

A VISITATION SERMON.

And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.—ACTS XV. 36.

THERE be certain royal laws, which Christ and his apostles made for eternal use ; to the observation whereof all Christian nations and persons are unchangeably bound. And there be some ritual things, which were at the first convenient, but variable according to the difference of times and places. Strictly to impose all these circumstances on us, were to make us, not the sons, but the slaves of the apostles. That is a fond scrupulosity which would press us in all fashions with a conformity to the primitive times ; as if the spouse of Christ might not wear a lace or a border for which she could not plead prescription. *Diversitas rituum commendat unitatem fidei*, saith our Anselm. Let us keep the substance, for the shadow God hath left us at liberty. But yet when we look back upon those first patterns, and find a rule of discipline fit for the present times, in vain we should study a new, that are so well accommodated with the old. The business of the text and day is a *visitation* ; a practice which, at the first view of the words, can plead antiquity ; and by a review, shall plead the great utility. I know there be divers kinds of visitations ; but whether they be national, provincial, parochial, or capitular, they all have *auctoritatem uberrimam*, being grounded upon a practice apostolical ; and *usum saluberrimum*, (to use the words of St Augustine,) being of a physical nature, to prevent or cure distemperatures in the church of God.

Generally, I. The form of the words is a motion ; II. The matter, a visitation.

I. The motion was Paul's, the forwardest soldier in all the army of Christ : that winged husbandman, who ploughed up the fallow hearts of the Gentiles ; that with a holy zeal, greater than the ambition of Alexander, would sooner have wanted ground than desire to travel in the business of his Master. *Terra citius defecisset, quam studium prædicandi*. Indeed, he had found an unusual mercy, as himself delivers it : 'The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant toward me,' 1 Tim. i. 14 ; using an extraordinary phrase to express an extraordinary grace ; a word never the like used, for a mercy never the like exhibited. There is oil in the widow's cruse to sustain, 1 Kings xvii. 16 ; Aaron's was far more, it 'ran down to the skirts of his clothing,' Ps.

cxxxiii 2. Such a superabundant grace was in Paul. For sanctification ; many saints are commended for some special virtues : Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, David for thankfulness, Job for patience—Paul is praised for them all. For subduing of vices ; men most sanctified have had some tangs : as David of anger for Nabab's churlish answer ; Hezekiah had a smack of pride—setting aside concupiscence, Paul had no spot. For knowledge ; he was rapt up into heaven, there learned his divinity among the angels—his school being paradise, his university the third heaven, and God his tutor. For power ; his very clothes wrought miracles. God so trusted Paul, that he committed his whole church unto him. Thus was he honoured : the other apostles were sent *à Christo mortali*, Paul *à Christo immortal*. And with the like superabundant grace did he answer his charge ; that though he were *novissimus in ordine*, he was *primus in merito*. Yea, he is well called God's arrow, wounding every soul that heard him with the love of Christ. This was his motion, one act of his apostolical care.

II. The matter is a visitation. To visit is a word of great latitude, and signifies the performance of all pastoral duties : to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the weak, to correct the stubborn, to confirm the religious. Strictly, it imports a superior's scrutiny or examination of things under his charge ; as a steward in a family overlooks the under-servants : praising the forward, provoking the sluggard, and rectifying disorders, which are ready to creep in through the least connivance. This we shall the better apprehend, if we let the text fall into parts, of which we shall find seven :—

1. The visitors, Paul and Barnabas ; for this office was at first apostolical, and hath ever been episcopal.

2. The visited, their 'brethren'—whether the people under the pastors, or the pastors set over the people ; for as they ought to visit their own particular charges, so the bishops to visit them : yea, and even those visitors may be visited by such delegates as the prince appoints, who is the chief visitor under Christ.

3. The exercise, or frequent use of this office, 'Let us go again.' For the rareness of performing this duty may breed much inconvenience.

4. The moderation, or seasonableness of it, 'after certain days.' There must be some intermission, or else the assiduity may make it a burden, or bring it into contempt.

5. The latitude or extent of it, 'in every city ;' not calling all the world to one place, as the bishop of Rome did in his glory, summoning all nations to his consistory. They visit every city ; they compel not every city to visit them. Nor do they balk the greatest for fear, nor neglect the meanest in contempt ; but 'every city.'

6. The limitation, restraint, or confining of this exercise, 'where we have preached the word of God.' Pagans are out of their walk ; they meddle not with unbelievers, but with those grounds wherein they have sown the seeds of the gospel.

7. Lastly, the intent and scope of all, 'to see how they do :' *quomodo se habeant* ; whether they fail or thrive in their spiritual growth. These be the passages ; whereof with what brevity I can, and with what fidelity I ought.

1. The visitors : Paul and Barnabas. There is difference, I know, betwixt the apostles and bishops. For, besides their immediate calling and extraordinary endowments, the apostles' function was an unlimited circuit, *Ite in universum orbem* ; the bishop's is a fixed or positive residence in one city. All those acts which proceeded from supernatural privilege ceased with their

cause; as the gift of tongues, of miracles, and the like. Those tools that serve for the foundation are not the fittest for the roof. The great Master-builder made choice of such for the first stones which he meant not to employ in the walls. But this is the first thing I would here note;—

The first foundation of the church was laid in an inequality, and hath ever since so continued. Parity in government is the mother of confusion and disorder,* and disorder doth ill become the church of God; where all the strings or voices be unisons, or of one tenor, there can be no harmony. There be *επισκοποι*, *seers*, which signifies the duty of each pastor over his flock; and there be *πρεσβυτεροι*, *overseers*, such as must visit and overlook both flock and seers. In the Old Testament, together with the parity of priesthood, there was an imparity of government: one Levite above another, priests above them, the high priest above them all. Christ himself is said to be a 'priest after the order of Melchizedek:' he was of some order then; but we have those that would be priests without any order at all, that refuse to be ordered.

Take away difference, and what will follow, but an anabaptistical ataxy, or confusion. It was the saying of Bishop Jewel, or the jewel of bishops, All priests have *idem ministerium, sed diversam potestatem*. A bishop and an archbishop differ not in *potestatis ordinis, sed in potestate regiminis*. Nor doth a bishop differ from a pastor, *quoad virtutem sacerdotii, sed quoad potentiam jurisdictionis*. There is one indelible character of priesthood to them both. That great *Claviger* of heaven, who opens, and no man shuts, shuts, and no man opens, Rev. iii. 7, hath left two keys for the government of the church: the one, *clavem scientie*, the preaching of the gospel, which is the more essential part of our function; for a 'necessity is laid upon us, and woe unto us if we preach not the gospel,' if we turn not that key. The other, *clavem potentie*, the key of jurisdiction or discipline, which makes the church *aciem ordinatam*, an army well marshalled. The former imposeth a duty, and *hæc oportet facere*; the latter importeth a decency, and *hæc oportet fieri*. Thus did the great Shepherd of Israel govern his flock, with 'two staves,' Zech. xi. 7. One, the 'staff of bands,' sound doctrine; the other, the 'staff of beauty,' orderly discipline. St Paul joins them both together: the steadfastness of their faith, and the comeliness of their order, and makes them the matter of his joy in the Colossians, chap. ii. 5. Without order, faith itself would be at a loss. Even the stars do not fight from heaven, but in their order, Judg. v. 20. Therefore is our ministry called orders, to shew that we are bound to order above other professions. This orderly distinction of ecclesiastical persons is set down by the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. xii., placing some as the head, other as the eyes, other as the feet; all members of one body, with mutual concord, equal amity, but unequal dignity. To be a bishop, then, is not a numeral, but a muneral function; a priority in order, a superiority in degree. 'Who is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household?'—*quem Dominus constituit super familiam*,—Matt. xxiv. 45. All ministers of Christ have their due honour; some are worthy of double honour. Far be it from us sinners to grudge them that honour, whereof God himself hath pronounced them worthy. This first. Again:—

Paul and Barnabas. Paul was a man of ardent zeal; Barnabas is interpreted 'the son of consolation.' Paul would have Barnabas along with him, that the lenity of the one might somewhat mitigate and qualify the fervour of the other. Thus Moses was with Elias when they both met with Christ

* Arist. Polit.

transfigured on the mount. Elias was a fiery-spirited prophet, inflamed with holy zeal; Moses a prophet of a meek and mild spirit: these two together are fit servants to wait upon the Son of God. I do not say that either Paul wanted compassion or Barnabas fervency; but this I say, that both these tempers are a happy composition in a visitor, and make his breast like the sacred ark, wherein lay both Aaron's rod and the golden pot of manna, Heb. ix. 4: the rod of correction, the manna of consolation; the one a corrosive, the other a cordial. Spiritual fathers should be like natural mothers, that have both *ubera* and *verbera*; or like bees, having much honey, but not without a sting. Only, let the sting be the least in their desire or intention, and the last in execution; like God himself, *qui habet in potestate vindictam, sed mavult in usu misericordiam*.

There have been some who did put lime and gall into the milk; yea, ministered *pro lacte venenum*: Bonners and Gardiners, that gave too sharp physic for the disposition of their patients; that—as the Antiochians said of Julian,* taking occasion by the bull which he stamped on his coin—have gored the world to death; that, as if they had Saul's commission to vex the church of Christ, have concluded their visitations in blood. But mercy, no less than holiness, becomes the breastplate of Aaron. I deny not the necessity of jurisdiction, both corrective and coercive: the one restraining where is too much forwardness, the other enforcing where is slackness. There is a rod, and there is a sword. *Veniam ad vos in virga*; that is the rod. *Utinam abscindantur qui perturbant vos*; that is the sword. If we observe God's proceeding in the church, we shall find how he hath fitted men to the times and occasions. In the low and afflicted estate of Israel, they had Moses, a man of meek spirit, and mighty in wonders. Meek, because he had to do with a tetchy and froward people; mighty in wonders, because he had to do with a Pharaoh. When they were settled in a quiet consistence, they had a grave and holy Samuel. In their corrupted declination, they had a hot-spirited Elijah, who came in a tempest, as he went out in a whirlwind. These times of ours be of a sinful and depraved condition, therefore have need to be visited with spirits more stirring than those of the common mould. *Imo, veni Paulle cum virga*,†—Come, Paul, with thy rod. Rather let us smart with correction than run on to confusion.

2. The visited: their brethren. Such was that great Apostle's humility that he calls all believers brethren, to shew that he had but the privilege of a brother, and did no otherwise than all the rest bear the arms of the elder. Yea, why should not an apostle accept of that title, when the eternal Son of God 'is not ashamed to call us brethren?' Heb. ii. 11. The weakest Christian is a brother to the holiest saint, therefore not to be contemned. It is most unnatural for a man to despise his brother, the son of his own father. It is a brand set upon that tongue, which must burn with quenchless flames: 'That it spake against his brother, and slandered his own mother's son,' Ps. l. 20. Bishops are in the chiefest respect brethren to the ministers; in a meaner regard they are fathers. They are our fathers but in that respect whereby they govern us; but in that respect which doth save us, they are our brethren. *Fratres in salute, patres in ordine ad salutem*. Even princes should not scorn the brotherhood of their subjects; for howsoever on earth there is a necessity of these ceremonial differences, yet in the grave for our bodies, in heaven for our souls, there is no such distinction. If there be any disparity after this life, it shall be *secundum opera*, not *secundum officia*; proportioned to the works they have done, not to the

* Socrat., lib. vii., cap. 22.

† Aug.

honours they have borne. St Paul calls Timothy in one place his son, in another place his brother.

Bishops are brethren to ministers in a threefold relation:—By nature, so are all men; by grace, so are all Christians; by office, so are all pastors. He that, Matt. xxiv. 45, was called *rector super familiam*, ‘ruler over the household,’ the same is also termed, ver. 49, *συνδούλος*, ‘a fellow-servant’ with the rest of the meany:* all servants under one lord, though some superior in office to the rest. As in the civil state, within that honourable rank, both earls and lords are called barons, yet their dignities are not equal: every earl being a baron, but not every baron an earl. So in the state ecclesiastical, in respect of the general service of Christ, the dispensation of his word and mysteries, bishops and priests are all brethren and fellow-presbyters; yet though the styles be communicable, the terms are not convertible: for every bishop is a priest, but every priest is not a bishop. As this therefore no way diminisheth their authority, for *episcopus est sacerdotum princeps*, saith Ignatius;† so it commendeth their humility to call us brethren: If we offend *paterna agant*, let them correct us as their children; while we do well, *fraterna teneant*, let them encourage us their brethren. God is not tied to means; for illumination of the mind, he often lights a great lamp of the sanctuary at a little wax-taper, as he did Paul by Ananias. And for moving of affections, often with a puff of wind he stirs up the waves of the great ocean. *Deus non est parvus in parvo*; not straitened according to the smallness of the organ. On the one side love and gravity, on the other side obedience and sincerity, on all sides holiness and humility, become the ministers of Jesus Christ.

