

WORDS OF THE WISE

FRANCIS QUARLES, (1592-1644.)

"How potent are the infirmities of flesh and blood! How weak is nature's strength! How strong her weakness! How is my easy faith abused by my deceitful sense! How is my understanding blinded with deluding error! How is my will perverted with apparent good! If real good present itself, how purblind is mine eye to view it! if viewed, how dull is my understanding to apprehend it! if apprehended, how heartless is my judgement to allow it! if allowed, how unwilling is my will to choose it! if chosen, how fickle are my resolutions to retain it! No sooner are my resolutions fixed upon a course of grace, but nature checks at my resolves; no sooner checked, but straight my will repents her choice, my judgement recalls her sentence, my understanding mistrusts her light; and then my sense calls flesh and blood to counsel, which wants no arguments to break me off. The difficulty of the journey daunts me; the straits of the gate dismays me; the doubt of the reward diverts me; the loss of worldly pleasure here deters me; the loss of earthly honour there dissuades me; here the strictness of religion damps me, there the world's contempt disheartens me; here the fear of my preferment discourages me: thus is my yielding sense assaulted with my conquering doubts; thus are my militant hopes made captive to my prevailing fears; whence if happily ransomed by some good motion, the devil presents me with a bea'droll of my offences: the flesh suggests the necessity of my sin, the world objects the foulness of my shame; where, if I plead the mercy and goodness of my God, the abuse of His mercy weakens my trust, slighting of His goodness hardens my heart, against my hopes. With what an host of enemies art thou besieged, my soul! How, how art thou beleaguered with continual fears! How doth the guilt of thy unworthiness cry down the hopes of all compassion! Thy confidence of mercy is conquered by the consciousness of thy own demerits, and thou art taken prisoner, and bound in the horrid chains of sad despair.—

"But cheer up, my soul, and turn thy fears to wonder and thanksgiving; trust in Him that saith, 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.'—(Luke xii. 32.)

"Hast thou crucified the Lord of glory, O my soul, and hast thou so much boldness to expect His kingdom? Consult with reason, and review thy merits; which done, behold that Jesus whom thou crucifiedst even making intercession for thee, and offering thee a crown of glory. Behold the greatness of thy Creator circled with the goodness of thy Redeemer; the justice of a first person qualified by the mercy of a second; the purity of the divine nature uniting itself with the human, in one Emmanuel; a perfect man to suffer; a perfect God to pardon; and both God and man in one person, at the same instant, able and willing to give and take a perfect satisfaction for thee. O my soul, a wonder above wonders! an incomprehensibility above all admiration! a depth past finding out! Under this shadow, O my soul, refresh thyself: if thy sins fear the hand of justice, behold thy sanctuary: if thy offences tremble before the Judge, behold thy Advocate: if they threaten a prison, behold thy bail: behold the Lamb of God that hath taken thy sins from thee: behold the Blessed of heaven and earth that hath prepared a kingdom for thee. Be ravished, O my soul; O bless the name of Elohim; O bless the name of our Emmanuel with praises and eternal hallelujahs.

"Great Shepherd of my soul, whose life was not too dear to rescue me, the meanest of thy little flock, cast down thy gracious eye upon the weakness of my nature, and behold it in the strength of thy compassion: open mine eyes that I may see that object which flesh cannot behold. Enlighten mine understanding that I may clearly discern that truth which my ignorance cannot apprehend: