

SERMON XVI.

BY THE REV. HENRY HURST, A.M.

SOMETIME FELLOW OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

HOW MAY WE INQUIRE AFTER NEWS, NOT AS ATHENIANS, BUT AS CHRISTIANS, FOR THE BETTER MANAGEMENT OF OUR PRAYERS AND PRAISES FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD?

For all the Athenians and strangers that were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.—
Acts xvii. 21.

IN the text chosen for me to speak of, and for you to hear, I do observe, and would have you also consider, [that] we meet with a concourse of people who pretended to be the *virtuosi* of that age; and, for aught I do discern, may as well deserve the character, as *they* do in our age *who* spend their time in inquiring into useless novelties.

If our learned men equal the learning of these Athenians; if students from foreign parts flock to us to perfect their course of studies, as to Athens; if merchants in equal numbers, but with unequal riches, attend the custom-houses, and fill the exchanges, with us as with them; if there were some travellers who came only to see and talk, who were *οι επιδημουντες ξενοι*, “the strangers there;” if each sort had business of [no?] greater importance to mind than to spend their time in hearing what others could tell, or telling what others would be pleased with hearing; (which was the folly and distemper of those Athenians and strangers;) the same is the epidemical folly and disease of our age, and of all sorts of the *beaux-esprits*, “refined spirits,” with us. The cure of this disease is the design of this discourse in this case:—

How may we inquire after news, not as Athenians, but as Christians, for the better management of our prayers and praises for the church of God?

He that inquires, to satisfy his curiosity or his sinful prejudices or malicious wishes, and to boast and triumph in the sorrows of the church of God; and he that inquires not at all, nor concerneth himself with these works of God; do both highly offend. The one rejoices in the destruction of Zion; (as it is, Obad. 12;) the other is “at ease in Zion,” (Amos vi. 1,) and “is not grieved for the affliction of Joseph:” (verse 6;) and each does provoke the displeasure of the Lord against themselves. Amos pronounceth a woe against the one; (verse 1;) and an utter extirpation is threatened against the other. (Obad. 18.) Such “careless ones” as neither fear the evil, nor hope for the good, of Zion; neither pray for its deliverance, nor do praise God for his salvation to Zion; greatly sin, and are likely to

be deeply punished. (Isai. xxxii. 9—12.) That we may escape both, the case warns us not to inquire Athenian-like, but to inquire as becomes Christians, and suitably pray for a *distressed*, or praise God for a *delivered*, church.

In stating this unusual case, it will, I think, be best to draw it out into some previous propositions, which shall make way for the clearer resolution of it.

PROPOSITIONS.

PROPOSITION I.—*The casuist doth grant that in some cases we may inquire what is the news that is abroad.*—Whosoever asketh direction how to do an action, is first persuaded of the lawfulness of the thing he would do. “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?” (Micah vii. 6,) implieth that I may, yea, ought to, come before him. So here the casuist is of opinion [that] we may inquire, but is solicitous lest you should, with the most, inquire amiss; and therefore would direct you the best way of doing what is lawful to be done. If there were a doubt, the case should be first, “May it be done?” not, “How is it to be done?”

PROP. II. *News which spreads abroad in the world is of very different nature.*

1. *Some, trifling reports.*—Below the gravity and prudence of a man to receive from a reporter, or to communicate to any hearer.

2. *Others, of a very particular, private, personal concern, and among such as are of mean and abject state.*—Which as they rise among them, so it is fit they should die amongst them; or, if reported, are of no more concern to a judge or magistrate or the public, than a counter-scuffle of boys in their sports to a general and his army.

3. *There are other news of a public nature, and which concern the state or church.*—Which import some threatening danger, or some smiling providence; the approaches of somewhat more than ordinary for the *good* of mankind or the church of Christ. Such was the news of Joseph,—that he was alive, lord of Egypt; and that he had sent to fetch Jacob and his family, (the church of God in that day,) to preserve a seed alive. Such was the news of Cyrus’s coming to the throne, favouring the Jews, and issuing-out the edict of their return; which made the Jews, dreamers-like, think it was too good to be true. Or when *sad* news alarms the world; as when rumours of wars come one upon another, and threaten the world with an universal deluge of blood.

In such cases, it is yet considerable, how certain, or how dubious, the reports are which we hear; how near at hand, or how far off, the effects are which attend the good or bad news we hear; how likely it is the evil may be diverted, lessened, or removed, or whether inevitable and growing great; how probable, or sure, the hoped good accompanying the providences of God in such cases is, &c. Of such-like news this case speaketh. Tidings which do import great good or great evil to the church of God, call upon every member of the church to inquire into [them].

