No. 52.

The means by which we endeavor to execute our ends.
Psalm xxxvi. 2. — "For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful."

Why is it, my fr., that the profession & the practice of many times are so widely, & so lamentably at variance? Why are we so often compelled to mourn that the spirit of religion & the life of virtue have vanished from those who maintain the form, & pretend friendship to their cause? — It is not always because men are hypocrites, that they profess more than they practise, & love the name better than the substance. It is not always because their faith sits loosely up on them & may be shaken off by every temptation, or by eve
made assault, as the world makes upon it, the
they bring disgrace upon the name whereby they are
called... It is not always because infidelity reigns
in the heart, 34 religion dwells merely on the beam
that there is so little conformity between the life
of the creed of man. These causes doubtless oper-
ate in a greater or less degree; but, they are not the
only causes, nor the main.

There are other reasons why
the soul slumbers in sin and suffers itself to be born
by the several vices. Among them
is one, self-deception. This is a principle of
very wide operation, because it may exist itself at
almost every time is in almost every character.
It is this principle, the king of Israel, the in-
the text (forty-third) verse 8, flourishing... He is
of the wickedness of these, who forget God, who
give themselves up, without a check, to their un-
checked passions. "The transgression of the wicked
be, "sinth within my heart, that there is no fear
of God before his eyes." He then proceeds to assign
the cause for this sinful stupidity, saying that he
had studied human nature thoroughly, knew it
well. "For he, "he flattereth himself in his own
eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. He
is one secret sin, one of man's continuing in vice with-\n
This, though it is odious, may be innocent; but we
flatter ourselves, if this is a most dangerous, sometimes
a most fatal indulgence. We become our own enemies,
the wounds we inflict on us are the deeper
more deadly, because for the time we do not feel the
If we say to our hearts, "peace, peace, when there is no peace,"
we be to us, for there is a time coming when we shall
weep tears of bitterness to think how we have admin-
istered poison to our own hopes.

It is not because we never think of our sins, that we
do not reform; it is not because we are never sorry for
them, that we do not reform... Perhaps there is no
one, whose heart is not at times involved and softened by the remembrance of his neglect of duty or of his immemorial vice. You may hear the voice of conscience for a while; but she will rise at length and claim her rights. We will claim to be heard, you must be heard. Why then do we not listen to her voice and leave our sins? Why do we acknowledge our transgressions, yet cleave to them? It is because we practice upon ourselves all the various arts of self-deception; because we design ourselves to believe our own hearts have been busy in kindness, charity, and love to others; because we find a thousand excuses to excuse what we cannot justify; and to apologize for that which we are conscious must be condemned at the bar of reason and religion. I propose to notice some of these arts with which we impose upon ourselves, and contrive to excuse injurious acts to our own consciences.

1. Every common, every easy species of self-deception is designed to blunt the edge of our consciences, to represent them as less heinous than they are, by comparing ourselves with others. Because we are no more than our fellows, we are very apt to think that we are good enough. The virtues in which we practice are customary; therefore we imagine they cease to be virtues, at least if they do not serve as those with whom we associate. There are partners as those with whom we associate. There are partners in our guilt, to keep us in countenance; if we think we need not blush; and others have as much cause to blush as ourselves. There is society, and our iniquity; we feel quite relieved, because no one is called upon to reprehend us, and the finger of God cannot point to us, because God is absent. If we do not stand alone, we feel quite relieved, because we do not stand alone.

2. If we are too much, we plead, as an excuse, that we are not more so than our neighbors. If we are not more so than our neighbors, we do not stand alone; we are not called upon to reprehend us. And thus it helps, if we are unjust, or fraudulent, or hypocritical, if we are not ashamed, because we can look around us and see no one who is guilty of the same faults. - And thus it helps, if we are unjust, or fraudulent, or hypocritical.
admonitions, & proceed without apprehension in our
favorite paths of vice, because we are surrounded by a
multitude who are travelling the same downward course.
Gloze the bands of our companions in iniquity, & think
to be held up by their support. Now this is a most
dangerous delusion: Yet it is truly lamentable to see this
principle of social union, so highly implanted in our
breasts for the best & fairest purposes, abused & perverted
to the subvert & encouragement of vice... Those strong
bonds, Heaven has bound us to each other, we never in
vented, to be the ties of a fraternity in guilt. The affec
tions, which prompt us to social intercourse, were design
ed to achieve & to purify our hearts: They were given us in
much mercy. & who has not experienced what felonies
have to suffer, to support, & to animate us, when we are
ready to sink into debasement, weakness, & indolence?
But shall we convert this angel of light, the prin
cipal of social union, destined to encourage & stimulate
our virtues, into an angel of darkness, by emblazon &
embolden & recommend our vices? It is a most guilty
prostitution of one of the best of blessings to the worst
of purposes... Besides, this reasoning by which we strive
to persuade ourselves that we may sin, because others
do, is a wicked piece of sophistry, & would at once
appear to be so, if it were applied to the case of civil
transaction among men... Where is the man, who, if he were
accused for the violation of a law of the land, would
have the hardihood to plead before any tribunal, that
he had seen the law so often violated by others, as to come
to the conclusion, that he too, as well as they, might truly
be upon it with impunity? & if the criminal were
made to see its folly & weakness? & if yet
this is precisely the apology we make for our transgres
ions of the laws of God; & usually we deem it quite
successful & satisfactory. Let us then be ashamed
to suppose that we can make our peace with God by
and foolish excuses, as we should not for a moment
admit in the councils of human justice... And how
not know or have forgotten the express declaration
of Scripture? "Be ye not conformed to this world..."
shall not follow a multitude to do evil" &
shall not leadeth unto destruction. & many there be whom
in threat? Think not then that you sin with more safety, because you sin in company with multitude. There is but one standard by which our conduct, & that is the revealed will of God. Nor is the world below the divine will, for you are not exempted from the obligation of obedience. The law of God has always the same binding power, if you break it with the multitude, you must be punished with the multitude.

Undoubtedly, I should describe another frame of mind, who are more righteous & more holy than I have just mentioned. & that is when we are not removed from the comparison in our favor, when we see ourselves in the eyes of the Lord & say, we have sinned, but more; that we are not only as good as we are, but better than the rest.

This is the time, we say, we do indulge in various practices; it is true, our hearts are stained with many a transgression; you have departed from the strict, unyielding line of rectitude. But if our indulgences have not been so gross or so frequent as those of our neighbors, our lives are not of so dark a die & have not been so long engaged in our souls, as the
among the different qualities, might chance to enter into the composition of our characters, we are anxious to strike a balance by selling off one against another, thus to make the good traits of the one acknowledge the indulgence of our passions. By this sort of compromise, we practice if we should live a very dangerous deception, in which we are drawn into as a sort of self-delusion, if we do not renounce our own sin with ease and security, because we believe those are bending under a still greater load of guilt, than yourself? It is time for us, to be as faithful to ourselves as we shall otherwise be, not otherwise wish we had been.

And another expedient, by which we endeavor to soften our odious character of our kind, is to represent them as perfect, when conscience brings them before our eyes, to content ourselves with ourselves. By this means, that most are very fond of considering one part of our characters as compensation for another part — whatever good qualities may flatter ourselves that we possess, are bringing them more against our faults, though we allow that we habitually violate the rules of duty in some respects, yet in the other hand we contend that we have virtues not so strong as our cause. Suppose let us favor a somewhat superficial judgment...
that may be applied to our own case, we have from us to secure us as much use of it as possible. Because in the estimation of mankind the faults of good men are pardoned on account of their virtues, it may strive to persuade ourselves that if one can but as well as bad qualities, bright spots as well as dark ones fill the eye to rest upon. But after all, when have done this, we have but attempted to be very generous in deceiving ourselves. We should not be so as to find an unrighteous and a palpable set of our vices, if we would but remember that as the word of God is no such exchange. It requires no half service, no partial obedience. God will have no divided service or our hearts. We may not like the false half of the heart of the price which one tries to sanctify our passions or our virtues. What is the declaration of James on this subject? For whatsoever shall keep the whole law yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. i.e. he who habitually is wilfully transgresses command of God given that he has within him a disposition, or would lead him to violate with the same readiness any other part of the divine laws. It is not so much the number of our sins, as it is the disposition, the willingness to sin, which is displeasing in the sight of God. Guilt is not a subject of mental calculation. It consists in the state of the heart, more than in the frequency of the act. Sedulousness, that he who seldom commits sin is to be considered as equally guilty with him, whose life is one continued course of sin. But that we beware, that we do not take to ourselves too much credit for our good qualities, pretend to find in them an atonement for our faults; as we may justly, assured, that so long as we voluntarily and habitually cherish one vice, we are willing to share that, though we sacrifice others, - we manifest in a state of feeling, which is in open rebellion against the laws of the Most High. The same authority, which has issued one command, given it as another, has issued another command, all the other commands, may we not put in temptation, nor void, destroy, in another? - Besides, even if we were permitted to count the number of virtues and the breaches of vices from which we are exempt, we at the former against the
latter, still we may make a very certain calculation for there are very voices which cannot possibly exist together: therefore it is no praise to us that we are free from thirst. For instance, aversion and prodigality, tenacity and feebleness, cannot dwell together in the same person. And it is this, if while we are aversive, we take to ourselves a form of being prodigal, if in the midst of prodigality we boast that aversion is not our sin, it is plain that claim what we do not deserve: for there is something profound in being exempt from none of these qualities when it is impossible for both qualities to exist together. But, I must dwell on the weakness of this self-sufficiency; it is sufficient to say of it, that it substitutes its own foolish self-righteousness as the infallible mark of goodness.

3 - There is another method by which we frequently do penance for sins, and that is by the very confession. We proceed with no earnestness, the fault of our nature is the strength of our temptations. In this description we find that sins of the soul must find shelter in the hardened heart. We do not deny that we have our defects, we are too much devoted to the plea of a free soul, if it may be we cherish in our bosoms these free passions, it may be, we cherish in our bosoms these free passions, our soul, our reason, our will, our will, our will, our will, our will.

But, I must dwell on the weakness of this self-sufficiency, it is sufficient to say of it, that it substitutes its own foolish self-righteousness as the infallible mark of goodness.
in the ways of duty at our times. Dear Sir, has given as he has not been unmindful of that weakness. are imperfect, but then God does not require us perfection. It is because we have the refined faculties and the celestial faculties of the angels glorified. In time their praises around the throne of the Lord that we are made the objects of such a state of discipline, as that in which we find ourselves.  

More frail, it is true. But Scripture reasons this frailty very differently from the manner in which we reason, when we wish to make an excuse for our vicissitudes. Does speak on this subject to his disciples? “The soul is willing but the flesh is weak.” He regards the weakness of his apostles, as a powerful motive with them to labor with the more zeal and earnestness to overcome it to gain strength. But is this the conclusion we draw from the frailty of our natures? Far from it. We need a motive to all the various duties of which we are capable in the cause of virtue. To a doctrine of God, we ought willingly yield to temptation. Then console ourselves with the idea that we are frail beings, creatures. But, if we shall be judged by our real defects, we shall be considered as rational beings, as the inhabitants of this world. As we are rational beings, we shall be judged by our real defects, we shall be considered as rational beings, as the inhabitants of this world.
to reduce us from our duty; yf we lay to these things, yet eternity will be long enough to reward us.

...tating the charge of our sins, it is almost always in our own fault that we yield to them. — What does it mean, then, that our King has chosen to educate us for the kingdom of his glory? — Let us be assured that if we yield to temptation, it is usually our own corrupt passions, and the severity of the trial, which subdues us, not.

Such, my friends, are some of the arts, by which men attempt to flatter themselves into sinful security. It is true, the end is not to sleep, yf often it makes not, the arts are to its shame. — The arts, the arts decay. These arts are some that we may deceive ourselves; but are we not the arts? — Have we forgotten, that while we are played lusts off these expediencies to secure the pleasures of sin, Sin One, who from on high looks through all the folds of our hearts, — One, who sees the folly and weakness of all our excuses? — Now in this our day let us beware of ourselves — let us be faithful to ourselves now, yf thou this fidelity may for the present cost us many a charm.

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O thou, who art the Searcher of hearts, who dost know all our imperfections, our frailties, our sins; to thee we look, imploring thee to guard us amidst all the temptations from which we are exposed. Preserve us, we earnestly beseech thee, from deceiving ourselves. Suffer us not to spend our time in endeavoring to find excuses for our sins, but may we use all our zeal to turn from the errors of our ways unto thee, the living stone, the God. May we guard with diligence against all the impositions of self-deception, against all the wiles of a wicked heart. Who can understand this? Cleanse then us from secret faults, let them not have the dominion over us.
tations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our strength, our redeemer. Save us from all the enemies of the peace of purity of our souls, yea from ourselves. We thank thee that on this day thou hast removed the cloud of spiritual darkness. Forgive us our inexcusable coldness and devotion of religious service. Finally admit us to the joy of thy presence through our Lord.