Preached at S. Pauls, The Sunday after the Conversion of S. Paul. [1624/5]

Acts 9.4. AND HE FELL TO THE EARTH, AND HEARD A VOYCE, SAYING, SAUL, SAUL, WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME?

Let us now praise famous Men, and our Fathers that begat us, (saies the Wiseman) that is, that assisted our second generation, our spirituall Regeneration; Let us praise them, commemorate them. The Lord hath wrought great glory by them, through his power from the beginning, saies he there, that is, It hath alwaies beene the Lords way to glorifie himselfe in the conversion of Men, by the ministry of Men. For he adds, They were leaders of the people by their counsaile, and by their knowledge and learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent men in their instructions; and that is, That God who gives these gifts for this purpose, looks for the employment of these gifts, to the edification of others, to his glory. There be of them, that have left a name behinde them, (as it is also added in that place) that is, That though God can amply reward his servants in the next world, yet he does it sometimes in this world; and, though not with temporall happinesses, in their life, yet with honor, and commemorations, and celebrations of them, after they are gone out of this life, they leave a name behind them. And amongst them, in a high place, shines our blessed and glorious Apostle S. Paul, whose Conversion the Church celebrates now, and for the celebration thereof, hath appointed this part of Scripture from whence this text arises, to be the Epistle of the Day, And he fell to the earth, and heard a voyce, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

There are words in the text, that will reach to all the Story of S. Pauls Conversion, embrace all, involve and enwrap all; we must con-
tract them; into lesse then three parts, we cannot well; those will be these; first, The Person, Saul, He, *He fell to the earth*; and then, his humiliation, his exinanition of himselfe, his devesting, putting off of himselfe, *He fell to the earth*; and lastly, his investing of Christ, his putting on of Christ, his rising againe by the power of a new inanimation, a new soule breathed into him from Christ, *He heard a voyce, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Now, a re-distribution, a sub-division of these parts, into their branches, we shall present to you anon, more opportunely, as we shall come in due order to the handling of the parts themselves. In the first, the branches will be but these; Sauls indisposition when Christ tooke him in hand, and Christs worke upon him; what he found him, what he left him, will determine our first part, The person.

First then, what he was at that time, the Holy Ghost gives evidence enough against him, and he gives enough against himselfe. Of that which the Holy Ghost gives, you may see a great many heavy pieces, a great many appliable circumstances, if at any time, at home, you do but paraphrase, and spread to your selves the former part of this Chapter, to this text. Take a little preparation from me; *Adhuc spirans*, saies the first verse, *Saul yet breathing threatnings and slaughter*, Then when he was in the height of his fury, Christ laid hold upon him. It was, for the most part, Christs method of curing. Then when the Sea was in a tempestuous rage, when the waters covered the ship, and the storme shaked even that which could remove mountaines, the faith of the Disciples, then Christ rebukes the winde, and commands a calme. Then when the Sun was gone out to run his race as a Giant, (as David speaks) then God by the mouth of another, of Ioshuah, bids the Sun stand still. Then when that uncleane spirit foam'd, and fum'd, and tore, and rent the possessed persons, then Christ commanded them to go out. Let the fever alone, say our Physitians, till some fits be passed, and then we shall see farther, and discern better. The note is S. Chrysostomes, and he applies it to Christs proceeding with Saul; *Non expectavit ut fatigatus debacchando mansuesceret*, sayes he, Christ staid not till Saul being made drunkene with blood, were cast into a slumber, as satisfied with the blood of Christians; *Sed in media insania superavit*, but in the midst of his fit, he gave him physick, in the midst of his madnesse, he reclaims him. So is it also part of the
evidence that the Holy Ghost gives against him, *Quod petit Epistolas*, that he sued to the State for a Commission to persecute Christians. When the State will put men to some kinde of necessity of concurring to the endamaging or endangering of the cause of Christ, and will be displeased with them, if they doe not, men make to themselves, and to their consciences some faint colour of excuse: But when they themselves set actions on foote, which are not required at their hands, where is their evasion? Then when *Saul* sued out this Commission, *That if he found any of that way*, (that is, Christians) (for he had so scattered them before, that he was not sure to finde any, They did not appeare in any whole body, dangerous, or suspicious to the State) but, If hee found any, *Any man or woman*, That he might have the Power of the State, so as that he need not feare men, That hee might have the impartiality, and the inflexibility of the State, so as that he need not pity women, Then when his glory was to *bring them bound to Jerusalem*, that he might magnifie his triumph and greatnesse in the eye of the world, Then, then sayes Christ, to this tempest, Be calme, to this uncleane spirit, Come out, to this Sun, in his own estimation, Go no farther.

Thus much evidence the Holy Ghost gives against him; and thus much more himselfe, *I persecuted this way unto the death; I bound and delivered into prison, both men and women;* And after, more then this, *I punished them, and that oft, and, in every Synagogue, and, compelled them to blaspheme, and, was exceedingly mad against them, and persecuted them even unto strange Cities*. What could he say more against himselfe? And then, sayes Christ, to this tempest, *Quiesce*, Be still, to this glaring Sunne, *Siste*, stand still, to this uncleane spirit, *Veni foras*, come forth. In this sense especially doth S. *Paul* call himselfe *Abortivum*, a person borne out of season, That whereas Christs other Disciples and Apostles, had a breeding under him, and came first *ad Discipulatum*, and then *ad Apostolatum*, first to be Disciples, and after to be Apostles; S. *Paul* was borne a man, an Apostle, not carved out, as the rest in time; but a fusil Apostle, an Apostle powred out, and cast in a Mold; As *Adam* was a perfect man in an instant, so was S. *Paul* an Apostle, as soone as Christ tooke him in hand.

Now, Beloved, wilt thou make this perverse use of this proceeding, God is rich in Mercy, Therefore I cannot misse Mercy? Wouldest thou
say, and not be thought mad for saying so, God hath created a West Indies, therefore I cannot want Gold? Wilt thou be so ill a Logician to thy selfe, and to thine own damnation, as to conclude so, God is always the same in himselfe, therefore he must be always the same to me? So ill a Musician as to say, God is all Concord, therefore He and I can never disagree? So ill a Historian as to say, God hath called Saul, a Persecutor, then when he breathed threatnings and slaughter, then when he sued to the State for a Commission to persecute Christ, God hath called a theife, then when he was at the last gaspe; And therefore if he have a minde to me, he will deal so with me too, and, if he have no such minde, no man can imprint, or infuse a new minde in God? God forbid. It is not safe concluding out of single Instances. It is true, that if a soure, and heavy, and severe man, will adde to the discomforts of a disconsolate soule, and in that souls sadnesse, and dejection of spirit, will heap up examples, that God hath still suffered high-minded sinners to proceed and to perish in their irreligious wayes, and tell that poore soule, (as Iobs company did him) It is true, you take God aright, God never pardons such as you, in these cases, these singular, these individuall examples, That God hath done otherwise once, have their use. One instance to the contrary destroys any peremptory Rule, no man must say, God never doth it; He did it to Saul here, He did it to the Theife upon the Crosse. But to that presumptuous sinner, who sins on, because God shewed mercy to One at last, we must say, a miserable Comforter is that Rule, that affords but one example. Nay, is there one example? The Conversion of Saul a Persecutor, and of the Theife upon the Crosse, is become Proverbum pec- catorum, The sinners proverb, and serves him, and satisfies him in all cases. But is there any such thing? Such a story there is, and it is as true as Gospel, it is the truth of Gospel it selfe; But was this a late Repentance? Answer S. Cyril, Rogo te frater, Tell me, Beloved, Thou that deferrest thy Repentance, doest thou do it upon confidence of these examples? Non in fine, sed in principio conversus latro, Thou deludest thine owne soule; The Theife was not converted at last, but at first; As soone as God afforded him any Call, he came; And at how many lights hast thou winked? And to how many Cals hast thou stopped thine eares, that deferrest thy repentance? Christ said to him, Hodie mecum eris, This day thou shalt be with me in paradise; when
thou canst finde such another day, looke for such another mercy; A
day that cleft the grave-stones of dead men; A day that cleft the
Temple it selfe; A day that the Sunne durst not see; A day that saw
the soule of God (may we not say so, since that Man was God too)
depart from Man; There shall be no more such dayes; and therefore
presume not of that, *Hodie*. This day thou shalt be with me, if
thou make thy last minute that day, though Christ, to magnifie his
mercy, and his glory, and to take away all occasion of absolute despera-
tion, did here, under so many disadvantages call, and draw *S. Paul*
to him.

But we say no more of that, of the danger of sinning by precedent,
and presuming of mercy by example; we passe from our first Con-
sideration, From what, to the other, To what, Christ brought this
persecutor, this *Saul*. He brought him to that remarkable height, as
that the Church celebrates the Conversion of no man but this. Many
bloody Executioners were converted to Christ, even in the act of that
bloody Execution; Then when they tooke a delight in tearing the
bowels of Christians, they were received into the bowels of Christ
Jesus, and became Christians. Men that road to Market, and saw an
Execution upon the way; *Men* that opened a window to take ayre,
and saw an Execution in the street; The Ecclesiastical Story abounds
with examples of occasionall Convertits, and upon strange occasions;
but yet the Church celebrates no Conversion, but this. The Church
doeth not consider the Martyrs as borne till they die; till the world see
how they persevered to the end, shee takes no knowledge of them;
Therefore shee cals the dayes of their deaths, *Natalitia*, their birth-
dayes; Then she makes account they are borne, when they die. But of
*S. Paul* the Church makes her selfe assured the first minute; and there-
fore celebrates his Conversion, and none but his. Here was a true
Transubstantiation, and a new Sacrament. These few words, *Saul*,
*Saul, why persecutest thou me*, are words of Consecration; After these
words, *Saul* was no longer *Saul*, but he was Christ: *Vivit in me
Christus*, sayes he, *It is not I that live*, not I that do any thing, *but
Christ in me*. It is but a little way that *S. Chrysostome* goes, when he
speaks of an inferior Transubstantiation, of a change of affections, and
sayes *Agnus ex Lupo*, that here is another manner of Lycanthropy,
then when a man is made a Wolfe; for here a Wolfe is made a Lambe,
Ex lupo Agnus. Ex vepribus racemus, says that Father, A bramble is made a vine; Ex sizaniis frumentum, Cockle and tares become wheat; Ex pirata gubernator, A Pirat becomes a safe Pilot; Ex novissimo primus, The lees are come to swim on the top, and the last is growne first; and ex abortivo perfectus, He that was borne out of time, hath not onely the perfection, but the excellency of all his lineaments. S. Chrysostome goes farther then this, Ex blasphemo, Os Christi, & lyra spiritus, He that was the mouth of blasphemy, is become the mouth of Christ, He that was the instrument of Satan, is now the organ of the Holy Ghost. He goes very far, when he sayses, In Calis homo, in terris Angelus, Being yet but upon earth, he is an Angel, and being yet but a man, he is already in Heaven. Yet S. Paul was another manner of Sacrament, and had another manner of Transubstantiation, then all this; As he was made Idem spiritus cum Domino, The same spirit with the Lord, so in his very body, he had Stigmata, the very marks of the Lord Jesus. From such a lownesse, rayed to such a height, as that Origen sayes, many did beleeve, that S. Paul had been that Holy Ghost, which Christ had promised to the world, after his departing from it.

It is but a little way that S. Ierome hath carried his commendation neither, when he calls him Rugitum leonis. The roaring of a Lion, if we consider in how little a forest the roaring of a Lion is determined; but that he calls him Rugitum Leonis nostri, The roaring of our Lion, of the Lion of the Tribe of Iuda, That as far as Christ is heard, S. Paul is heard too; Quem quoties lego, non verba mihi videor audire, sed tonitrua, Wheresoever I open S. Pauls Epistles, I meet not words, but thunder, and universall thunder, thunder that passes through all the world. For, Eius exceccatio totius orbis illuminatio, That that was done upon him, wrought upon all the world; he was struck blind, and all the world saw the better for that. So universall a Priest, (sayes S. Chrysostome, who loves to be speaking of S. Paul) as that he sacrificed, not sheep and goats, sed seïpsum, but himselfe; and not onely that, sed totum mundum, He prepared the whole world, as a sacrifice to God. He built an Arke, that is, established a Church; and to this day, receives, not eight, but all into that Arke: And whereas in Noahs Ark, Quem corvum receptit, corvum emisit, If he came in a Raven, he went out a Raven; S. Paul, in his Arke, Ex milvis facit columbas, as himself was, so he transubstantiates all them, and makes them Doves of
Ravens. Nay, so over-absolutely did he sacrifice himselfe, and his state in this world, for this world, as that he sacrificed his reversion, his future state, the glory and joy of heaven, for his brethren, and chose rather to be Anathema, separated from Christ, then they should. I love thee, says S. Chrysostome to Rome, for many excellencies, many greatnesse; But I love thee so well, says he, therefore because S. Paul loved thee so well. Qualem Rosam Roma Christo, (as he pursues this contemplation) What a fragrant rose shall Rome present Christ with, when he comes to Judgement, in re-delivering to him the body of S. Paul? And though he joyne them both together, Iugati boves Ecclesia, That S. Peter and S. Paul were that yooak of oxen that ploughed the whole Church, Though he say of both, Quot carceres sanctificastis? How many Prisons have you two consecrated, and made Prisons Churches? Quot catenas illustrastis? How many fetters and chains of iron have you two changed into chaines of gold? Yet we may observe a difference in S. Chrysostomes expressing of persons so equall to one another, Quid Petro majus? says he, But, Quid Paulo par fuit? What can exceed Peter, or what can equall Paul? Still be all this far from occasioning any man to presume upon God, because he afforded so abundant mercy to a Persecuter: but still from this, let every faint soule establish it selfe in a confidence in God; God that would find nothing to except, nothing to quarrell at, in S. Paul, will not lie heavy upon thy soule, though thou must say, as he did, Quorum ego maximus, That thou art a greater sinner then thou knowest any other man to be.

We are, in our order proposed at first, devolved now to our second Part; from the person, and in that, what he was found, A vehement persecuter, And then, what he was made, A laborious Apostle, To the Manner, to his Humiliation, Cecidit super terram, He fell, and he fell to the ground, and he fell blind, as by the history, and context appears. We use to call every declination, of any kind, and in any subject, a falling; for, for our bodies, we say a man is falne sick, And for his state, falne poore, And for his mind, falne mad, And for his conscience, falne desperate; we are borne low, and yet we fall every way lower, so universall is our falling sickness. Sin it selfe is but a falling; The irremediable sin of the Angels, The undeterminable sinne of Adam, is called but so, The fall of Adam, The fall of Angels. And therefore the
effectuall visitation of the holy Ghost to man, is called a falling too; we are fallen so low, as that when the holy Ghost is pleased to fetch us againe, and to infuse his grace, he is still said to fall upon us. But the fall which we consider in the Text, is not a figurative falling, not into a decay of estate, nor decay of health, nor a spirituall falling into sin, a decay of grace; but it is a medicinall falling, a falling under Gods hand, but such a falling under his hand, as that he takes not off his hand from him that is falne, but throwes him downe therefore that he may raise him. To this posture he brings Paul, now, when he was to re-inanimate him with his spirit; rather, to pre-inanimate him; for, indeed, no man hath a soule till he have grace.

Christ, who in his humane nature hath received from the Father all Judgement, and power, and dominion over this world, hath received all this, upon that condition that he shall governe in this manner, Aske of me, and I shall give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance, says the Father; How is he to use them, when he hath them? Thus, Thou shalt breake them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potters vessell. Now, God meant well to the Nations, in this bruising and breaking of them; God intended not an annihilation of the Nations, but a reformation; for Christ askes the Nations for an Inheritance, not for a triumph; therefore it is intended of his way of governing them; and his way is to bruise and beat them; that is, first to cast them downe, before he can raise them up, first to breake them before he can make them in his fashion. Novit Dominus vulnerare ad amorem; The Lord, and onely the Lord knowes how to wound us, out of love; more then that, how to wound us into love; more then all that, to wound us into love, not onely with him that wounds us, but into love with the wound it selfe, with the very affliction that he inflicts upon us; The Lord knowes how to strike us so, as that we shall lay hold upon that hand that strikes us, and kisse that hand that wounds us. Ad vitam interficit, ad exaltationem prosterntit, says the same Father; No man kills his enemy therefore, that his enemy might have a better life in heaven; that is not his end in killing him: It is Gods end; Therefore he brings us to death, that by that gate he might lead us into life everlasting; And he hath not discovered, but made that Northerne passage, to passe by the frozen Sea of calamity, and tribulation, to Paradise, to the heavenly Jerusalem. There are fruits that ripen not, but by frost;
There are natures, (there are scarce any other) that dispose not themselves to God, but by affliction. And as Nature lookes for the season for ripening, and does not all before, so Grace lookes for the assent of the soule, and does not perfect the whole worke, till that come. It is Nature that brings the season, and it is Grace that brings the assent; but till the season for the fruit, till the assent of the soule come, all is not done.

Therefore God begun in this way with Saul, and in this way he led him all his life. Tot pertulit mortes, quot vixit dies, He dyed as many deaths, as he lived dayes; for so himselfe says, Quotidie morior, I die daily; God gave him sucke in blood, and his owne blood was his daily drink; He catechized him with calamities at first, and calamities were his daily Sermons, and meditations after; and to authorize the hands of others upon him, and to accustome him to submit himself to the hands of others without murmuring, Christ himself strikes the first blow, and with that, Cecidit, he fell, (which was our first consideration, in his humiliation) and then, Cecidit in terram, He fell to the ground, which is our next.

I take no farther occasion from this Circumstance, but to arme you with consolation, how low soever God be pleased to cast you, Though it be to the earth, yet he does not so much cast you downe, in doing that, as bring you home. Death is not a banishing of you out of this world; but it is a visitation of your kindred that lie in the earth; neither are any nearer of kin to you, then the earth it selfe, and the worms of the earth. You heap earth upon your soules, and encumber them with more and more flesh, by a superfluous and luxuriant diet; You adde earth to earth in new purchases, and measure not by Acres, but by Manors, nor by Manors, but by Shires; And there is a little Quillet, a little Close, worth all these, A quiet Grave. And therefore, when thou readest, That God makes thy bed in thy sickness, rejoice in this, not onely that he makes that bed, where thou dost lie, but that bed where thou shalt lie; That that God, that made the whole earth, is now making thy bed in the earth, a quiet grave, where thou shalt sleep in peace, till the Angels Trumpet wake thee at the Resurrection, to that Judgement where thy peace shall be made before thou commest, and writ, and sealed, in the blood of the Lamb.

Saul falls to the earth; So farre; But he falls no lower. God brings his servants to a great lownesse here; but he brings upon no man a per-
verse sense, or a distrustfull suspition of falling lower hereafter; His hand strikes us to the earth, by way of humiliation; But it is not his hand, that strikes us into hell, by way of desperation. Will you tell me, that you have observed and studied Gods way upon you all your life, and out of that can conclude what God meanes to doe with you after this life? That God took away your Parents in your infancy, and left you Orphanes then, That he hath crossed you in all your labours in your calling, ever since, That he hath opened you to dishonours, and calumnies, and mis-interpretations, in things well intended by you, That he hath multiplied sicknesses upon you, and given you thereby an assurance of a miserable, and a short life, of few, and evil dayes, nay, That he hath suffered you to fall into sins, that you your selves have hated, To continue in sins, that you your selves have been weary of, To relapse into sins, that you your selves have repented; And will you conclude out of this, that God had no good purpose upon you, that if ever he had meant to doe you good, he would never have gone thus farre, in heaping of evills upon you? Upon what does thou ground this? upon thy selfe? Because thou shouldest not deal thus with any man, whom thou mean'st well to? How poore, how narrow, how impious a measure of God, is this, that he must doe, as thou wouldest doe, if thou wert God! God hath not made a week without a Sabbath; no tentation, without an issue; God inflicts no calamity, no cloud, no eclipse, without light, to see ease in it, if the patient will look upon that which God hath done to him, in other cases, or to that which God hath done to others, at other times. 

Saul fell to the ground, but he fell no lower; God brings us to humiliation, but not to desperation.

He fell; he fell to the ground, And he fell blinde; for so it is evident in the story. Christ had said to the Pharisees, I came into the world, that they which see, might be made blinde; And the Pharisees ask him, Have you been able to doe so upon us? Are we blinde? Here Christ gives them an example; a reall, a literall, an actuall example; Saul, a Pharisee, is made blinde. He that will fill a vessell with wine, must take out the water; He that will fill a covetous mans hand with gold, must take out the silver that was there before, sayes S. Chrysostome. Christ, who is about to infuse new light into Saul, withdrawes that light that was in him before; That light, by which Saul thought he saw all before, and thought himselfe a competent Judge, which was the onely
true Religion, and that all others were to be persecuted, even to death, that were not of his way. *Stultus factus est omnis homo à scientia*, says God in the Prophet, Every man that trusts in his owne wit, is a foole. But *let him become a foole, that he may be wise*, says the Apostle; Let him be so, in his own eyes, and God will give him better eyes, better light, better understanding. *Saul* was struck blinde, but it was a blindnesse contracted from light; It was a light that struck him blinde, as you see in his story. This blindnesse which we speak of, which is a sober and temperate abstinence from the immoderate study, and curious knowledges of this world, this holy simplicity of the soule, is not a darknesse, a dimnesse, a stupidity in the understanding, contracted by living in a corner, it is not an idle retiring into a Monastery, or into a Village, or a Country solitude, it is not a lazy affectation of ignorance; not darknesse, but a greater light, must make us blinde.

The sight, and the Contemplation of God, and our present benefits by him, and our future interest in him, must make us blinde to the world so, as that we look upon no face, no pleasure, no knowledge, with such an Affection, such an Ambition, such a Devotion, as upon God, and the wayes to him. *Saul* had such a blindnesse, as came from light; we must affect no other simplicity, then arises from the knowledge of God, and his Religion. And then, *Saul* had such a blindnesse, as that he fell with it. There are birds, that when their eyes are cieled, still soare up, and up, till they have spent all their strength. Men blinde with the lights of this world, soare still into higher places, or higher knowledges, or higher opinions; but the light of heaven humbles us, and layes flat that soule, which the leaven of this world had puffed and swelled up. That powerfull light felled *Saul*; but after he was fallen, his owne sight was restored to him againe; *Ananias* saies to him, *Brother Saul, receive thy sight*. To those men, who imployle their naturall faculties to the glory of God, and their owne, and others edification, God shall afford an exaltation of those naturall faculties; In those, who use their learning, or their wealth, or their power, well, God shall increase that power, and that wealth, and that learning, even in this world.

You have seene *Sauls* sicknesse, and the exaltation of the disease, Then when he breathed threatnings, and slaughter, Then when he went in his triumph; And you have seen his death, The death of the
righteous, His humiliation, He fell to the earth; And there remaines yet his Resurrection; The Angel of the great Counsell, Christ Jesus, with the Trumpet of his owne mouth, rayses him, with that, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou mee?