PROP. III. *In such cases the persons are of very different capacity, who (as they ought) do inquire.*—And according to the different capacity each is in, so each ought to inquire what may be done by himself to prevent, lessen, or remove afflicting evils; or what may be done to hasten, increase, and secure hoped or enjoyed good. This by such persons ought to be seasonably and effectually done.

The Divine Providence doth advance some to places of the highest power and authority; and intrusteth them with advantages of being “shields of the earth,” (Psalm xlvii. 9,) “nursing fathers and nursing mothers” to his church, (Isai. xlix. 23,) “saviours upon Mount Zion.” (Obad. 21.) They that are “defenders of the faith,”—they should inquire, what tidings for or against the church; that they may know what they are to do in repelling violence and injustice, or in promoting the welfare and safety of the public. The inquiry such make is, and ought to be, much more exact, constant, and solicitous. These should not only receive intelligence, but seek it; maintain such as from abroad are fit to give account what is framing against the public good of the civil state, or against the good of the church of God: neither of which will be long in safety, peace, or prosperity, if those who are watchmen, and like shepherds, should neglect to inquire what ravening beasts usually haunt the adjoining woods or wildernesses. (Ezek. xxxiv. 2.)

Now, because it would be too tedious to mention the several ranks of men concerned to inquire into news of a public nature;—as counsellors and lawgivers, judges and inferior magistrates, martial and fighting men, who are to “turn the battle in the gate;”—ministers of the word, and spiritual guides of the church, yea, and all the members of the church, are to inquire into what God is doing for or against his church, as they have in their present station opportunity to do; as Nehemiah did, who inquired of them that came from Jerusalem, what condition that city and people of God were in. (Chap. i. 2.)

They who have any ability and power in their hand to do good, to help the church of God, or any part of it under distress; proportionably every one of them are to awaken their inquiries after the state of the church, and set themselves with diligence to relieve it: and since we may (as it is our duty) praise God for his mercy shown to the church, and pray for mercy when wanted, we should know by inquiry what is our duty herein. So then by this we may see [that] it is the particular office of some to inquire, and ought to be the care of all in their places to know, what the church needs, and they ought to do for it.

I. *But none may inquire like the Athenians.*—Into which we must inquire now, and pray the liberty of making discovery of this, by what helps we can meet with, both from human and sacred testimony,—*what they were, &c.*

1. “These Athenians began to be a people about the year of the world 2496, about 1558 years before Christ’s birth;” * and when

* *Incepit regnum Atheniensium anno mundi 2496, ante Christum natum 1558.*—HOTTOMANNI *Lexicon Universale, ad vocem, Athenæ.*

this was written, it was the fifty-first year of Christ. It was at that time a city one thousand six hundred and nine years old under various changes, and grew up to great trade for merchants, and as great learning; for it was, through a long course of years, the university of the world, and a place that wandering wits delighted to visit. Now, among such *capriccios*, so many "curious and inquisitive humours," succeeding one another, and inventing new things, and glorying in the invention; no wonder that their inquiries were vain, or ridiculous, or mischievous to others. If sad, threatening news were reported, they inquired into it; they betook themselves to their antiquity, their power, wisdom, and their idols, &c. So did Nineveh of old; (Nahum ii. 8—10;) so did a city more ancient than Nineveh. If tidings affrighted Rome, the *Palladium*, the duration of the city, *Roma æternum duratura*, and such-like, are inquired after, as the security they trust in. Jerusalem, though better taught, yet became so brutish as to inquire after vain and helpless refuges against bad news: "The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these:" (Jer. vii. 4:) or else they condemn the rod, and Him that useth it: "Can the ancient city, the glory of the world, be destroyed? Or shall the course of its prosperity, after many hundred years, be changed into misery?" This were, Athenian-like, to inquire into the effects of new causes. If new judgments threaten us for our old sins, and we hear that they approach, a Christian inquiry should be, "How we may prevent the execution by a speedy return unto God."

2. *The temper* the Athenians are represented to us in, will help us to guess what inquiries they would make upon new emergencies: and our own reason will tell us that all such inquiries unbeseem a Christian. Let us view the Athenians in their temper, as Plutarch, Varro, Polybius, Aristophanes, and Aristotle, &c., give it us.

(1.) *Very suspicious and jealous*.—Now, whatever other abilities a man may have to make right inquiries of new occurrences, this one vice or distemper is enough to disturb all. Jealousy will take amiss all that is good, and suspect it is evil: it will aggravate evil, and make it worse than it is. No right judgment is made; or if a man of such temper stumble upon the right nature, tendency, and importance of unusual things reported, yet he cannot fix or be constant in it.

