

**A Discourse
Upon
Providence**
Ezekiel Hopkins

**A DISCOURSE
UPON
PROVIDENCE**

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MISCELLANEOUS SERMONS.

II.

A DISCOURSE UPON PROVIDENCE.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.—MATT. x. 29, 30.

THE mystery of God's providence, next to that of man's redemption, is the most sublime and inscrutable. It is easy, in both, to run ourselves off our reason: for, as reason confesseth itself at a loss, when it attempts a search into those eternal decrees, of electing sinners to salvation, and designing Christ to save them; so must it, likewise, when it attempts to trace out all those entangled mazes and labyrinths, wherein the Divine providence walks. We may sooner tire reason, in such a pursuit, than satisfy it; unless it be some kind of satisfaction, when we have driven it to a nonplus, to relieve ourselves with an $\alpha\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon\zeta$: "Oh the depth of the.....wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom. xi. 33.

This knowledge, therefore, being too wonderful for us, I shall not presume to conduct you into that secret place, that pavilion of clouds and surrounding darkness, where God sits holding the helm of the world, and steering it through all the floatings of casualty and contingency to his own foreordained ends: where he grasps and turns the great engine of nature in his hands; fastening one pin, and loosening another; moving and removing the several wheels of it; and framing the whole according to the eternal idea of his own understanding. Let it content us, to consider so much of God's providence as may affect us with comfort, in reflecting on that particular care which he takes of us; rather than with wonder and astonishment, by too bold a prying into those hidden methods, whereby he exerciseth it.

Our Saviour Christ, in this chapter, giving commission to his Apostles and sending them forth to preach the gospel, obviates an objection which they might make, concerning the great danger that would certainly attend such an undertaking. To send them upon such a hated employment, would be no other than to thrust them

upon the rage and malice of the world; to send them forth as sheep into the midst of wolves, who would doubtless worry and devour them: "Sure we are to have our message derided; our persons injured; and that holy name of thine, on which we summon them to believe, blasphemed and reviled: and, though our word may prove a word of life to some few of the hearers, yet to us, who are the preachers of it, it will prove no other than death." A vile and wretched world, the while! when the gospel of peace and reconciliation shall thus stir up enmity and persecution against the ambassadors, who are appointed to proclaim it! To this our Saviour answers,

First. By showing what the extent of their adversaries' power is; how far it can reach, and what mischief it can do, when God permits it to rage to the very utmost.

And this he doth in the 28th verse; the verse immediately preceding the text: "Fear not them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul:" or, as St. Luke expresseth it, chapter xii. 4, they can "kill the body," but "after that, have no more that they can do." Alas! are such men to be feared, who, when they do their worst, can only destroy your worst part; which if they do not, yet accidents or diseases will? What! are your bodies but clogs to your spirit, and prisons to your souls? And, certainly, those enemies are not very formidable, who, when they most think to hurt you, only knock off your clog, or break open your prison and let your souls escape to their desired liberty.

Secondly. Our Saviour answers, that though they can kill the body, when God permits them; yet they cannot so much as touch it, without his permission.

And this he doth, in the words of my text, by showing how punctual and particular God's providence is; even over the smallest, and those which seem the most trifling occurrences of the world. A sparrow, whose price is but mean, two of them valued at a farthing, which some make to be the tenth part of a Roman penny, and was certainly one of their least coins; whose life, therefore, is but contemptible, and whose flight seems but giddy and at random: yet it falls not to the ground, neither lights any where, "without your Father." His all-wise providence hath before appointed, what bough it shall pitch on, what grains it shall pick up, where it shall lodge, and where it shall build, on what it shall live, and when it shall die. And, if your Father's providence be so critical about the small concerns even of sparrows: "fear not ye, for ye are of

more value than many sparrows;" yea, of more value than many men.

Our Saviour adds: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." He knows how many fall off, and the precise number of those that remain; and no wonder, since he knows the number of our sins, which are far more.

Hence we learn, that God governs the meanest, the most inconsiderable and contemptible occurrences in the world, by an exact and particular providence. Do you see a thousand little motes and atoms, wandering up and down in a sunbeam? It is God, that so peoples it; and he guides their innumerable and irregular strayings. Not a particle of dust flies in a beaten road, but God raises it, conducts its uncertain motion, and by his particular care conveys it to the certain place which he had before appointed for it, nor shall the most fierce and tempestuous wind hurry it any farther. And, if God's care and providence reach thus to these minute things, which are but as it were the circumstances of nature, and little accessories to the world; certainly, man, who is the head and lord of it, for whose sake and service other creatures were formed, may very well be confident that God exerciseth an especial and most accurate providence over him and his affairs.

By this you see what the subject is, of which it is intended to treat; even the overruling and all-disposing providence of God: not a sparrow, not a hair of your heads falls to the ground, "without your Father."

But, before I proceed farther, I must take notice of two things in the words.

First. That our Saviour, speaking here of the providence of God, ascribes to him the name of our Father.

God hath many names and titles attributed unto him in the Scriptures; as Father, Lord, Creator, Redeemer, Judge, King, and God; but God is a word that denotes his essence: Lord, is a title of his dominion: Creator marks out his omnipotence: Redeemer, commends his love: Judge, is a name of fear and astonishment: and King, is a title of royal majesty: but this endearing name of Father signifies unto us his providence: for, from him, as from a father, do we expect guidance and government.

Secondly. Whereas nothing comes to pass without our Heavenly Father, this may be understood three ways; without his permission, without his ordination and concurrence, without his overruling and directing it to his own ends.

No evil comes to pass, without his *permissive* providence.

No good comes to pass, without his *ordaining* and *concurring* providence.

Nothing, whether good or evil, comes to pass, without the *overruling* providence of our Father, guiding and directing it to his own ends.

But, concerning this distinction of permissive, concurring, and overruling providence, I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter. My work, at present, shall be,

To describe unto you what the providence of God is, in the general notion thereof.

To prove that all affairs and occurrences, in the world, are, guided and governed by Divine providence.

To answer some puzzling questions and doubts, concerning the providence of God; and some objections, which may be made against it.

I. Let us see WHAT PROVIDENCE IS.

Take it in this description: providence is an act of God, whereby, according to his eternal and most wise counsel, he preserves and governs all things; and directs them all to their ends, but chiefly to his own glory.

This providence consisteth in two things; preservation and government of his creatures.

i. One remarkable act of the providence of God, is the PRESERVATION of his creatures in their beings. He preserves them,

1. *In their species and kind, by the constant succession of them one after another*: so that, though the individuals of them are mortal and perish; yet the species or kind is immortal.

There is no kind of creature that was at first made by God, but it still continueth to this very day, and shall do so to the end of the world. And, truly, it is the wonderful providence of God, thus to perpetuate the creation: that, whereas we see an imbred enmity in some sorts of creatures against others; yet his wisdom so sways their mutual antipathies, that none of them shall ever prevail to a total extirpation and destruction of the other.

2. He preserves them, likewise, *by his providence, in their individual and particular beings*, while they have a room to fill up and an office to discharge in the universe.

Each fly and worm, as well as man (who is but the greater worm of the two) hath a work to do in the world; and, till that be finished, God sustains its being: nor shall the weakest creature be

that ever such abominations should be incident to the sons of men. Wonder not at the matter, as if any strange thing were happened to them; but rather wonder at the goodness of God, which is the sole cause that such things as these are wonders. Were his permissive providence as large, as men's lusts are outrageous, these things would soon cease to be wonders, and become the common and ordinary practice of all men. Why are not our streets continually filled with violence, rapine, murders, and outrages? Whence is it, that we enjoy our possessions and our lives in safety? The wickedness of men lies hard and presses upon God's restraints; and, wheresoever there are any gaps in it, it breaks forth naturally and violently; and, if this dam and bank of divine providence were but broken down, it would break out till it had overflowed the whole face of the earth, and covered it with a deluge of impiety and profaneness: but that God, who sets bound to the raging of the sea, and saith, *Hitherto shall thy proud waves come and no farther, doth, by the same almighty providence, set bounds to the lusts and corruptions of men, which are altogether as unruly; and curbs in the fury of their madness, which else would drown the whole world in perdition and destruction.*

iv. This should teach us TO ACQUIESCE AND REST SATISFIED IN EVERY PROVIDENCE OF GOD, AS THAT, WHICH WILL CERTAINLY, IN THE END, REDOUND TO HIS OWN GLORY.

When we see disorders and confusions abroad in the world, we are apt to despond and to cry out, "Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name? Thy honor, thy glory lies bleeding, and suffers through the sins of men." Commit thy care to God. He will certainly so wield their lusts, as that they shall bring about and effect his own ends. God is glorifying himself, even by these things; and why then should we be troubled? This thought, kept alive on our hearts, would cause us to rest satisfied amidst all the tumults which we observe and hear of in the world: for, though we know not how to unwind these tangled dispensations to the bottom of his glory, yet he can and will. There is an invisible and wise hand, that moulds and fashions all: and, though the parts by themselves may appear rude and unpolished; yet, put the whole frame and series of providence together, and that will appear most admirable and glorious.

the ground "without your Father; fear ye not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." yea, not a hair of your head falls without a providence, and think ye that the head itself shall? Certainly, God doth not, like Domitian, busy himself about flies, and neglect the great and weighty affairs of his government. And this is the reason of that question, which the Apostle asks, 1 Cor. ix. 9, "Doth God take care for oxen?" yes, certainly he doth; nor did the Apostle intend to deny it, but thereby to infer that certainly his care is much more particular towards us. This, then, may establish our hearts under any personal sufferings, or public calamities; when evil is upon ourselves, or the nation; when uproars and confusions seem to reduce the world back to its ancient chaos; when storms and waves overwhelm the ship, and we, with the disciples, think our God asleep, and begin to cry out, with the Psalmist, "Awake, oh Lord, why sleepest thou?" Ps. xlv. 33. Our God is not sleeping, but even then at the helm: he steers, he governs and guides all these disorders; and will conduct the whole tumult and hurry of affairs to his own glory and our good.

ii. If God's providence hath the command and sway even over the sins of men, this then may be **ABUNDANT MATTER OF PEACE AND SATISFACTION, IN THE WORST OF TIMES, WHEN WICKEDNESS DOETH MOST OF ALL RAGE AND ABOUND.**

Let us then consider, that, if God permits them, he also can, when he pleaseth, check and put a stop and period to their rage and madness. Their hands are fettered by the adamantine chains of a most strong decree, which they can neither reverse nor exceed: whatsoever they do, is but by permission; a limited, and a limiting permission. Our Saviour tells Pilate, "Thou couldst have no power over me, except it were given thee from above:" John xix. 10. The very power, that men have to sin against God, is from God; and therefore, certainly, he will withdraw it, when it doth not work out his own ends. This was it, that satisfied David, when Shimei pelted him with stones and curses: 2 Sam. xvi. 10. Let him alone: "let him curse; because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David."

iii. Hence see **TO WHAT WE OUGHT TO ASCRIBE IT, THAT THERE IS NO MORE NOTORIOUS WICKEDNESS COMMITTED IN THE WORLD.**

When we hear of any prodigious villainy, we are apt to wonder,

destroyed, within the prefixed time that God hath set to its duration. There are none of us here alive this day, but have abundant cause thankfully to acknowledge the powerful and merciful providence of God, in preserving us in and rescuing us from many dangers and deaths, to which we stood exposed. It is only his visitation, that hath hitherto preserved our spirits; and, to his never-failing providence we owe it, that such frail and feeble creatures, who are liable to be crushed before the moth, liable to so many diseases and accidents, have yet a name among the living, and have not yet failed from off the face of the earth.

ii. As God preserves, so he **GOVERNS** all things, by his providence.

And this government consists in two things: direction of the creature's actions; and distribution of rewards and punishments, according to the actions of his rational creatures.

1. God, by his governing providence, *directs all the actions of his creatures*; yea, and by the secret, but efficacious concurrence and penetration of the divine influence, he powerfully sways and determines them which way he pleaseth.

And, from this part of his providence, brancheth forth his permission of evil actions, and his concurrence to good; both by the assistance of his common, and likewise of his special grace; and, lastly, his general influence into all the actions of our lives, all which we are enabled to perform by the almighty power of the Divine providence; which, as at first it bestowed upon us natural faculties, so by a constant concurrence it doth excite and assist those faculties to their respective operations.

2. God, by his governing providence, *distributes rewards and punishments according to our actions.*

And this part of his providence is oftentimes remarkable, even in this present life; when we see retributions of divine mercy and vengeance, signally proportioned according to men's demerits: but the more especial manifestation and execution of it is commonly reserved to the life to come; and, then, all the seeming inequalities of God's dispensations here will be fully adjusted, in the eternal recompense of the godly, and the eternal punishment of the wicked and impenitent.

Now, by this Almighty providence, God overrules and sways all things to his own glory. There is nothing comes to pass, but God hath his ends in it, and will certainly make his own ends out of it. Though the world seem to run at random, and affairs to be

huddled together in blind confusion and rude disorder; yet God sees and knows the linking together of all causes and effects; and so governs them, that he makes a perfect harmony out of all those seeming jarrings and discords. As you may observe in the wheels of a watch, though they all move with contrary motions one to the other, yet they are useful and necessary to make it go right: so is it, in these inferior things: the proceedings of Divine providence are all regular and orderly to his own ends, in all the thwartings and contrarieties of second causes. We have this expressed in that mysterious vision, Ezek. i. 10, where the providences of God are set forth by the emblem of a wheel within a wheel, one intersecting and crossing another; yet they are described to be full of eyes round about: what is this, but to denote unto us, that, though providences are as turning and unstable as wheels, though they are as thwart and cross as one wheel within another, yet these wheels are all nailed round with eyes: God sees and chooses his way in the most intricate and entangled providences that are; and so governs all things, that whilst each pursues its own inclination, they are all overruled to promote his glory.

This is providence: the two great parts of which, are preservation and government; and the great end of both these, the glory of the Almighty and All-wise God. And this is it, which our Saviour speaks of when he tells the Jews, John v. 17, "My Father worketh hitherto," viz, in preserving and governing his creatures; "and I work."

II. The second general topic propounded, was to demonstrate to you, that **ALL THINGS IN THE WORLD ARE GOVERNED BY THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE.**

The old philosophers, among the heathen, had very different notions concerning the government of the world. Some held, that all things were governed by an imperious and inevitable fate, to which God himself was subject: so, Chrysippus, and the Stoics. Others thought, that all was left to blind chance; and whatsoever came to pass here below was only casual and fortuitous: so, the Epicureans. Others, that the great God regarded only the more glorious affairs of heaven; but had committed the care of earthly concerns unto inferior spirits, as his under officers and deputies: so, most of the Platonists, though their master was orthodox. Others, that God's providence reached only to the great and important matters of this world; but that it was too

earth with their filth, that those attributes of his, which seem to be buried under them, may afterwards spring up with the greater luster and glory: from hence he will reap the richer harvest of praise to himself. Sometimes, he glorifies the severity of his justice, by hardening them in their sins to their own destruction; sometimes, the riches of his mercy, by calling the greatest and most flagitious sinners to repentance, and granting them pardon; and, always, his infinite patience and forbearance, in not executing present vengeance upon those, who so daringly provoke him. But, although we cannot now so clearly comprehend the advantages, which God makes out of the sins of men: yet, when we come to stand in the general assembly at the day of judgment, God will then comment upon and explain the mysteries of his providence; and make us understand how those sins, for which he will then condemn the world, put a polish and glory upon his attributes.