First, he affords him a call, A voyce. Saul could not see; Therefore he deales not upon him by visions. He gives a voyce; and a voyce that he might heare; God speaks often, when we do not heare; He heard it, and heard it saying; Not a voyce only, but a distinct, and intelligible voyce; and saying unto him, that is, appliable to himselfe; and then, that that the voyce said to him, was, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? We are unequall enemies, Thou seest I am too hard for thee, Cur tu me? why wilt thou, thou in this weakenesse oppose me? And then, we might be good friends, Thou seest I offer parly, I offer treaty, Cur tu me? Why wilt thou oppose me, me that declare such a dispostion to be reconciled unto thee? In this so great a disadvantage on thy part, why wilt thou stirre at all? In this so great a peaceablenesse on my part, why wilt thou stirre against me? Cur tu me? Why persecutest thou me?

First then, God speaks: For, beloved, we are to consider God, not as he is in himselfe, but as he works upon us: The first thing that we can consider in our way to God, is his Word. Our Regeneration is by his Word; that is, by faith, which comes by hearing; The seed is the word of God, sayes Christ himselfe; Even the seed of faith. Carry it higher, the Creation was by the word of God; Dixit, & facta sunt, God spoke, and all things were made. Carry it to the highest of all, to Eternity, the eternall Generation, the eternall Production, the eternall Procession of the second Person in the Trinity, was so much by the Word, as that he is the Word; Verbum caro, It was that Word, that was made Flesh. So that God, who cannot enter into bands to us, hath given us security enough; He hath given us his Word; His written Word, his Scriptures; His Essential Word, his Son. Our Principall, and Radicall, and Fundamentall security, is his Essential Word, his Son Christ Jesus. But how many millions of generations was this Word in heaven, and never spoke? The Word, Christ himself, hath been as long as God hath been: But the uttering of this Word, speaking hath been but since the Creation. Peter sayes to Christ, To whom shall we goe? Thou hast the words of eternall life. It is not onely, Thou
art the word of eternall life; (Christ is so) But thou hast it; Thou hast it, where we may come to thee for it; In thy Treasury, in thine Ordinance, in thy Church; Thou hast it, to derive it, to convey it upon us. Here then is the first step of Saul's cure, and of ours, That there was not only a word, the Word, Christ himselfe, a Son of God in heaven, but a Voyce, the word uttered, and preached; Christ manifested in his Ordinance: He heard a voyce.

He heard it. How often does God speake, and nobody heares the voyce? He speaks in his Canon, in Thunder, and he speaks in our Canon, in the rumour of warres. He speaks in his musique, in the harmonious promises of the Gospel, and in our musique, in the temporall blessings of peace, and plenty; And we heare a noyse in his Judgements, and wee heare a sound in his mercies; but we heare no voyce, we doe not discern that this noyse, or this sound comes from any certain person; we do not feele them to be mercies, nor to be judgements uttered from God, but naturall accidents, casuall occurrences, emergent contingencies, which as an Atheist might think, would fall out though there were no God, or no commerce, no dealing, no speaking between God and Man. Though Saul came not instantly to a perfect discerning who spoke, yet he saw instantly, it was a Person above nature, and therefore speaks to him in that phrase of submission, Quis es Domine? Lord who art thou? And after, with trembling and astonishment, (as the Text sayes) Domine quid me vis facere? Lord what wilt thou have me to do? Then we are truliest said to hear, when we know from whence the voyce comes. Princes are Gods Trumpet, and the Church is Gods Organ, but Christ Jesus is his voyce. When he speaks in the Prince, when he speaks in the Church, there we are bound to heare, and happy if we doe hear. Man hath a natural way to come to God, by the eie, by the creature; So Visible things shew the Invisible God: But then, God hath super-induced a supernaturall way, by the care. For, though hearing be naturall, yet that faith in God should come by hearing a man preach, is supernaturall. God shut up the naturall way, in Saul, Seeing; He struck him blind; But he opened the super-naturall way, he inabled him to heare, and to heare him. God would have us beholden to grace, and not to nature, and to come for our salvation, to his Ordinances, to the preaching of his Word, and not to any other meanes. Though hee were blinde, even that blind-
nesse, as it was a humiliation, and a diverting of his former glaring lights, was a degree of mercy, of preparative mercy; yet there was a voyce, which was another degree; And a voyce that he heard, which was a degree above that; and so farre we are gone; And he heard it, saying, that is distinctly, and intelligibly, which is our next Circumstance.

He heares him saying, that is, He heares him so, as that he knowes what he sayes, so, as that he understands him; for, he that heares the word, and understands it not, is subject to that which Christ sayes, That the wicked one comes, and catches away that was sowne. S. Augustine puts himselfe earnestly upon the contemplation of the Creation, as Moses hath delivered it; he findes it hard to conceive, and he sayes, Si esset ante me Moses, If Moses who writ this were here, Tenerem cum, & per te osecrearem, I would hold him fast, and beg of him, for thy sake, O my God, that he would declare this worke of the Creation more plainly unto me. But then, sayes that blessed Father, Si Hebræa voce loqueretur, If Moses should speake Hebrew to mee, mine cares might heare the sound, but my minde would not heare the voyce; I might heare him, but I should not heare what he said. This was that that distinguished betweene S. Paul, and those who were in his company at this time; S. Luke sayes in this Chapter, That they heard the voyce, and S. Paul relating the story againe, after sayes, They heard not the voyce of him that spok to me; they heard a confused sound, but they distinguished it not to be the voyce of God, nor discerned Gods purpose in it. In the twelfth of Iohn, there came a voyce from Heaven, from God himselfe, and the people said, It thunche. So apt is naturall man to ascribe even Gods immediate and miraculous actions to naturall causes; apt to rest and determine in Nature, and leave out God. The Poet chides that weaknesse, (as he cals it) to be afraid of Gods judgements, or to call naturall accidents judgements; Quo morbo mentem concusse? timore Deorum, says he; he sayes The Conscience may be over-tender, and that such timorous men, are sick of the feare of God; But it is a blessed disease The feare of God, and the true way to true health. And though there be a morall constancy that becomes a Christian well, not to bee easily shaked with the variations and revolutions of this world, yet it becomes him to establish his constancy in this, That God hath a good purpose in that action,
not that God hath no hand in that action; That God will produce
good out of it, not that God hath nothing to doe in it. The Magicians
themselves were forced to confesse *Digitum Dei*, The finger of God, in
a small matter. Never thinke it a weakenesse, to call that a judgement
of God, which others determine in Nature; Doe so, so far as works to
thy edification, who seest that judgement, though not so far, as to
argue, and conclude the finall condemnation of that man upon whom
that judgement is fallen. Certainly, we were better call twenty natu-
rall accidents judgements of God, then frustrate Gods purpose in any
of his powerfull deliverances, by calling it a naturall accident, and
suffer the thing to vanish so, and God be left unglorified in it, or his
Church unedified by it. Then we heare God, when we understand
what he sayes; And therefore, as we are bound to blesse God, that he
speakes to us, and heares us speake to him, in a language which wee
understand, and not in such a strange language, as that a stranger who
should come in and heare it, would thinke the Congregation mad; So
also let us blesse him for that holy tendernesse, to be apt to feele his
hand in every accident, and to discerne his presence in every thing that
befals us. *Saul heard the voyce, saying;* He understood what it said,
and by that, found that it was directed to *him*, which is also another
step in this last part.

This is an impropriation without sacriledge, and an enclosure of a
Common without damage, to make God mine owne, to finde that all
that God sayes is spoken to me, and all that Christ suffered was suf-
fered for me. And as Saul found this voyce at first, to be directed to
him, so ever after he bends his eye the same way, and observes the
working of God especially upon himselfe; As at the beginning, so in
the way too; particularly there, *By the grace of God I am that I am;* and
then, *His grace was bestowed on me, And not in vaine;* and againe, *I
have laboured more abundantly then all;* And after all, still he consid-
er himselfe, and findes himselfe to be the greatest sinner, *Quorum ego
maximus*. It is called a greatnesse of spirit, or constancy, but it is indeed
an incorrigible height of pride, when a man will not beleive that he is
meant in a libel, if he be not named in that libel. It is a fearfull obdura-
tion, to be Sermon-proffe, or not to take knowledge, that a judgement
is denounced against him, because he is not named in the denouncing
of that judgement. Is not thy name *Simon Magus*, if thou buy and sell
spirituall things thy selfe? and is not thy servants name Gehazi, if he exact after? Is not thy name Cain, if thou rise up against thy brother? And is not thy name Zacheus, if thou multiply thy wealth by oppression? Is not thy name Dinah, if thou gad abroad, to see who will solicite thee? And is not the name of Putiphars Wife upon thee, if thou stay at home and solicite thy servants? Postdate the whole Bible, and whatsoever thou hearest spoken of such, as thou art, before, beleve all that to be spoken but now, and spoken to thee. This was one happinesse here, that Saul found this voyce to be directed to him; And another (which is our last Consideration) is what this voyce said; it said, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Here, to make sure of him, God calls him by his name, that hee should not be able to transfer the summons upon any other, or say it was not he. They say that our Noctambulones, men that walke in their sleepe, will wake if they be called by their names. To wake Saul out of this dreame, (for, to thinke to oppose Christ and his cause, is, in the highest person of the world, of what power or of what counsel soever, but a vertiginous dreame, and a giddy vapour) to wake him, he calls him by his name, to let him know he meanes him; and to wake him throughly, he calls him twice, Saul, and Saul againe. The great desolation which was to fall upon that land, God intimates, God interminates, God intonates with such a vehemency, Terra, terra, terra, Earth, earth, earth heare the word of the Lord. God should be heard at first, beleeved at first; but such is his abundant goodnesse, as that he ingeniates, multiplies his warnings; And to this whole land he hath said, Terra, terra, terra, Earth, earth, earth heare the Word of the Lord; Once in an Invasion, once in a Powder-treason; and againe, and againe in pestilentiall contagions; And to every one of us, he hath said oftner then so, Dust, dust, dust why doest thou lift up thy self against thy Maker? Saul, Saul why persecutest thou mee?

Here Christ calls the afflictions of those that are his, in his purpose, his afflictions. Christ will not absolutely verifie his owne words, to his owne ease; He had said before this, upon the Crosse, Consummatum est, All is finished; But though all were finished in his Person, he hath a daily passion in his Saints still. This language which the Apostle learnt of Christ here, himselfe practised, and spake after, Who is weake, and I am not weake? who is offended, and I burne not? Since
Christ does suffer in our sufferings, be this our consolation, Till he be weary, we should not be weary, nor faint, nor murmur under our burdens; and this too, That when he is weary, he will deliver us even for his owne sake; for he, though he cannot suffer paine, may suffer dishonour in our sufferings; therefore attend his leisure.

We end all in this, *Cur tu me? Why doest Thou persecute Me? Why Saul Christ?* Put it upon a Nation, (what is any Saul, any one man to a Nation?) Put it upon all the Nations of the World, and you shall heare God aske with an indignation, *Quare fremuerunt Gentes? Why doe the heathen rage, why do the people imagine a vaine thing? why will they doe it? what can they get? He that sitteth in the Heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall have them in derision.* Christ came into the Temple and disputed with the Doctors; but hee did not despise them, he did not laugh at them. When all the Midianites, and all the Amalekites, and all the Children of the East, were in a body against Israel, God did not laugh at them. *Gideon* his Generall, mustered two and thirty thousand against them. God would not impoyl so many in the day of Battaile, yet he did not laugh at them, hee did not whip them out of the field, he made the face of an Army, though it were but three hundred. But when God can chuse his way, Hee can call in Nation against Nation, he can cast a dampe upon any Nation, and make them afraid of one another, He can doe an execution upon them by themselves, (I presume you remember those stories in the Bible, where God did proceed by such wayes) or he can sit still in a scorne, and let them melt away of themselves; when he can cast downe Saul to the earth, and never appeare in the cause, benight his noone, frustrate his purposes, evacuate his hopes, annihilate him in the height of his glory, *Cur tu me? why will any Saul, any Nation, any World of Sauls persecute Christ, any sinner tempt him, who is so much too hard for him?*

*Cur me? Why doest thou offer this to me, who being thus much too hard for thee, would yet faine be friends with thee? and therefore came to a parley, to a treaty? for, *verba hec, non tam arguentis, quam defendentis*, sayes S. Chrysostome: These are not so much offensive as defensive words; He would not confound Saul, but he would not betray his own honour. To many Nations God hath never spoken; To the Jews he spoke, but suffered them to mistake him; To some whole
Christian Churches he speaks, but he lets them speake too; he lets them make their word equall to his; To many of us he hath spoken, and chidden, but given over before we are cured; As he sayes of Israel, in a manner, That she is not worth his anger, not worth his punishing, *A people laden with sinnes, why should they any more be smitten?* Why should I go about to recover them? But if God speake to thee still, and speake in a mixt voyce, of Correction, and Consolation too, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Him that receives so little benefit by thee, and yet is so loath to lose thee, *Him* that can so easily spare thee, and yet makes thy soule more precious then his own life, *Him* that can resolve thee, scatter thee, annihilate thee with a word, and yet afford so many words, so many houres conferences, so many Sermons to reclaime thee, why persecutest Thou Him? Answer this question, with *Sauls* answer to this question, by another question, *Domine quid me vis facere? Lord what wilt thou have me do?* Deliver thy selfe over to the will of God, and God shall deliver thee over, as he did *Saul* to *Ananias*; provide thee by his Ministry in his Ordinance, means to rectifie thee, in all dejection of spirit, light to cleare thee in all perplexities of conscience, in the wayes of thy pilgrimage, and more and more effectuall seals thereof, at the houre of thy transmigration into his joy, and thine eternall rest.