve. Rachel set her heart too much upon her children, and when she had lost them, she lost herself too; such a vein of grief was opened as could not be staunched, “she refused to be comforted.” Here was discontent. When we let any

creature lie too near our heart, when God pulls away that comfort, a piece of our heart is rent away with it. Too much fondness ends in frowardness. Those that would be content in the want of mercy, must be moderate in the enjoyment. Jonathan dipt the rod in honey, he did not thrust it in. Let us take heed of ingulphing ourselves in pleasure; better have a spare diet, than, by having too much, to surfeit.

**Rule 6. Get much of heaven into your heart.** Spiritual things satisfy; the more of heaven is in us, the less earth will content us. He that hath once tasted the love of God, (Ps. 63. 5) his thirst is much quenched towards sublunary things; the joys of God's Spirit are heart-filling and heart-cheering joys; he that hath these, hath heaven begun in him, (Ro. 14. 27) and shall not we be content to be in heaven? O get a sublime heart, "seek those things which are above." (Col. 3. 1) Fly aloft in your affections, thirst after the graces and comforts of the Spirit; the eagle that flies above in the air, fears not the stinging of the serpent; the serpent creeps on his belly, and stings only such creatures as go upon the earth.

**Rule 7. Look not so much on the dark side of your condition, as on the light.** God doth chequer his providences, white and black, as the pillar of the cloud had its light side and dark: look on the light side of the estate; who looks on the back side of a landscape? Suppose thou art cast in a law-suit, there is the dark side; yet thou hast some land left, there is the light side. Thou hast sickness in thy body, there is the dark side; but grace in thy soul, there is the light side. Thou hast a child taken away, there is the dark side; thy husband lives, there is the light side. God's providences in this life are variously represented by those speckled horses among the myrtle-trees which were red and white! (Ze. 1. 1) Mercies and afflictions are interwoven: God doth speckle his work. O, saith one, I want such a comfort! but weigh all thy mercies in the balance, and that will make thee content. If a man did want a finger, would he be so discontented for the loss of that, as not to be thankful for all the other parts and joints of his body? Look on the light side of your condition, and then all your discontents will easily disband; do not pore upon your losses, but ponder upon your mercies. What! wouldest thou have no cross at all? Why should one man think to have all good things, when himself is good but in part; Wouldest thou have no evil about thee, who hast so much evil in thee? Thou art not fully sanctified in this life, how then thinkest thou to be fully satisfied? Never look for perfection of contentment till there be perfection of grace.

**Rule 8. Consider in what a posture we stand here in the world.** 1. We are in a *military* condition, we are soldiers, (2 Ti. 2. 3) now a soldier is content with any thing: what though he hath not his stately house, his rich furniture, his soft bed, his full table, yet he doth not complain; he can lie on straw as well as down; he minds not his lodging, but his thoughts run upon dividing the spoil, and the garland of honour shall be set upon his head; and for hope of this, is he content to run any hazard, endure any hardship. Were it not absurd to hear him complain, that he wants such provision and is fain to lie out in the fields? A

Christian is a military person, he fights the Lord's battles, he is Christ's ensignbearer. Now, what though he endures hard fate, and the bullets fly about? He fights for a crown, and therefore must be content. 2. We are in a *peregrine* condition, pilgrims and travellers. A man that is in a strange country, is contented with any diet or usage, he is glad of any thing; though he hath not that respect or attendance which he looks for at home, nor is capable of the privileges and immunities of that place, he is content; he knows, when he comes into his own country, he hath lands to inherit, and there he shall have honour and respect: so it is with a child of God, he is in a pilgrim condition; "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." (Ps. 39. 12) Therefore let a Christian be content; he is in the world, but not of the world: he is born of God, and is a citizen of the New Jerusalem, (He. 12. 22) therefore, though "he hunger and thirst, and have no certain dwelling-place, (1 Cor. 4. 11) yet he must be content: it will be better when he comes into his own country. 3. We are in a *mendicant* condition; we are beggars, we beg at heaven's gate, "give us this day our daily bread;" we live upon God's alms, therefore must be content with any thing; a beggar must not pick and choose, he is contented with the refuse. Oh, why dost thou murmur that art a beggar, and art fed out of the alms-basket of God's providence?

**Rule 9. Let not your hope depend upon these outward things.** Lean not upon sandy pillars; we oft build our comfort upon such a friend or estate; and when that prop is removed, all our joy is gone, and our hearts begin either to fail or fret. A lame man leans on his crutches; and if they break, he is undone. Let not thy contentment go upon crutches, which may soon fail; the ground of contentment must be within thyself. The Greek word which is used for contentment signifies self-sufficiency. A Christian hath that from within that is able to support him; that strength of faith, and good hope through grace, as bears up his heart in the deficiency of outward comforts. The philosophers of old, when their estates were gone, yet could take contentment in the goods of the mind, learning and virtue: and shall not a believer much more in the graces of the Spirit, that rich enamel and embroidery of the soul? Say with thyself, "if friends leave me, if riches take wings, yet I have that within which comforts me, an heavenly treasure; when the blossoms of my estate are blown off, still there is the sap of contentment in the root of my heart; I have still an interest in God, and that interest cannot be broken off." O never place your felicity in these dull and beggarly things here below!

**Rule 10. Let us often compare our condition.** Make this five-fold comparison.

*Comparison 1st.* Let us compare our condition and our *desert* together; if we have not what we desire, we have more than we deserve. For our mercies, we have deserved less; for our afflictions, we have deserved more. First, in regard of our mercies, we have deserved less. What can we deserve? Can man be profitable to the Almighty? We live upon free grace. Alexander gave a great gift to one of his subjects; the man being much taken with it, "this," saith he, "is more than I am worthy of." "I do not give thee this," saith the king, "because

thou art worthy of it, but I give a gift like Alexander.” Whatever we have is not merit, but bounty; the least bit of bread is more than God owes us; we can bring faggots to our own burning, but not one flower to the garland of our salvation; he that hath the least mercy, will die in God’s debt. Secondly, in regard of our afflictions, we have deserved more: “thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve. (Ex. 9. 13) Is our condition sad? we have deserved it should be worse. Hath God taken away our estate from us? he might have taken away Christ from us. Hath he thrown us into prison? he might have thrown us into hell; he might as well damn us, as whip us; this should make us contented.

*Comparison 2d.* Let us compare our condition with *others*; and this will make us content. We look at them who are above us, let us look at them who are below us; we can see one in his silks, another in his sackcloth; one hath the waters of a full cup wrung out to him, another is mingling his drink with tears; how many pale faces do we behold, whom not sickness, but want hath brought into a consumption! Think of this, and be content. It is worse with them, who perhaps deserve better than we, and are higher in God’s favour. Am I in prison? Was not Daniel in a worse place? the lion’s den. Do I live in a mean cottage? look on them who are banished from their houses. We read of the primitive saints, “that they wandered in sheep’s skins and goats’ skins, of whom the world was not worthy.” (He. 11. 37,38) Hast thou a gentle fit of an ague? look on them who are tormented with the stone and gout, &c. Others of God’s children have had greater afflictions, and have borne them better than we. Daniel fed upon pulse and drank water, yet was fairer than they who ate of the king’s portion; (Dan. 1. 15) some Christians who have been in a lower condition, that have fed upon pulse and water, have looked better, been more patient and contented than we who enjoy abundance. Do others rejoice in affliction, and do we repine? Can they take up their cross and walk cheerfully under it, and do we under a lighter cross murmur?

*Comparison 3d.* Let us compare our condition with *Christ’s upon earth*. What a poor, mean condition was He pleased to be in for us? he was contented with any thing. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor. (2 Cor. 8. 9) He could have brought down an house from heaven with him, or challenged the high places of the earth, but he was contented to be in the wine-press, that we might be in the wine-cellar, and to live poor that we might be rich; the manger was his cradle, the cobwebs his canopy; he who is now preparing mansions for us in heaven, had none for himself on earth, “he had no where to lay his head.” Christ came in *forma pauperis*; who, “being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant. (Ph. 2. 7) We read not of any sums of money He had; when he wanted money, he was fain to work a miracle for it. (Mat. 17. 27) Jesus Christ was in a low condition, he was never high, but when he was lifted up upon the cross, and that was his humility: he was content to live poor, and die cursed. O compare your condition with Christ’s!

*Comparison 4th.* Let us compare our condition with *what it was once*, and this will make us content. First, let us compare our spiritual estate with what it was once. What were we when we lay in our blood? we were heirs apparent to hell, having no right to pluck one leaf from the tree of promise; it was a Christless and hopeless condition: (Ep. 2. 12) but now God hath cut off the entail of hell and damnation; he hath taken you out of the wild olive of nature, and ingrafted you into Christ, making you living branches of that living vine; he hath not only caused the light to shine upon you, but into you, (2 Cor. 6. 6) and hath interested you in all the privileges of sonship: is not here that which may make the soul content. Secondly, let us compare our temporal estate with what it was once. Alas! we had nothing when we stepped out of the womb; “for we brought nothing into this world.” (1 Ti. 6. 7) If we have not that which we desire, we have more than we did bring with us; we brought nothing with us but sin; other creatures bring something with them into the world; the lamb brings wool, the silk-worm silk, &c. but we brought nothing with us. What if our condition at present be low? It is better than it was once; therefore, having food and raiment, let us be content. Whatever we have, God’s providence fetcheth it unto us; and if we lose all, yet we have as much as we brought with us. This was what made Job content, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb;” (Job 1. 21) as if he had said, though God hath taken away all from me, yet why should I murmur? I am as rich as I was when I came into the world? I have as much left as I brought with me; naked came I hither; therefore blessed be the name of the Lord.

*Comparison 5th.* Let us compare our condition with *what it shall be shortly*. There is a time shortly coming, when, if we had all the riches of India, they would do us no good; we must die, and can carry nothing with us; so saith the apostle, “it is certain we can carry nothing out of the world; (1 Ti. 6. 7) therefore it follows, “having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.” Open the rich man’s grave and see what is there; you may find the miser’s bones, but not his riches, says Bede. Were we to live forever here, or could we carry our riches into another world, then indeed we might be discontented, when we look upon our empty bags. But it is not so; God may presently seal a warrant for death to apprehend us: and when we die, we cannot carry estate with us: honour and riches descend not into the grave, why then are we troubled at our outward condition? Why do we disguise ourselves with discontent? O lay up a stock of grace! Be rich in faith and good works, these riches will follow us. (Re. 14. 13) No other coin but grace will pass current in heaven, silver and gold will not go there; labour to be rich towards God, (Lu. 12. 21) and as for other things, be not solicitous, we shall carry nothing with us.

**Rule 11. Go not to bring your condition to your mind, but bring your mind to your condition.** The way for a Christian to be contented, is not by raising his estate higher, but by bringing his spirit lower; not by making his barns wider, but his heart narrower. One man, a whole lordship or manor will not content; another is satisfied with a few acres of

land; what is the difference? The one studies to satisfy curiosity, the other necessity; the one thinks what he may have, the other what he may spare.

**Rule 12. Study the vanity of the creature.** It matters not whether we have less or more of these things, they have vanity written upon the frontispiece of them; the world is like a shadow that declineth; it is delightful, but deceitful; it promiseth more than we find, and it fails us when we have most need of it. All the world rings changes, and is constant only in its disappointments: what then, if we have less of that which is at best but voluble and fluid? The world is as full of mutation as motion; and what if God cut us short in sublunaries? The more a man hath to do with the world, the more he hath to do with vanity. The world may be compared to ice, which is smooth, but slippery; or to the Egyptian temples, without very beautiful and sumptuous, but within nothing to be seen but the image of an ape; every creature saith concerning satisfaction, it is not in me. The world is not a filling, but a flying comfort. It is like a game at tennis; providence bandies her golden balls, first to one, then to another. Why are we discontented at the loss of these things, but because we expect that from them which is not, and repose that in them which we ought not? “Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.” (Jon. 4. 6) What a vanity was it? Is it much to see a withering gourd smitten? Or to see the moon dressing itself in a new shape and figure?

**Rule 13. Get fancy regulated.** It is the fancy which raiseth the price of things above their real worth. What is the reason one tulip is worth five pounds, another perhaps not worth one shilling? Fancy raiseth the price; the difference is rather imaginary than real; so, why it should be better to have thousands than hundreds, is, because men fancy it so; if we could fancy a lower condition better, as having less care in it, and less account, it would be far more eligible. The water that springs out of the rock, drinks as sweet as if it came out a golden chalice; things are as we fancy them. Ever since the fall, the fancy is distempered; God saw that the imagination of the thoughts of his heart were evil. (Ge. 6. 5) Fancy looks through wrong spectacles; pray that God will sanctify your fancy; a lower condition would content, if the mind and fancy were set right. Diogenes preferred his cynical life before Alexander’s royalty: he fancied his little cloister best. Fabricius a poor man, yet despised the gold of king Pyrrhus. Could we cure a distempered fancy, we might soon conquer a discontented heart.

**Rule 14. Consider how little will suffice nature.** The body is but a small continent, and is easily recruited. Christ hath taught us to pray for our daily bread; nature is content with a little. Not to thirst, not to starve, is enough, saith Gregory Nazianzen; meat and drink are a Christian’s riches, saith St Hierom; and the apostle saith, “having food and raiment let us be content.” The stomach is sooner filled than the eye; how quickly would a man be content, if he would study rather to satisfy his hunger than his humour.

**Rule 15. Believe the present condition is best for us.** Flesh and blood is not a competent judge. Surfeiting stomachs are for banquetting stuff, but a man that regards his health, is

rather for solid food. Vain men fancy such a condition best and would flourish in their bravery; whereas a wise Christian hath his will melted into God's will, and thinks it best to be at his finding. God is wise, he knows whether we need food or physic; and if we could acquiesce in providence, the quarrel would soon be at an end. O what a strange creature would man be, if he were what he could wish himself! Be content to be at God's allowance; God knows which is the fittest pasture to put his sheep in; sometimes a more barren ground doth well, whereas rank pasture may rot. Do I meet with such a cross? God shows me what the world is; he hath no better way to wean me, than by putting me to a step-mother. Doth God stint me in my allowance? he is now dieting me. Do I meet with losses? it is, that God may keep me from being lost. Every cross wind shall at last blow me to the right port. Did we believe that condition best which God doth parcel out to us, we should cheerfully submit, and say, "the lines are fallen in pleasant places."

**Rule 16. Do not too much indulge the flesh.** We have taken an oath in baptism to forsake the flesh. The flesh is a worse enemy than the devil, it is a bosom-traitor; an enemy within is worst. If there were no devil to tempt, the flesh would be another Eve, to tempt to the forbidden fruit. O take heed of giving way to it! Whence is all our discontent but from the fleshy part? The flesh puts us upon the immoderate pursuit of the world; it consults for ease and plenty, and if it be not satisfied, then discontent begins to arise. O let it not have the reins! Martyr the flesh! In spiritual things the flesh is a sluggard, in secular things an horse-leech, crying "give, give." The flesh is an enemy to suffering; it will sooner make a man a courtier, than a martyr. O keep it under! Put its neck under Christ's yoke, stretch and nail it to his cross; never let a Christian look for contentment in his spirit, till there be confinement in his flesh.

**Rule 17. Meditate much on the glory which shall be revealed.** There are great things laid up in heaven. Though it be sad for the present yet let us be content in that it shortly will be better; it is but a while and we shall be with Christ, bathing ourselves in the fountain of love; we shall never complain of wants and injuries any more; our cross may be heavy, but one sight of Christ will make us forget all our former sorrows. There are two things that should give contentment.