2. God, by permitting sin, *exerciseth the graces of his people.*

The sins of others give us matter for the exercise of a holy zeal for God, who is daily affronted by them; of a holy pity and commiseration over those, who, like madmen, wound and gash and destroy themselves; and for the exercise of a holy caution over ourselves, lest we be induced to sin after their example. Our own sins give us daily occasion to renew our repentance, to humble our souls before God, to fortify our resolutions, to double the guards we set upon our own hearts and ways, and to watch over ourselves more circumspectly that we relapse not into the commission of them again. Thus, a true Christian may gain some advantage by his very falls: as husbandmen make use of the very thorns and briars which grow in their fields, to stop the gaps and strengthen the fences about them; so we should improve our very sins and failings, to fence our souls, that we lie not open to the like temptations for the future.

IV. I shall conclude with two or three **INFERENCES.**

i. If the accurateness of God's providence reach unto all the little concerns of the world, we may be well assured, **THAT THOSE, WHICH ARE THE MORE CONSIDERABLE AND IMPORTANT OCCURRENCES OF IT, ARE ALL GUIDED AND GOVERNED BY A SPECIAL HAND OF PROVIDENCE.**

And thus, our Saviour himself urgeth, as a strong encouragement for our confidence and trust in God: not a sparrow falls to

itself had signally confuted it) is to plead that for the justification of our actions, without which they could not be sinful: thus Cain killed his brother, by a providence; and Achan stole the wedge of gold, and Judas betrayed Christ, and the Jews crucified him, by a providence; yea, and all the villany, that was ever acted under the sun, was all brought forth out of the cursed womb of men's lusts, by the providence of God, that is, by his permission of the evil, and concurrence as to the act. Neither is this any stain at all upon the infinite holiness and purity of his nature: for, though we sin, if we hinder not the commission of sin in others when it is in our power to do it, because we are commanded and obliged to it, both by the care we ought to have of his honor, and the charity we owe unto the souls of others; yet no such obligation lies upon God, who may justly give men over to their perverted inclinations: and, though he can easily keep the most wicked man in the world, from rushing into those sins which he daily commits; yet, not being bound to interpose his power to hinder them, he permits them holily, and at last will punish them justly.

But, the question is not so much whether God doth not by his providence permit sin, as why he doth it. And St. Austin answers it excellently, in that known saying of his: "God," saith he, "who is infinitely good, would never permit evil, were he not also infinitely wise, and knew how to bring good out of evil." It is the primary object of his hatred; and that alone for which he hates wicked men. As he is a holy God, so he hates it; and, as he is a wise God, so he permits it.

And there is a twofold good, for which God doth sometimes permit evil.

1. God, by permitting sin, *manifests the glory of many of his attributes.*

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee;" saith the Psalmist, Ps. lxxvi. 10. Every sin strikes at some of the Divine attributes; one denies his justice; another, his mercy: one, his power; another, his wisdom: and all are contrary to his purity. But yet God hath, in his own counsels, such secret springs and wires, whereby he doth so wreath and invert these sins, that eventually they advance what they seem directly to oppose. A child perhaps would think, when he sees a husbandman cast dung and soil upon his field, that it were but improvidently done thus to spoil the flourishing verdure and gaiety of the grass and flowers: why that very dung, which covers them, makes them afterwards sprout up more fair and fresh. So God permits wicked men to dung the

much a disparagement to his infinite Majesty, to look after the motion of every straw and feather, and to take care of every trivial and inconsiderable occurrence in this world: so speaks Cicero, in his Book *de naturâ Deorum*: "Magna Dii curant, parva negligunt." How much better is that most excellent saying of St. Austin! "Tu sic curas unumquemque nostrum, tanquam solum cures; et sic omnes, tanquam singulos:" "God takes as much care of every particular, as if each were all; and as much care of all, as if all were but one particular."

To demonstrate this all-disposing providence of God, I shall take two ways.

From the consideration of the nature and perfection of the Deity.

From the contemplation of that beauty and order, which we may observe in the world.

It is most necessary, that we should have our hearts well established in the firm and unwavering belief of this truth, that, whatsoever comes to pass, be it good or evil, we may look up to the disposer of all, to God: and, if it be good, may acknowledge it with praise; if evil, bear it with patience: since he dispenseth both the one and the other; the good to reward us, and the evil to try us.

i. To demonstrate it FROM THE BEING AND NATURE OF GOD.

This I shall do, in these following propositions, which I shall lay down as so many steps and gradations.

1. That *there is a God*, is undoubtedly clear by the light of nature.

Never was there any people so barbarous and stupid, but did firmly assent to this truth, without any other proof than the deep impress upon their hearts, and the observation of visible objects, that there was a Deity. It is neither a problem of reason, nor yet strictly an article of faith; but the unforced dictate of every man's natural conscience; where conscience is not violently perverted, and under the force of those vices, whose interest it is that there should be no God. Never was there any nation, which worshipped none; but their great sottishness was, that they worshipped many.

