

THE ART OF DIVINE CONTENTMENT

**PART
THREE**



**THOMAS
WATSON**

The Art of Divine Contentment — Part Three

Thomas Watson

CHAPTER XI

Divine Motives to Contentment.

Section I. *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.

First 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, (Prov. 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" (Psa. 57:7): what is this but a piece of heaven?

Second 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," (Matt. 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, (Psa. 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,” (Psa. 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.

Third 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 piece 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 Sam. 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,” (Hos. 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 repining, 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 [meagre] 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.

Fourth 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 Kings 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, (Gen. 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.

Fifth 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 Kings 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 simile) 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 contentation, 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 contentation 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," (Numb. 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, (Numb. 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, (Judg. 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," (Numb. 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.

(1). 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.

(2). Discontent tempts a man to atheism and apostasy. 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 mean while 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 gleaning of Ephraim than the vintage of Abiezar, (Judg. 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.

Sixth 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 chalice 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. Contentation is full of consolation.

Seventh 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," (Psa. 73:1).

Section 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,” (Eph. 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 César 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, (Eph. 1:7). In him there is both fullness 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 John 3:9), it is the sacred unction, (1 John 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 Pet. 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,” (Luke 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 for ever,” as the wise man saith, (Prov. 27:24). Heaven is a place where gold and silver will not go. A believer is rich towards God, (Luke 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 fullness? The Lord is my portion, saith David, (Psa. 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?

Section 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.

Section 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,” (Rev. 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.

Section 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.

Section 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,” (Rom. 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,” (Psa. 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.

1. They are *disciplinary*; they teach us. The Psalmist having very elegantly described the church's trouble (Psa. 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,” (Mic. 6:9). God makes our adversity our university. Affliction is a preacher; “blow the trumpet in Tekoa:” (Jer. 6:1) the trumpet was to preach to the people; “be thou instructed, O Jerusalem,” (Jer. 6:8). Sometimes God speaks to the minister to lift up his voice like a trumpet (Isa. 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 (Cant. 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, (Lam. 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 (Hos. 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,” (Jer. 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” (Isa. 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?

2. Afflictions are *probatory*, (Psa. 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?

3. 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,” (Luke 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,” (Isa. 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?

4. 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?

5. 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," (Psa. 91:15). It cannot be ill with that man with who 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," (Psa. 119:54). We read, the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire (1 Kings 19:11): but in a metamorphical 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!

6. 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.

7. 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," (Heb. 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.

Section 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.

1. 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 professest to live by faith: what? and not content? Faith is a grace that doth substantiate things not seen (Heb. 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, (Eph. 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 Sam. 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.

2. 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*, which are these.

First. 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?” (Rom. 9:20), why am I not higher? Discontents are nothing else but the estuations, and boilings over of pride.

Second. Another 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.

Third. Another 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 [Glutton], 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 satisfied, he is never content.

Fourth. Another 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,” (Prov. 6:34). And oft this is nothing but suspicion and fancy: yet such as creates real discontent.

Fifth. Another 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 Kings 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:

First. Discontent is joined with a *sullen melancholy*. A Christian of a right temper should be ever cheerful in God: “serve the Lord with gladness,” (Psa. 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” (Jonah 4:9).

Second. 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 Kings 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.

First. 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, (Matt. 3:16), a dove is the emblem of meekness; a discontented spirit is not a meek spirit.

Second. 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 Pet. 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.

Thirdly. Discontent *disjoins the soul*, it untunes the heart for duty. “Is any among you afflicted, let him pray,” (Jam. 5:13). But, is any man discontented? how shall he pray? “Lift up holy hands without wrath,” (1 Tim. 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.”

Fourthly. 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,” (Jonah 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.

Fifthly. 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,” (Jam. 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.

3. Consider the *simplicity* of it. I may say, as the Psalmist, “surely they are disquieted in vain,” (Psa. 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.” (Prov. 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 discruciate 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.

Section 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.

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

The shortness of life.

It is “but a vapour,” saith James, (Jam. 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."

Section 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 scorseth 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.

(1). 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, (Deut. 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 Tim. 6:9). The world is birdlime at our feet, it is full of golden sands, but they are quicksands. 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!” (Luke 18:24). His golden weights keep him from ascending 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 stomach's 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.

(2). 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 damson 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.

Section 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,” (Heb. 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 Micah, Have ye taken away my gods, and do you ask me what aileth me, (Judg. 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, (Matt. 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.

Section 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 skin-deep, 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.

Section 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,” (Hos. 4:10). The throat of a malicious man is an open sepulchre, (Rom. 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, (Eccl. 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, (Hag. 1:6). O let us take heed of this plague! Did not Esau say to his brother, “I have abundance, my brother,” (Gen. 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.

The third of four booklets.