1. That *God will make us able to bear our troubles.* (1 Cor. 10. 13) God, saith Chrysostom, doth like a lutanist, who will not let the strings of his lute be too slack lest it spoil the music of prayer and repentance? nor yet too much adversity, "lest the spirit fail before me; and the souls that I have made." (Is. 57. 16)

2. *When we have suffered a while, we shall be perfected in glory;* the cross shall be our ladder by which we shall climb up to heaven. Be then content, and then the scene will alter; God will ere long turn out water into wine; the hope of this is enough to drive away all distempers from the heart. Blessed be God, it will be better: "we have no continuing city here," therefore our afflictions cannot continue. A wise man looks still to the end; "The end of the

just man is peace.” (Ps. 37. 37) Methinks the smoothness of the end should make amends for the ruggedness of the way. O eternity, eternity! Think often of the kingdom prepared. David was advanced from the field to the throne: first he held his shepherd’s staff, and shortly after the royal sceptre. God’s people may be put to hard services here: but God hath chosen them to be kings, to sit upon the throne with the Lord Jesus. This being weighed in the balance of faith, would be an excellent means to bring the heart to contentment.

**Rule 18. Be much in prayer.** The last rule for contentment is, be much in prayer. Beg of God, that he will work our hearts to this blessed frame. “Is any man afflicted? let him pray;” (Ja. 5. 14) so, is any man discontented? let him pray. Prayer gives vent: the opening of a vein lets out bad blood; when the heart is filled with sorrow and disquiet, prayer lets out the bad blood. The key of a prayer oiled with tears, unlocks the heart of all its discontents. Prayer is an holy spell, or charm, to drive away trouble; prayer is the unbosoming of the soul, the unloading of all our cares in God’s breast; and this ushers in sweet contentment. When there is any burden upon our spirits, by opening our mind to a friend we find our hearts finely eased and quieted. It is not our strong resolutions, but our strong request to God, which must give the heart ease in trouble; by prayer the strength of Christ comes into the soul, and where that is, a man is able to go through any condition. Paul could be in every state content; but that you may not think he was able to do this himself, he tells you that though he could want and abound, and “do all things;” yet it was through Christ strengthening him. (Ph. 4. 13) It is the child that writes, but it is the scrivener that guides his hand.

## CHAPTER XV

### Use VI. Of Consolation to the Contented Christian.

The last use is of comfort, or an encouraging word to the contented Christian. If there be an heaven upon earth thou hast is. O Christian! thou mayest insult over thy troubles, and, with the leviathan, laugh at the shaking of a spear. (Job 41. 7) What shall I say? Thou art a crown to thy profession; thou dost hold it out to all the world, that there is virtue enough in religion to give the soul contentment; thou showest the highest of grace. When grace is crowning, it is not so much for us to be content; but when grace is conflicting, and meets with crosses, temptations, agonies; now to be content, this is a glorious thing indeed.

To a contented Christian, I shall say two things for a farewell. 1. *God is exceedingly taken with such a frame of heart.* God saith of a contented Christian, as David once said of Goliath's sword, "there is none like that, give it me." If you would please God, and be men of his heart, be contented. God hates a froward spirit. 2. *The contented Christian shall be no loser.* What lost Job by his patience? God gave him twice as much as he had before. What lost Abraham by his contentment? he was content to leave his country at God's call: the Lord makes a covenant with him, that he would be his God: he changeth his name; no more Abram, but Abraham, the father of many nations: (Ge. 17) God makes his seed as the stars of heaven; nay, honours, him with this title, "the father of the faithful:" (Ge. 18. 17) the Lord makes known his secrets to him, "shall I hide from Abraham the things that I will do?" God settles a rich inheritance upon him, that land which was a type of heaven, and afterwards translated him to the blessed paradise. God will be sure to reward the contented Christian. As our Saviour said in another case, to Nathaniel, "because I said I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these:" (Jno. 1. 50) so I say, art thou contented (O Christian) with a little? thou shalt see greater things than these. God will distill the sweet influences of his love into thy soul; he will raise thee up friends; he will bless the oil in the cruise; and when that is done, He will crown thee with an eternal enjoyment of himself; he will give thee heaven, where thou shalt have as much contentment as thy soul can possibly thirst after.

End.

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