2. As all confess that there is a God; so, likewise, that *this God must necessarily have in himself all perfections*, as being the first principle and source of all things.

All these perfections of wisdom, power, knowledge, or the like,

which we see scattered up and down among the creatures, must all be concentrated in God: and that, in a far more eminent degree; because whatever is found in creatures is but derived and borrowed from him, and therefore it must needs follow, that, because it is of more perfection to be infinite in each perfection, therefore God is infinite in them all.

5. Among all the perfections, which are dispersed among the creatures, the most excellent is *knowledge* and *understanding*.

For this is a property, that belongs only to angels and men, who are the top and flower of the creation: and therefore, certainly, this perfection of the creatures is to be found in God; yea, and that infinitely. His knowledge and wisdom, therefore, are infinite.

4. His knowledge being thus infinite, *he both knows himself, and all other things in himself.*

(1) God perfectly knows himself: he knows the boundless extent of his own being; and, though he be infinite and incomprehensible to all others, yet is he finite and comprehended to himself: and, hence, it follows,

(2) That he knows particularly all other things. For, if he know himself perfectly, he must needs know all things besides himself; because none can perfectly know himself, that doth not fully know all that his power and strength can reach. But there is nothing, which the power of God cannot reach; for, by his power, he created all things. And, therefore, knowing his own essence, which is the cause of all, he knows every thing in the fecundity of his essence.

Thus we have demonstrated it, from the principles of reason, that God necessarily knows all things. But providence denotes more than knowledge: and, therefore,

5. This knowledge, which is in God, is not like that, which we acquire: it is not a knowledge, that depends upon the objects known, and forms ideas from the contemplation of things already existing: but it is *like the knowledge of an artificer, which causeth and produceth the things it comprehends.*

God knows them, before they are; and, by knowing them, brings them to pass. "God knows all things," saith St. Austin, on the Trinity, "not because they are; but, therefore they are, because God knew them." So that his eternal knowledge and understanding give being to every thing in the world.

6. *It appertains to him, who gives being to a thing, to preserve and govern it in its being.*

And, therefore, God giving being to all things, he also doth

way he pleaseth, yet he never forceth it contrary to its own inclinations: for that, to which God determines it by his providence, seems, at that present, most rational to be done; and, upon that representation of good in the object, the will embraces it, and acts accordingly. So that its freedom is not violated by any boisterous and compulsive sway, which the first cause hath over it; but God attracts it with such a powerful and insinuating sweetness, that, though the will can incline to nothing but what it seems to have reason for, yet withal it wills nothing but that unto which God by providence overrules it. So Austin, De Civitate Dei, lib. v. cap. 9: *Nos dicimus et Deum scire omnia antequam fiat, et voluntate nos facere quicquid à nobis non nisi voluntibus fieri sentimus et novimus:* "Though God foresees and decrees all things before they are, yet we do that with a free will, which we do not otherwise than willingly."

v. The last doubt and query is this: "If GOD GOVERN ALL ACTIONS AND ALL AFFAIRS, BY AN EXACT AND CRITICAL PROVIDENCE; HOW THEN COMES IT TO PASS, THAT THERE IS SO MUCH EVIL, VILLANY, AND WICKEDNESS COMMITTED IN IT?"

The discussion of this is the more obscure and intricate; because it is hard to conceive how God, who is infinite goodness itself, should interest his providence in what is so contrary to his nature.

Now, here, we must affirm, that there is no evil whatsoever, whether it be of sin or of suffering, that comes to pass without the providence of God. As for the evil of punishment or suffering, it is clear, Amos iii. 6, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" But, for the evil of sin, it is not effectively from God; yet doth he, by his providence, for most holy and wise ends, permit wicked men to commit those sins, which his law prohibits, and his nature abhors. Though they refuse to be subject to the written law, yet they are and must be subject to the eternal law of his own counsels: and there is not a sin which they commit, but, as his authority condemns and his purity hates it; so, his wisdom both suffers it to be, and overrules it when it is to his own ends. It is true, all men naturally are slaves to their lusts, but God holds their chain in his own hands: sometimes, slackening it, by his permission; and, sometimes, straitening it, by his powerful restraint. And, therefore, to plead providence as the warrant of our actions (a boisterous argument, which, of late, hath been most used amongst us, until Providence

iii. Another objection may be this: "IF PROVIDENCE ORDERETH AND DISPOSETH ALL THE OCCURRENCES OF THE WORLD, THEN THERE CAN NOTHING FALL OUT CASUALLY AND CONTINGENTLY."

I answer: In respect of God it is true, there is nothing casual nor contingent in the world. A thing may be casual, in respect of particular causes; but, in respect of the universal and first cause, nothing is such. If a master should send a servant to a certain place, and command him to stay there till such a time, and presently after should send another servant to the same, the meeting of these two is wholly casual in respect of themselves, but ordained and foreseen by the master that sent them. So is it, in all fortuitous events here below. They fall out unexpectedly, as to us; but not so, as to God: he foresees and he appoints all the vicissitudes of things, and all the surprises of human accidents. So that, you see, there may be contingencies in the world, though God's providence be most particular and punctual.

iv. Some may object, that this "WOULD DESTROY THE LIBERTY OF MAN'S WILL; AND SUBJECT ALL THINGS TO A FATAL NECESSITY, EVEN HUMAN ACTIONS THEMSELVES: for, if man can do nothing, but what God hath by his providence appointed shall be done, how then is man free, either to do or not to do?"

This question requires much more time to answer it, at large, than I can allow it.

Some, seeing it a very difficult thing to *reconcile* providence and liberty, have presumed to deny that providence intermeddles at all in such affairs as depend upon the free will of man. And, of this opinion, Tully seems to have been: for which St. Austin chastiseth him as injurious to God; when he saith, "Voluntatem dum facerat liberam, fecit sacrilegam."

I shall not here stand to distinguish between a necessity of coercion, and a necessity of infallibility; and that the providence of God doth not bring upon the will a necessity of coercion, but only of infallibility, which very well consists with the liberty of the will.

All, that I shall at present answer, is, that God doth indeed efficaciously determine the will to do what it doth: yet this determination leaves it in a perfect state of liberty; because the liberty of the will doth not so much consist in indifference to act or not to act, as in a rational spontaneity. When we do what we have an appetite to do upon grounds that to us seem rational, then we act freely. Now, though God doth absolutely sway the will which

maintain and provide for them. It is the very law of nature, which he hath imprinted upon all his creatures, to provide for their own offspring: we see with what solicitous affection and tenderness, even brute and irrational creatures do it: we are all the offspring of God, and he our common parent; and therefore, certainly, he, who hath inspired such parental care in all things else, doth himself much more take care to give education to all to which he hath given being. Thus, you see, it is proved that God's providence reacheth unto all things.

It might likewise be demonstrated from God's omnipresence. He is present everywhere, with and in all his creatures: and, certainly, he is not with them, as an idle and unconcerned spectator; but as the director and governor of their actions.

ii. But I shall proceed to the second sort of arguments, to prove the Divine providence.

And those are taken FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE FRAME AND SYSTEM OF THE WORLD; THE BEAUTY AND HARMONY, WHICH WE SEE IN NATURE.

The world is a book, wherein we may clearly read the wonderful wisdom of God. There is no creature, which doth not proclaim aloud, that God is the wise Creator and governor of it.

Who hath gilded the globe of the sun, and put on his rays? Who hath set its bounds, and measured out its race, that it should, without failing, without error or mistake, know how to make its daily and annual returns, and divide our times and seasons to the world? Who hath given a particular motion to all the voluminous orbs of heaven, and beat out a path for every star to walk in? Who hath confined the great and proud ocean, with a girdle of sand; and restrains the waves thereof, that though they be higher than the land, yet they shall not overflow it? Who poiseth the opposition and contraries which are in nature, in so even a balance, that none of them shall ever prevail to a total destruction of the other? Who brings up the great family of brute beasts, without tumult and disorder? Do not all these great and wonderful works speak forth the watchful providence of God; who, as he makes them by his word, so still governs them by his power?

Therefore, whatsoever we receive beneficial from them, whatsoever seems to provide for our necessities or conveniences; it is God, who hath so dispensed the government of the world, as to make it serviceable. If the heavens turn and move for us, if the stars as so many burning torches light us in the obscurity of the

night, if the angels protect and defend us, let us acknowledge all this from the providence of God only. It is he, who turns the heavens round their axis: he lights up the stars: he commands the angels to be ministering spirits, guards, and sentinels about us. If the fire warm us, the air refresh us, the earth support us, it is God, who hath kindled the fire, who hath spread forth the air, and stablished the earth upon the pillars of his own decree, that it should not be shaken. And let us know, too, that, when we want these creatures for our sustentation, if the heavens, if the angels, if the earth, if the sea, if all things should fail us, ye^a band and set themselves against us; yet God, who provides for us by them, can also, if he please, provide for us without them.

III. The third general topic, which remains, is to ANSWER SOME QUESTIONS AND DOUBTS which may be made, and have indeed been strongly urged, against the government of the world by providence.

i. "If the world be governed by providence, WHENCE COMES IT, THAT WICKED AND UNGODLY MEN FLOURISH AND PROSPER? that God shines upon their tabernacles, and drops fatness upon all their paths: whereas, on the contrary, the godly are often exposed to poverty, contempt, and reproaches; persecuted by men, and afflicted by God? Would it not be as agreeable to the divine goodness, to cast abroad the wealth, the pomp, and glory of this world with an undeciding hand; leaving men to scramble for them as they can; as that he should, with a particular and studied care, advance those who contemn him, and crush those who humbly trust and depend upon him? Can I think the world is governed by the providence of a just God, when usually unjust men govern the world under him? When haughty sinners, who despise him, have power likewise to control others? Is it wisdom, to put a sword into that hand, which will turn the point of it against the giver? Is it justice, to empower them to all those acts of rapine, violence, and oppression, which they commit? And shall we call that Providence, which is neither wise nor just? One hath an unexhausted store to supply his dissolute luxury and riot; another, scarce necessities to maintain a poor life spent in the commands of God: here, a wicked Dives, who worshiped no other god but his own belly, feasts deliciously every day; whilst a godly Lazarus starves at this glutton's gate, and entertains the dogs with licking his sores: and, what! doth God's particular care furnish the glut-

of good, but as it promoted our eternal happiness; nor of evil, but as it tended to eternal misery.