3. The exercise, or due practice of this office: ‘Let us go again.’ Let us go; that is, go personally. Let us go again; that is, go frequently.

(1.) Let us go; not send our deputy, but go ourselves. He that sends sees by another’s eyes, and takes the state of things upon trust. If we go, we see by our own, and our own eyes be our best informers. How is he *episcopus* that never overlooks? So St Jerome, in his epistle to Nepotian, *nitatur esse quod dicitur*. He is an ill shepherd that does not know *vultum pecoris*. ‘Know the state of thy flocks and the face of thy herds,’ Prov. xxvii. 23. Desire to see them, *quomodo Moses voluit videre Deum, γυωσῶς*, face to face. In the proverb, *Domini oculus pascit equum, et vestigia ejus pinguefaciunt agrum*,—The master’s eye feeds the horse; the presence of the bishop, like the north wind, dispels infection. It was Paul’s continual fear, some prevarication in his absence: ‘I fear I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found to you such as you would not,’ 2 Cor. xii. 20. St Peter’s shadow wrought miracles, but now the bishop’s shadow will work no miracles. This is one special thing to be visited and examined, the residence of pastors in their charges. It is an unhappy thing for a man to be a stranger at home. Damasus‡ compares such to wanton women, who no sooner bear children, but presently put them forth to nurse, that with less trouble they may return to their old pleasure. Peraldus, a Popish writer, is so bitter against those that feed their flocks by deputies, that he says, It is as if a man should marry a wife, and suffer another to get children by her. *Illudque Clivtoræi, magis salsum quam falsum; vicariam quidem salutem, personalem vero perniciem, talibus manere*.

I know there is a residence personal and pastoral: and he that is a stranger to the pulpit, though he straggle not out of the bounds of his parish, is the greatest non-resident. And I grant that in some cases a dispensation

* That is, *ménage*, the household.—Ed.

† Ad Trall.

‡ Ep. 4, ad Episc.

is requisite—*cedat minus majori*; yet it is no hurt to pray, God persuade them all to dwell in their own tents. But it is not well for a preacher to be like a door, when it is once oiled, then to leave creaking. It was a friar's conceit upon Gen. vi., when the clergy, those 'sons of God,' began to dote upon the 'daughters of men,'—to be enamoured of temporal preferments,—then by such marriages monsters were begotten in the church, and the sanctuary of God was filled with giants, far from the shape of Christians. It is pity but the bishop should forbid the banns; and if any such marriage be, it is more than time to make it a nullity, by divorcing them from idleness, covetousness, and ambition. 'The faithful steward is he that gives the household their portion of meat in due season,' Luke xii. 42. He must give them all meat, young and old, rich and poor, weak and strong. In due season, that is, when their appetites call for it; nay, he must not always stay till they desire it. *Propriis manibus*, he must do it with his own hands: he is but a deputy, and therefore is not evermore allowed a deputy. Let us go ourselves.

(2.) Let us go again. The building of the church goes slowly forward; though there be many labourers, there be more hinderers: God never had so many friends as enemies. If the overseers look not well to the business, too many will make church-work of it; for such loitering is now fallen into a proverb. Men are fickle, as were the Galatians and churches of Asia; if they be not often visited, they will soon be corrupted. Luther said in Wittenberg, that a few fanatical fellows had pulled down more in a short space than all they could build up again in twenty years. The devil is always busy, and it is no small labour to earth that fox. The plant which we would have thrive must be often watered. The apostles did visit to confirm and comfort, because that was a time of persecution. Our mischief is intestine: *Pax à paganis, pax ab hæreticis, nulla pax à falsis filiis*. Let but Moses turn his back, and ascend the mount, to be Israel's lieger with God, the people presently speak of making a calf. He went but on their embassy to their Maker: yet, as if they had seen him take his heels and run into the wilderness, is no sooner vanished out of their sight, than out of their mind, and they fall to idolatry. Our churches are not like Irish timber; if they be not continually swept, there will be spiders and cobwebs. If the servants sleep, the master's field is not privileged from tares. Therefore to prevent dangers, and to heal diseases, frequent visitation is necessary for the church of Christ.

4. The moderation, or seasonableness of it: 'after certain days.' *Ex assidue vilitas*; that which is too common becomes cheap, and loseth credit. Due respirations are requisite in the holiest acts. God is so favourable to his creatures, that he requires them not to be overtoiled in the works of his own service. When the temple was a-preparing, the thirty thousand workmen wrought not continuedly, but with intermission, 1 Kings v. 14. One month they were in Lebanon, and two at home; so their labour was more generous and less burdensome. Ever ten thousand did work, while twenty thousand breathed. The mind that is overlaid with business grows dull and heavy; over-lavish expense of spirits leaves it heartless. The best horse will tire soonest, if the reins lie loose on his neck. Perfection comes by leisure, and no excellent thing is done at once. The gourd, which came up in a night, withered in a day; but the plants that live long rise slowly. It is the rising and setting of many suns that ripens the business both of nature and art. Who would not rather choose many competent meals than buy the gluttony of one day with the fast of a whole week? Therefore the

reverend fathers of the church observe their due times of visiting ; and particular pastors have their set days of feeding. He is an ill fisher that never mends his net ; a bad mower that never whets his scythe.

There be some so mad of hearing, that, as if their preacher had ribs of iron, and a spirit of angelical nature, they will not suffer him to breathe ; but are as impatient of such a pause as Saul was of David's sickness : 'Bring him to me in the bed, that I may slay him,' 1 Sam. xix. 15. Such, and no more, is their pity to their minister. Bring him though he lie sick in his bed ; spare him not, though his heat and heart be spent. And if he satisfy not their unseasonable, unreasonable desires, they exclaim and break out into bitter invectives against us : not unlike the Chinese, that whip their gods when they do not answer them. Such misgoverned feeders should be stinted to their measure, as the Israelites were to an omer. God will never thank us for killing ourselves to humour our hearers.

5. The extent, or latitude of it : 'in every city.' First, such was their favour and indulgence, they went to every city ; not summoned every city to appear before them. Our grave dioceses do follow the blessed apostles in this step : they visit us in our several deaneries and divisions, without compelling the remote dwellers to travel unto their consistories.

Again, 'in every city :' such was their impartial justice, and most equal love to all ; the greatest were not exempted from their jurisdiction, nor the least neglected of their compassion. The holiest congregations may be blemished with some malefactors. Rome, and Corinth, and Ephesus, though they were all famous cities, had no less need of apostles for their visitants than they had for their founders. Three traitors kindle a fire, two hundred and fifty captains bring sticks to it, and all Israel is ready to warm themselves at it, Num. xvi. It was happy for Israel when they had but one Achan, Josh. vii. ; and yet that one Achan was enough to make them unhappy. The innocence of so many thousands was not so forcible to excuse his one sin, as his one sin was to taint all the people. One evil man may kindle that fire which the whole world cannot quench. Shall Jeroboam be an idolater alone ? No ; he can no sooner set up his calves, but his subjects, like beasts, are presently down on their knees.

Where stands that Utopia, that city which is in so good case that it need not be visited ? Sin doth multiply so fast that the poor preacher cannot outpreach it ; yea, it is well if the bishop himself, with all his authority, can suppress it. We cannot say always whence these evils come, but we are sure they are. You have peradventure heard or seen a motion, a puppet-play ; how the little idols leap, and move, and run strangely up and down. We know it is not of themselves ; but there is a fellow behind which we see not, it is he that doth the feat. We see in our parishes strange motions : a drunken companion bearding his minister, a contentious incendiary vexing him with actions and slanders ; an obstinate Papist carries away his recusancy, scorns the preacher, seduceth the people : this is a strange kind of puppet-play ; but God knows who it is behind the curtain that gives them their motion ; only we are sure they cannot thus move themselves. There are many meetings, and much ado, as if sin should be punished : a jury is empanelled, a sore charge is given ; the drunkard shall be made an example, Good-ale shall be talked with, whoredom shall be whipped, and all shall be well. We look for present reformation ; but it commonly proves like the juggler's feast in Suidas : a table furnished with all manner of dainties in show, whereof when they came to taste, they found nothing but air. But I pass from the extent, to—

6. The limitation, or restraint of it: 'where we have preached the word of the Lord.' Not every city, but every city and place that hath received the word of instruction. No visiting a garden but where some seeds have been planted; that which is all weeds is left to a higher visitation: 'God shall judge them that are without,' 1 Cor. v. 13. One would think that the word of God were so prevailing, that it should beat down enormities faster than Satan can raise them. But we find, by miserable experience, that even in those cities where the gospel hath abounded, sin hath superabounded; and that this glorious sun hath not dispelled and overcome all those fogs and mists that have surged from hell. But if the sun cause a stench, it is a sign there is some dunghill nigh; let it reflect upon a bed of roses, there is all sweetness.

Shall we lay the blame upon the preachers? That were unjust in our own consciences. What city in the world is so rich in her spiritual provision as this? Some whole countries within the Christian pale have not so many learned and painful pastors as be within these walls and liberties. It looks like the firmament in a clear night, bespangled with refulgent stars of different magnitude, but all yielding comfortable light 'to guide our feet in the way of peace.' The church in Constantinople, wherein Nazianzen preached, was called *ἀναστάσις*, the Resurrection Church, in respect of the great concourse and assembly of people. Most churches in this city may well bear that name. Where is the fault then? I could happily tell you of some causes: the great profanation of God's Sabbath, the perfunctory hearing of his sacred word, the cages of unclean birds, brothels and drinking-schools, the negligence of the secular magistrate, the exemplary corruption of rulers, the sinful indulgence of parents and masters in their families, when the mouths of their children and servants be filled with uncorrected oaths and blasphemies. Oh that we might see an end of these things before we see an end of all things! The last point is—

7. The intent, or end of all: 'to see how they do.' First, to see how the pastors do whom they had set over particular congregations. The apostles had been careful in their first election; and good reason: 'Lay hands suddenly on no man,' saith St Paul. There is a story in the legend, how a bishop devoted to the service of Our Lady, in the agony of death, prayed her to be his mediator, as he had been her chaplain. To whom she answered, that for his other sins she had obtained pardon, but his rash imposition of hands was a case which her Son would reserve to himself. But some that were fit in the choice, may prove unworthy in the progress: therefore must be visited, to 'see how they do.' For if the physician be sick, what shall become of his patients? Certainly a minister's life is full of honour here, and hereafter too; so it is full of danger here, and hereafter too. Oh, what an honour it is to labour in God's harvest, to be an ambassador from Christ, to remit and retain sins, to dress and lead the bride, to sit on thrones and judge the nations! Again, what a danger is it to answer for souls lost by our silence, to be guilty of blood by either teaching or living amiss! For howsoever the doctrine itself be the light, yet the preacher's life is the lantern that carries it, and keeps it from blowing out; and it is an easier defect to want Latin or learning than to want honesty and discretion. God hath given us the keys; but if they rust upon our hands, whether through foul carriage or want of use, they will but serve to lock ourselves out of doors. Therefore we must submit to a visitation.

'How they do.' What! must it be examined what store of souls they have converted? No, it is the measure, not the success, that God looks to.

St Paul himself doth not say, *Plus profui omnibus*,—I did more good than the rest; but, *Plus laboravi omnibus*,—I took more pains than the rest. ‘I laboured more abundantly than they all,’ 1 Cor. xv. 10. Our reward shall be ‘according to our works,’ not according to the fruit of our works. And our labour, however fruitless among men, ‘shall not be in vain in the Lord,’ ver. 58. It was the complaint of a great prophet, ‘I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought; yet my reward is with the Lord,’ Isa. xlix. 4. Though we cannot save you, yet our desire and endeavour to do it shall save ourselves. We give God what we have, he asks us no more: this is enough to honour him and reward us.

‘How they do.’ What! how they thrive in their temporals, what riches or preferments be given them? No, as this is none of our ambition, so it is none of our luck or portion. Men suck our milk, like mules, and then kick us with their heels. Cominæus says, he that would be a favourite must not have a hard name, that so he might be easily remembered when promotions are a-dealing. It seems that preachers have hard names, for none remember them in the point of benefit. The world regards them as poor folks do their children, they would be loath to have any more of them, because they are troubled to maintain them they have. In Jeroboam’s time the lowest of the people were made priests, and now priests are made the lowest of the people. A layman, like a mathematical line, runs on *ad infinitum*; only the preacher is bound to his competency, yea, and defrauded of that. But let all preferments go; so long as we can find preferment in your consciences, and be the instruments of your salvation, we are content.

‘How they do.’ Not only the pastors, but even all the brethren; their errors must also be looked into. St Paul mentions the house of Chloe, 1 Cor. i. 11, ‘It hath been declared to me, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions and faults among you;’ from thence he had information of their disorders. Answerable to which, we have church-wardens, they are the house of Chloe, bound by oath to present misdemeanours, that sins may have their just censure. Let them on the one side take heed of spleen, that they do nothing maliciously. So their accusation may be just, and their affection unjust; and in doing that they shall sin, which they had sinned in not doing. *Ille dat poenam, tu amisisti laudem*. On the other side, of connivance and partiality; for there is an *Omnia bene* that swallows all vanities. Drunkenness, uncleanness, swearing, profanation of the Sabbath, go abroad all the year, and when the visitation comes, they are locked up with an *Omnia bene*. This is not that charity that ‘covereth sin,’ but a miserable indulgence that cherisheth sin.

In the creation there was an *Omnia bene*; God reviewed all his works, and they were ‘exceeding good.’ In our redemption there was an *Omnia bene*; he hath done all things well, he hath made the blind to see, and the lame to go; a just confession and applause. Here was an *Omnia bene* indeed, but there never was an *Omnia bene* since.

Let there be therefore a visitation with the rod, lest God come to visit with fire. God hath a fourfold visitation:—1. A visitation of grace and mercy: *Visitavit et redemit*,—‘He hath visited and redeemed his people,’ Luke i. 68. He came not only to see us, but to save us: not only to live among us, but to die for us. So Paul applies that of the psalm, ‘What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?’ Heb. ii. 6. The time wherein Jerusalem heard the oracles, and saw the miracles of our blessed Saviour, is called ‘the day of her visitation.’ 2. A visitation of pity and compassion: so when God relieved Sarah’s

barrenness, he is said to 'visit her,' Gen. xxi. 1. Thus he did visit Job in his sickness: 'Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.' This duty he commends to us for true religion indeed: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God is, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,' James i. 27. To these works he promiseth the kingdom of heaven: 'You have visited me when I was sick, or in prison; therefore come, ye blessed,' Matt. xxv. 43. 3. A visitation of severity and correction; so Job calls his trial a visitation, Job vii. 18, and we call the pestilence, God's visitation. This he threatened even to the offenders of the house of David: 'I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes,' Ps. lxxxix. 32, This visitation is not without mercy; yea, it is an argument of mercy; for when God refuseth to visit, that is the sorest visitation of all. Therefore we pray, 'Look down from heaven, O Lord; behold, and visit thy vine,' Ps. lxxx. 14. 4. Lastly, a visitation of wrath and fury: 'Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?' Jer. v. 29. So he visited Egypt, when he slew their first-born; the old world, when he drowned it; Sodom, when he burned it: 'I will go down and see.' Thus shall he one day visit the wicked, and with fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

God's visitation cannot be eluded or avoided; there will be no appealing to a higher court, no revoking by prohibitions, no hiding from the censure, no corrupting the judge, no answering the matter by proxy, no commuting the penalty; no preventing, but either by living innocent, or dying penitent.

Therefore let us all visit ourselves, that we may save God the labour. This is a duty to which we are all naturally backward: like elephants that choose troubled waters, and refuse to drink in clear springs, for fear of seeing their own deformities. Our unthrifths, that are run so far in arrearages, they are loath to hear of a reckoning. Or, it may be, we have chiding consciences; and then, like those that are troubled with curst and scolding wives at home, love to be rambling abroad. But it is better to have our wounds searched while they are green, than to have our limbs cut off for being festered. Descend we, then, into the depth and corners of our own hearts, let us begin our visitation there; mortifying all our rebellious lusts, and subduing our affections to the will of our Maker. So only shall we pass clear and uncondemned by the great Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ. I have done: *Deo gloria, vobis gratia, mihi venia.* Amen.