And thus you see this grand objection answered; and the providence of God cleared from that injustice, which we are apt peevishly to impute unto it. Other doubts are of less moment, and therefore shall be more briefly resolved.

ii. "IF GOD'S PROVIDENCE ORDAINS ALL THINGS TO COME TO PASS ACCORDING TO THE IMMUTABLE LAW OF HIS PURPOSE, THEN WHAT NECESSITY IS THERE FOR PRAYER? We cannot, by our most fervent prayers, alter the least circumstance or punctilio in God's decrees. If he hath so laid the method of his providence in his own counsels, as to prepare mercies and blessings for us, our prayers cannot hasten nor ripen them before their time: or, if he determine, by his providence, to bring afflictions upon us, our prayers cannot prevent nor prolong the time fixed for their coming."

Now to this Aquinas answers well, that the Divine providence doth not only ordain what effects shall come to pass, but also by what means and causes, and in what order they shall flow. God hath appointed, as the effect itself, so the means to accomplish it.

Now prayer is a means to bring to pass that, which God hath determined shall be. We do not pray, out of hope to alter God's eternal purposes; but we pray, to obtain that, which God hath ordained to be obtained by our prayers: we ask, that thereby we may be fit to receive, what God hath from all eternity determined to give by prayer, and not otherwise. And, therefore, when we lie under any affliction, if we languish under pain or sickness, if we are pinched by want or poverty, if we are oppressed by the injuries and persecutions of others, prayer is necessary; because, as God by his providence hath brought these things upon us, so likewise possibly the same providence hath determined not to remove them, till we earnestly and fervently pray for our deliverance from them. And, therefore, when God hath promised great mercies to the Jews, he tells them by the Prophet Ezek. xxxvi. 37: "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Prayer, therefore, doth not incline God to bestow that, which before he was not resolved to give: but it capacitates us to receive that, which God will not give otherwise.

when he scatters abroad the desirable things of this world, riches, honours, pleasures, &c., then he rains "snares" upon them; and, when he shall call them to an account for these things, then he will rain upon them "fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest" of his wrath and fury. Dives, who reveled in luxury on earth; yet, in hell, could not obtain so much as one poor drop of water, to cool his scorched and flaming tongue: had not his excess and intemperance been so great in his life, his fiery thirst had not been so tormenting after death: and, therefore, in that sad item that Abraham gives him, Luke xvi. 25, he bids him "remember, that thou, in thy lifetime, receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." I look upon this as a most bitter and a most deserved sarcasm; upbraiding him for his gross folly, in making the trifles of this life his good things: "thou hast received thy good things, but now thou art tormented." Oh, never call Dives' purple and delicious fare "good things," if they thus end in torments! Was it good for him to be wrapt in purple, who is now wrapt in flames? Was it good for him to fare deliciously, who was only thereby fattened against the day of slaughter? Could you lay your ears to hell's gates, you might hear many of the grandees and potentates, the great and rich ones of this world, cursing all their pomp and bravery; and wishing that they had been the most despicable of all those, whom they once hated, oppressed, and injured. And, as it will appear at that day, that none of the enjoyments of this world are good to wicked men; so will it appear, that none of those afflictions and calamities, which good men suffer, are evil: Lazarus's sores are not evil, since now every sore is turned into a star: his lying prostrate at the rich miser's door is not evil, since now he lies in Abraham's bosom. And, at this day, all these intricacies of providence will be made plain; and we shall have other apprehensions of things, than what we have at present: now we call prosperity, riches, and abundance, "good things;" and want and affliction, "evil;" but, when we come to consider these with relation to eternity, the true standard to measure them by, then poverty may be a mercy, and riches a judgment: God may bestow more afflictions, and curse another by prosperity; he may bestow more upon us in suffering us to want, than if he should give us the store and treasures of all the earth. And, certainly, whatever our thoughts of it are now, yet within awhile this will be the judgment of us all; when we are once lodged in our eternal state, then we shall acknowledge that nothing in this world deserved the name

ton's table with daily excess, who will not give the remaining scraps to God's children? If there be divine providence in this, what is become of the divine equity? This inequality of affairs seems to persuade, that it is not the holy and righteous God of heaven, but rather the god of this world, who govern the concerns of it; and that he spoke truth, when he told our Saviour Luke iv. 6, the power and glory of this world is 'delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will give it.' I answer,

1. *This quarrel is not only, of late, commenced against heaven; but it hath been the complaint of all ages.*

It raised controversies among the very heathen themselves; some of them upon this ground denying, and others again by whole treatises defending, the government of the world by providence. And no wonder it should puzzle them, since the very best of God's saints and servants have likewise stumbled at this stone of offense: thus, the Psalmist, Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked:" so, likewise, the prophet Jeremiah, xii. 1, "Righteous art thou, oh Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy, that deal very treacherously?" This, therefore, is an old grief; which, in all ages of the world, hath been complained of. And, though at first sight it seems to confute the providence of God, yet, if we more narrowly consider it, it is a strong confirmation of it: for, since virtue and goodness are so despicable a thing in the world, since holy and good men have been always injured and persecuted, certainly were there not an all-wise providence, that finds out ways and means of its own to counterpoise these disadvantages, and to preserve them amidst the rage and hatred of their implacable enemies, long ere this there had been none of them left, either to have suffered or complained. Were there no other argument to prove that God governs the world, this would suffice, even, that his servants have been continually oppressed in it, yet never could be rooted out of it: though men and devils have combined together against them, and God (as they have complained) hath seemed to abandon them; yet such a defenseless and forlorn generation as this, hath been hitherto and shall still be preserved to the very end of the world: doth not this speak forth the power and care of Almighty God, thus to keep a bush unconsumed, in the midst of fire? to preserve fuel untouched, in the very embraces of flames?

2. *God doth chastise his own people and prosper the wicked, that he might thereby rectify our judgments; and teach us not to account adversity the greatest evil, nor get prosperity the chief good.*

For, certainly, were they so, only the righteous should enjoy the grandeur, pomp, and glory of this world; and only the wicked and ungodly become miserable. Concerning this, St. Austin speaks excellently, in his LXXth Epistle: "Worldly things," saith he, "are, in themselves, but indifferent; and good and evil, only as they are improved: but, lest they should be thought always evil, therefore God sometimes gives them to those who are good; and, lest they should be thought the highest and the chief good, they are sometimes given to those who are evil. There is no such way, to trudge the riches, the honors, the pleasures of this life; those vain nothings, which are so earnestly desired and eagerly pursued by the most; no such way to beat down their price in the esteem of all wise and good men, as for God to bestow those upon the vilest, which he sometimes denies to the best and holiest."

3. *When God bestows any temporal good thing upon wicked and ungodly men, he gives it as their portion: and, when he brings any calamity on his own children, he inflicts it for their trial.*

Is it not ordinary, that a servant receives more for wages, than a son may have for the present at his own command? God is the Father and bountiful maintainer of the whole family, both in heaven and earth; a Father to the faithful, a Lord and Master over all: he may give his slaves large wages, when his own children possibly have not so much in hand. Is he therefore hard or unjust? No: the inheritance is theirs, and that is kept in reversion for them. What wicked men possess of this world, is all that ever they can hope for: why should we grudge them filled bags, or swelling titles! it is their whole portion: they now receive their good things: hast thou food and clothing? That is children's fare: envy not ungodly men, who shine amid the gaieties of the world: they have more than you; but it is all they are like to have: the Psalmist gives us an account of their estate, Ps. xvii. 14. They are the "men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and whose bellies" God filleth "with" his "hid treasure." Whereas thou, oh Christian, who possessest nothing, art heir-apparent of heaven, joint heir with Jesus Christ who is the heir of all things, and hast an infinite mass of riches laid up for thee; so great and infinite, that all the stars of heaven are too few to account it by: you have no reason to complain of being kept short, for all, that God hath, is yours: whether prosperity or adversity,

life or death, all is yours. What God gives, is for your comfort: what he denies or takes away, is for your trial: it is for the increase of those graces, which are far more gracious than any temporal enjoyment. If, by seeing wicked and ungodly men roll in wealth and ease, when thou art forced to struggle against the inconveniences and difficulties of a poor estate, thou hast learnt a holy contempt and disdain of the world, believe it, God hath herein given thee more, than if he had given thee the world itself.

4. *God doth, many times, even in this world, expound the mystery of his providence, by the fatal and dreadful overthrow of those wicked men, whom he, for a while, suffered to prosper.*

"The triumphing of the wicked is short:" Job xx. 5. At longest, it is but short; because measured out by a short life: now, is their triumph; hereafter, their torment. But, many times, God brings them to ruin, even in this life: he turns the wheel of providence, and makes it pass over those, who, but a while before, sat proudly on the top of it. And then wilt thou doubt, whether God governs the world by providence? Wilt thou doubt, whether God be just, in suffering wicked men to prosper and flourish? God lifts them up on high, only that he may cast them down with the more terrible fall. "When all the workers of iniquity" prosper, saith the Psalmist, Ps. xcii. 7: "it is that they may be destroyed forever." Now when God comes thus to execute judgment upon them, those, who questioned the providence of God in their advancement, will the more glorify it in their downfall: "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; and shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous: verily there is a God, that judgeth in the earth:" Ps. lvi. 11.

5. *If God doth not clear up this inequality of his providence, in this life, yet he will certainly do it at the day of judgment.*

And, indeed, the strange dispensation of affairs in this world is an argument, which doth convincingly prove, that there shall be such a day, wherein all the entanglements of providence shall be clearly unfolded. Then, shall the riddle be dissolved, why God hath given this and that profane wretch so much wealth, and so much power to do mischief: is it not, "that they shall be destroyed forever?" Ps. xcii. 7. Then shall they be called to a strict account, for all that plenty and prosperity, for which they are now envied; and the more they have abused, the more dreadful will their condemnation be. Then, it will appear that God gave them not as mercies, but as snares. It is said, Ps. xi. 6, that God will "rain on the wicked snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest:"