(2.) The Athenians were naturally *prone to anger*.—[They] soon took fire upon what they heard, or saw, and thought to be worthy of their anger; and this was "a perpetual anger," *οργη αιμνηστος*. Now jealousy, like a dark cloud, darkens our thoughts and judgments: anger, like the lightning that breaks out of that cloud, is of more destructive fire than of directing light, and too quick and impetuous to allow us time of thinking aright or inquiring aright. If the news, then, displease this passion, the man cannot judge aright, till he hath mastered his anger, and can debate the whole calmly with himself. Where this double rage prevailed, none could inquire into new occurrences in right manner, nor be an example for us to imitate.

(3.) They were "*close dissemblers, very deceitful.*"*—Like wounds healed outwardly, but festering; in whose mind, seemingly healed of their anger and disgusts, there is undiscerned enmity, and resolutions to revenge. Italianated men can smile when they intend to cut your throat; [are] affable to enemies, and disguise their hatred in the commendations of you to your face; salute with mortal embraces, and clasp you with the arms they unexpectedly will imbrue in your blood. Now what inquiry will such-tempered men entertain you with, upon any news they meet with? They inquire into particulars which may facilitate their revenges, that may satisfy their malice, and endanger an innocent, which an honest, plain-hearted reporter never dreamt of: like Joab inquiring the news at court,—how Abner was entertained, how long since, and which way he went, what company with him, &c.; which inquiries an honest heart would never have mistrusted [that they] came from a bloody heart, if Joab's bloody hand had not at last appeared. (2 Sam. iii. 23—27.)

(4.) They were generally a *people of an unblushing countenance.*—Seldom dashed out of countenance, or discovered by a change of it; men of a great confidence, which in our plainer dialect we should be apt to call "impudence;" that dare ask any question, and attempt to pry into closets and cabinet-councils; that fear no rebuke for any saucy carriage, or for any false lies they spread; that could either disguise, lessen, or deny any good news they heard, or could add to and increase the bad; could "perversely discourse and comment on all occurrences."† It was grown up into a proverb, and so used by the ingenious poet, when he would express a shameless and bold fellow, ready to contrive and execute any mischief.‡ Such a tempered people were the Jews; (Jer. vi. 15;) who rightly interpreted nothing the prophet told them; who inquired, indeed, "What news?" but never inquired with a humbled, repenting, reforming mind.

(5.) They were *very great lovers of praise, proud, and contemners of others.*—They accounted all other people unjust intruders into other men's proprieties. They boasted themselves to be the only nation against which no lease of ejection might be sealed.|| All other were Barbarians to them; as if they only were the men of wisdom, humanity, and arts, and all others were fools, ill-natured, and as ill-bred. The rank smell of this you have in the philosopher, who gave thanks to the gods that he was a man, not a woman; a Grecian, not a Barbarian; and, among Grecians, that he was a philosopher, that is, bred at Athens, and born there. Of such proud ones we may say, as David said of them of his time, "God is not in all their thoughts. As for all their enemies they puff at them." (Psalm x. 4—6.) All new occurrences of providence are slighted or perverted by these men.

* *Ἵππολοι, εὐδολοί, fallaces, περβόδι.*—PLATO, PLUTARCHUS; ZACHARY BOGAN'S *Archæologia Attica.* † *Κακὸς ἀγορευεὶν ἐκ πρῶτος τροπού.* ‡ *Ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου τ' ἐστὶν Ἀττικὸν βλέπον.*—ARISTOPHANIS *Nubes*, 1176. *Id est, κακουργὸν βλέμμα καὶ δραστήκιον,* as the scholiast. "Upon thy face appears the Attic look."—WHEELWRIGHT'S Translation. That is, "a mischievous and impudent aspect," according to the interpretation which the scholiast gives.—EDIT. || *Ἀυτοχθόνες.* ["The genuine sons of the soil."] *Vide BUDÆUM in verbum.*

They cannot inquire aright into the works of God nor into the works of men. All with such men is turned into an advancing of their own praise and disdain of others. In the Athenians' answer to Gelon, offering them assistance against Xerxes, provided he might command either by sea or land; a modest proposal for a king to make, who offered two hundred ships, twenty-eight thousand armed men, and provision for his own and all the Grecian soldiers during the wars: but "the Athenians will not yield, who were ever esteemed best at sea, and for this praised by Homer."* Thus the pride of these self-conceited ones lost the benefit of a good offer, and turned away the news of such help from themselves, assailed with an army reckoned up to be two million six hundred and forty-one thousand, six hundred and ten, beside victuallers, eunuchs, and loose women that followed the camp.

(6.) They were such as were full of "enmity," (Αττική εχθρα,) and very prone to speak contemptuously one of another; scurrilous and abusive discourses of persons or things.—Hence many quarrels within themselves, and wars with their neighbours.† These Athenians took a liberty in this abusive way of speaking against any; but more particularly against the chief, the *optimates*, or "nobles," among them; and took this liberty at the Eleusinian feasts kept in honour to Ceres, when, with a veil cast over their faces, these lewd scoffers did bespatter all that passed by them, and reproached them with all they had by chance or inquiry heard of their betters.‡

(7.) They were unruly and terrible to their governors.—Which may easily find credit with you, if you consult the various changes of governments among them. § And Aristotle, when he mentions some of their rights as extorted, forced from their kings, sufficiently intimates this fierceness of the people and their terribleness to the rulers. But when kings were turned into rulers for ten years and "made accountable," || and this decennial rule after seventy years dwindled into an annual rule, the people grew more unruly in their deportment, and more terrible in their discontents; and in their rage many times punished their best governors with the ostracism, that is, with ten years' banishment; which exile was "not a punishment for crimes, but an appeasing of the envy of the common people." ¶ When the Athenian discontents employed them[selves] in discovering news of the government and governors, you will not need to be told how they inquired, or why; to be sure, so as neither you nor I may inquire.

(8.) They were, as is observed, malicious observers of the deportment of the strangers who sojourned among them.—So that strangers were never secure in their persons, name, or affairs. Quick-sighted malice, prying into the temper, designs, and actions of students, merchants, and travellers, sojourning among them, either did misrepresent all to

* *Athenienses non assentientur, utpote qui semper aliis Græcis navali apparatu antecelluerunt.*—PEZELII *Mellificium Historicum.* † *Bellandi cupidiore quam eat esset.* "They were more than enough desirous of fighting."—EDIT. ‡ PLUTARCHUS in *Vita Syllæ.* HESYCHIUS. § *Vide SIGONIUM De Republicâ Atheniensi, lib. 1. cap. 1.* || *Referendis rationibus obnoxium.*—PAUSANIAS *Rerum Atticarum Liber.* ¶ *Non improbitalis castigatio, sed vulgaribus animis insita invidiæ placatio.*—ERASMI *Chilides.*

others, or received all misrepresented by others; and if malice attained its ends herein, it ended either in the ruin or great danger of the innocent, who were as far from fear, as they were far from giving cause of fear to any. To sum up all in brief: since we are from good testimony assured that the Athenians were suspicious, angry, dissemblers, boldly impudent, lovers of their own praise, and as much vilifiers of others, quarrelsome and contentious, unruly, terrible to their governors, and disingenuous to the height of malice against strangers sojourning with them, (though some were better among them,) we may not fetch our copy from such persons, nor inquire as the most of such kind of men would inquire. Such cannot but offend in the matter, rules, ends, and manner, of inquiring after new things.

Hitherto we have consulted *men* in their reports of the Athenian temper: let us now see what *the text and context* will afford us; for these will be a most sure rule, by which we may know how news-mongers there did pump one another. These inquired,

(1.) *With strong prejudices against truth, and with as inveterate opinion and inclination to their own errors.*—So here citizens and philosophers entertain the gods of Asia, Europe, and Africa; hold this polytheism, and will not see into the truth [which] the apostle preached,—one God,—and their own altar fully owned by its inscription: “To the unknown God.” In this they might have seen St. Paul’s orthodoxy, and their own error, in a matter of great concern to all mankind.

(2.) *With curiosity more to know what other men believe and do in religion, than serious purpose to know what they themselves should believe and do.*—Had these Athenians inquired with sober and considerate resolutions to receive truth, it might have been a happy opportunity of conversion “from dumb idols to the living and true God.” These inquiries came with *Τι αν θελοι*; “What would this babbler have?” (Verse 18;) and, *Δυναμιστα γινωσκειν*; “May we know?” (Verse 19.) Here is not one word of inquiry that they might be saved. “Their foolish hearts were darkened,” while they inquire after knowledge; as Rom. i. 21.

(3.) They inquire *with pride and contempt of the persons of whom they inquire.*—So did these philosophers. Before they thoroughly considered what the apostle preached, and how he confirmed his assertions, they do censure him as an empty fellow, who talked much, nimbly, and smoothly; but that was all with them; as if there were no weight in his arguments, nor any thing of moment in his doctrines. They despise him, and give him the most contemptible name of a “babbling.” (Verse 18.)

(4.) *With unreasonable partiality, they confess their own ignorance.*—There is a God unknown to them, to whom they had erected an altar, and offered sacrifices. Now here comes a man of a sober deportment, of quick and ready parts, clear judgment, and a close disputer, who offers to instruct them, and tell them who this unknown God is, and how he ought to be worshipped: but, brutes as they were, they will rather be ignorant still, than learn by the

apostle. And though a patient and attentive hearing of the apostle would have filled Athens with greater and better news than ever was brought to their ears; yet they, who made it their business to hear all news, make it their sin and folly to refuse this news.

(5.) *With resolutions not to be persuaded, though they were silenced or convinced.*—This appeareth partly from their contempt of his person, before they heard his doctrine and the reasons of it; partly from their obstinate adhering to idols and worship of them, though the apostle had by clearest reason discovered the absurdity thereof in his excellent discourse of the nature of God and his worship, &c.; and partly by the effect [which] his reasoning had upon Dionysius the Areopagite, who believed. (Verse 34.) Now Dionysius was of the number of those whose fame was great at Athens for wisdom, integrity, and justice. For want of these qualities, these philosophers reject the apostle, and the new doctrine which he preached.

(6.) These Athenians did *with tumult and violence* make their inquiry after the new things [which] St. Paul preached.—So the word in the original seems to signify, and is so used in Luke xxiii. 26, [respecting] Simon of Cyrene, compelled to bear the cross of Christ; and when the captain of the castle took Paul out of the Jews' hands. (Acts xxi. 30, 33; in which places the same word is used.) They “apprehended” him, or “laid hands on him as on a guilty person.”* They inquire not as became learners or sober disputers: but,

(7.) *They hurry him before the Areopagites' court.*—To answer it with his life, for either denying the Athenians' gods, or endeavouring to “bring-in new gods” without the approbation of the Areopagites; † both which were capital by the law, and had endangered many heads, cost some their life; as Socrates, condemned to death by this court, in which two hundred eighty and one votes concurred in the sentence against him.

All these particulars last mentioned are evident in this context, from verses 17—32; and I leave it to you to judge, whether this way of inquiry becometh a Christian. Many Christians begin their inquiry into new things with prejudices, carry them on in curiosity, pride, and partiality, and close them with obstinate adhering to old errors, and refusing truth new-discovered; and in the tumultuousness of a rabble bring the publishers of truth and godliness into apparent danger of their lives. This [is] the whole progress of the Athenian dispute with the apostle. If you remember these things, you will know what you ought not to do; and I have hopes you will forbear doing that which you know too evil in a Heathen, and more evil in a Christian, and would be most evil in us who have seen bloody effects of news raised, abetted, witnessed, and sworn by profligate, perjured persons, not before Areopagites, but before judges; raised to take away the life of innocents, and to condemn such whose love and care,

* *Non sine manuum injectione tanquam in reum.*—LORINUS *in loc.*

† *Quis ingeret nova daemonia.*—Idem.

whose power and resolution, qualified them to be patriots to their country and the church.

(8.) *The Athenians spent too much time in telling and hearing news of any sort, whether important or a trifle, certain or doubtful.*—So be it is news, it is that [which] pleaseth them; they ever have leisure to hear it; nothing cometh more acceptably to them. This disease hath descended from age to age, and been most pernicious to the great, rich, voluptuous, and proud ports, cities, and academies of the world; a disease the wisest and most serious have complained of, but the vain and foolish would not be sensible of or cured.

The waste of time never to be recalled, neglect of our necessary affairs, loss in trades and employments, spreading of false stories of others, provoking displeasure against others and ourselves on such occasions, endangering ourselves and others by engaging in parties and quarrels, increasing discontents amongst those [whom] we should endeavour to unite, giving occasions to enemies and false accusers to lay to our charge things we know not, falling under suspicion of plotters and conspirators against the public weal,—all these and much more might be arguments against an immoderate attendance on public places of news amongst us; where wise men come and stay whilst their necessary business calls and requires, and prating fools continue till they fall. [They are the] pest of the nation and bane of tradesmen, common nuisances and public mischiefs, in the opinion of some wise and good men: but when the places are blamed, they that come there too often, and stay there too long, are in the fault, and should, I think, be punished. I could wish there were a redress of all the inconveniences and vices that spring up in coffee-houses; but I believe that every man who frequents them must mend his own faults herein, and not expect directions from a pulpit, how often or seldom, how long or short a time, what business with friends and chapmen to wait for or meet there. Go not thither but on business [which] thou canst best do there; stay but till it is done; and though many complain of the coffee-houses, they cannot condemn thee.

II. But I pass on, to tell you *how* (in these places which seem to be *Athenæ redivivæ*, and the company we meet there like Athenian news-mongers, all inquiring what is newest) *you may, as Christians ought, inquire, what news of church-affairs; that you may the better manage your prayers for the church in trouble, or praise God for good wrought for it; which is the second part, and positive part, of the case before us.*

First, then, *a Christian ought to make inquiry into news that concerns the church, according to the advantage and capacity he hath, more fully to know both the good and welfare of the people of God, or to know the sorrows and dangers that lie upon the church.*—Some lie under an incapacity of knowing much of the affairs of their own country and the church in it, who never heard any thing so much as the name of some of the churches of Christ, nor are they any way likely to know much of them; yet these ought to inquire what they

ern, that their prayers and praises for the church may be suitable to what they know of the church. Jerusalem must not be forgotten; she must be prayed for. (Psalm cxvii. 6.)

Such who know few but their Christian relations or neighbours, may know the sorrows, dangers, wants of these; and ought to pray for them, as they are members of the church; and consider [that] the like state other Christians are in, and must be prayed for, &c. We are to mourn with those that mourn, and rejoice with those that rejoice: (Rom. xii. 15:) that we may the better do this, we should inquire, the most we can, into the present state of the church. But, *more especially,*

1. *Christian kings, princes, and supreme magistrates*, as nursing fathers, defenders, and promoters of Christ's kingdom and people, ought to inquire, and maintain intelligences whereby they may understand, what is the state of all the churches of God with which they and their subjects hold a commerce; that so either public prayers or praises may be made for the church. Moses hath given us example of this kind; who did deliberately conclude with himself, that he would "visit his brethren the children of Israel," and with his own eyes survey their condition, that he might suitably address himself to help them; supposing they would know [that] God would deliver Israel by Moses. (Acts vii. 23—25.) Some few we meet in history, who have concerned themselves for the church of Christ abroad, without their own dominions, now and then. A Constantine appears, to defend the church, and to mind a Licinius to forbear persecuting the church; or an Elizabeth, to support a neighbour-church; or a Gustavus Adolphus, to rescue oppressed churches; or such as we have in our day seen raised to be a father and a mother to his people in this kingdom. It was well for us that God awakened them to inquire what state the church was in here, and how it might be rescued.

2. *Nobles and counsellors about Christian princes and kings*, who have opportunity to know public concerns of churches abroad above other men, ought to inquire more particularly and fully; that they may the better advise inferior ones to pray for the church, or praise God, as the seasons require; and that they may employ their interest at home with their own king, or abroad in foreign courts, for the good of the church. Which way soever Mordecai first scented Haman's plot, he acquitted himself in this point; gave not over the inquiry, till he had done his best to rescue the Jews. Much of the same temper was Nehemiah; who, at court, in fulness of honour, riches, and ease, could not forget Jerusalem, nor let slip an opportunity of acquainting himself with the condition of the Jews there, and addresseth himself to rebuild and repair it. (Neh. i. 2, 3.) Had not king James I. and his nobles about him inquired into the Plot, the church and kingdom had been ruined, though the lord Mounteagle discovered what he knew of it.

3. *Ambassadors in the courts of princes that are enemies to the truth and church, and ready to extirpate both*, have advantage of inquiring what dangers threaten the churches under such prince's

dominions : and, in such case, they are fittest to acquaint the prince who sent them, that loves the church, and is foster-father to it ; that, by his mediation and interest, the design of enemy-princes and persecutors may be stopped, and endangered subjects and Christians may be secured. The French tyrant had been at his dragooning conversions some years sooner, (as I have heard,) if, on the news of his design, (communicated by [an] ambassador to his master, a neighbouring conqueror,) express orders had not been sent to the ambassador to require present and peremptory orders to recall the marching troops : so much the safety of the church may sometimes depend upon the vigilance and zeal of such public ministers of state. Wise ambassadors of our neighbours, I doubt not, informed their masters and our friends, what dangerous plots were laid against us and them, and all the churches of Christ : so that now “the snare is broken, and we are escaped.” (Psalm cxxiv. 7.) For the one, many prayed ; for the other, more gave praise to God.

4. *Chief commanders in martial affairs who are Christians*, are concerned to inquire what state the church is in among those on whom they are commanded to make war. Sometimes [a] multitude of Christians may be within the quarters, under the power of the enemy : sometimes Christians of an eminent character, and highly valued by all that know the truth and love it, may be threatened to be destroyed by the enemy. In such case a plain, brave, and peremptory message, that the enemy's violence shall be retaliated, may save many lives : so, many Christians have been preserved from Turkish fury, many Protestants from Popish rage, both in days past and of late. So Jeremiah's case was weighed by the chief captain of the Assyrian army. (Jer. xxxix. 11—14.)

5. *Merchants who travel into far remote parts for their trade, and gentlemen who travel for their pleasure and to satisfy themselves by an ocular survey of countries and cities, of which they often heard reports scarce to be believed on hearsay* ; these have some greater advantages to see and hear the low and sinking state, or the rising and flourishing condition, of those churches which are planted in such countries ; and, as Christians, they are bound to observe, inform themselves, and tell others, how it is with the churches, that prayers and praises may be offered unto God for them. But this is very little minded by merchants, when abroad ; and less minded by them, when returned home with wealth, greater than ever they hoped. Though religion decay, and churches lessen in number, knowledge, faith, and holiness ; yet who of them, out of their abundance, settle a tribute of thankfulness to God, making provision for the sending and maintaining preachers and schoolmasters among them ? Would the enriched merchants remember their duty to God, and what thanks they owe to the people who were so kind to them in travels and trading, there would be some settlements made, to encourage such as are fit and willing to employ themselves in promoting the welfare of the churches ; but poverty and low condition in the world forbids them to do it on their own estate, and no due provision is made by others to support them in such a

work. Some few of this travelling disposition, though poor, do go abroad tutors to some young raw gentlemen; who being so unexperienced and imprudent among strangers, and ever endangering themselves if the tutor be absent, he can do little but attend them in every place, and spend his time in viewing things that please young fancies, and profit none but those that are door-keepers or officers about the places. One short tour of a learned man, now a great prelate among us,* gives us assurance that travels might give us good intelligence of the state of the church; were there due care taken in this by persons who could bear the expenses of prudent, experienced, and diligent persons, lovers of the truth and church, as well as lovers of knowledge, we might in a short time have a good account of the true state of all, or most, of the churches of Christ, and our praises would be more seasonable and suitable.

6. There are *the whole tribe of Levi*,—*ecclesiastical persons, who live upon the emoluments of the church*: these, above others, should concern themselves for the church. These are to manage public prayers and praises for the church; these are to be examples to others, to kindle the affections of their people to pray and praise, as occasions require. They are or should be able to take account of the church-affairs written and published to the world in several languages: they should be diligent readers of such books. They, more than others, should understand the times and seasons of the prophecies; and how the wilderness-state ends, or the state of return out of the wilderness begins; especially under such revolutions as we now are; as, whether the witnesses are rising, or whether any vials, or how many, are poured forth; whether we are to encourage the people of God to hope for a speedy deliverance, or to advise them to expect and prepare for sorer and longer troubles. These and such-like inquiries the learned clergy are much more fit to make than the laity; and, I think, they are bound to it more than others; but, in a more particular manner, those of the clergy who have preferments which will bear the charges of,

(1.) All sorts of books that concern this.

(2.) All sorts of amanuenses and helps to read and give account to them.

(3.) All sorts of intelligences and correspondences with bishops and pastors of the churches abroad.

(4.) Entertaining and conversing with all exiles, refugees, and travellers, that come from foreign churches.

(5.) Sending, if need be, particular messengers to know the truth or falsehood of what is reported to them.

Rich archbishops, bishops, and deans might and ought to do thus, or more, for the church of Christ. I do not know how much of this work is set on foot, or whether none. I can hardly think [that], among so many and learned men as have great and rich preferments in the church of England, it is wholly omitted. They do, I believe, receive intelligences from abroad; and if these be as true as those

* DR. BURNET, bishop of Sarum.

that some of them have sent abroad concerning the state of God's church here in England, no wonder they all grow "worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived," as the apostle said of some other men. (2 Tim. iii. 13.) In giving all intelligences to others, let us keep—and, in receiving all from them, let us desire them to keep—to the apostle's direction: Inform, *αληθευοντες εν αγαπη*, "speaking the truth in love." (Eph. iv. 15.) It is an inexcusable crime to be malicious slanderers one of another: and since the doctrine of the church of England in points of faith and good manners, the renunciation of Popery, as fully as is required, are both subscribed, and allegiance to the government assured by oath or subscription, let none such be any more misrepresented as of no principles in religion, friends to Popery, and enemies to monarchy and government. Ingenuity [ingenuousness] and truth are much wanting both in words and writings of men that should describe their brethren to foreigners; instead of which, they decipher a monster of their own making, and set it up to be abhorred by all that see or hear it. A famous professor of divinity in a university and city (with which the whole dissenting party are often upbraided) knew not our state or cause for many years; who, when he was informed aright, wondered extremely at our ill-usage at home, and worse representation abroad.

I am, I confess, tempted to suspect very great partiality and falsehood in ecclesiastical historians, both ancient and modern; who have written with the prejudice, enmity, and partiality of sworn vassals to a party. Were there a college of judicious, impartial, diligent, and able historians, employed and encouraged to search out the truth of all misrepresented parties, and tell the world their best, as well as their worst hath been told by others; it would, I think, be an ecclesiastical history far more desirable than any I yet have seen. *Quis dabit Thuanum ecclesiasticum?** After so long a discourse on the first direction, *Inquire as fully as your capacity and opportunity can enable you;*

Secondly. If you would inquire as Christians ought, to affect your hearts, in order to pray or praise God for the church, *let your thoughts be much upon the importance of what is reported to you.*—Weigh well what influence the new things are likely to have on the good or evil, to the comfort or the discomfort, of the church-catholic, or any particular churches near to or far from you. Nehemiah, no doubt, weighed the importance of the news brought to him from Jerusalem; and it was thought reasonable that Israel in Egypt, on the first appearance of Moses, should have considered what importance it was to see such a man as Moses was,—how likely he might be to bring them out. When the edict for Israel's return out of captivity was first spread as good news to the Jews, none of them resented it aright who considered only his personal advantage by it. *They prayed and praised God right, who looked into the import of it to the whole church.* The news of the death of Ahaz, and succession of Hezekiah,

* "Who will give us such a history of ecclesiastical matters as Thuanus has given of civil affairs?"—EDIT.

is not inquired after, till the certainty of the reformation of religion, and the great change for the better in the church, is looked into.

Julian's death was great and good news to the church, and called for praise to God ; but those that considered not the influence it would have upon the church for good, if God raised up a Christian successor, must needs fall very far short in their prayer and praise. When the news of the death of Edward VI. afflicted the hearts of God's children in England, and they mourned and prayed as apprehensive of the consequences of the death of a pious prince, a zealous Reformer, a hearty lover of truth, and professor of it ; whilst he lay sick, these considerations quickened them of that age to beg his life. So, when the sickness of queen Mary was the news on the stage, and her death would be the safety of the church ; no wise Protestant inquired after the news, without a thought how much it would benefit the church to lose her.

Thirdly. [He] who inquires as a Christian, in order to manage prayer and praise, should, I think, *inquire of those who can and will inform him the best, most truly and sincerely, of any news he knoweth.*—There ever have been, and now are, persons who abuse the world with false reports : to amuse the more simple-hearted, they dare coin lies, and cry out, "Woe, woe!" or, "Peace, peace!" very unagreeably to the nature and aspect of affairs. If you have a friend, who dares not wittingly spread a lie nor deny a truth, and knows much of public occurrences, thou mayest rely somewhat on his word ; thou mayest with greater confidence pray for the church in deep distress, and praise God for bringing it out of its distress. When we know [that] the church needs our prayers, it is most agreeable to God that we do pray. If, when we praise God for the church in any particular, afterwards it appear [that] we were deceived by false reports, the enemy scoffs at us. We should, to the best of our knowledge, pray and praise suitably to the real state of the church. It was a common practice in our late civil wars, upon a fight, that both parties kept thanksgiving-days, when it was not possible both should have the victory : this was highly scandalous, and each upbraided others with hypocrisy. Let us, as much as in us lieth, prevent such a reproof : what we cannot be eye-witness of, but must take on hearsay, let us endeavour to be truly informed [of] ; that both prayer and praises may be grounded on the truth of things, as they proceed from truth of heart. Tragical stories of Catholics prosecuted in England, when Garnet and some few others were executed for their unparalleled hellish Powder-Plot and Treason, set many a deceived Papist into tears and prayers ; who, had they known the truth of things, would have praised God for preserving their king and country, condemned the traitors, and owned the hand of God in the discovery of the plot and punishment of plotters. On the other side, when bloody men imbrued their hands in blood of many thousand innocents in the Parisian massacre, and [in] the Irish rebellion destroyed innocent Protestants by hundreds of thousands, it is palliated with false rumours, to lessen the horror of the fact, the barbarous cruelty of the actors ; as if a few turbulent persons had been pre-

vented, and fallen by the hands of self-defenders: which had it been a truth, who could have found in their hearts to pray for such? But with respect to all such bloody usage of the innocent church in all ages past, and in this of ours, we will pray, with the Psalmist, "Let God be known by the revenging of the blood of his saints." (Psalm lxxix. 10.)

Fourthly. [He] who inquires as a Christian, must *inquire with a compassionate affection to the suffering churches of Christ.*—Or, feeling their wounds as living members feel the griefs and wounds of the body in what part soever, preparing to help the whole and bear his own part; as one who "prefers Jerusalem above his chief joy," and can heartily rejoice in her prosperity; as one whose heart is wounded with the same sword that woundeth Jerusalem, and therefore bitterly bemoaneth and heartily prayeth for the bleeding church. Give us a Nehemiah, who "sat down and wept," when he heard sad tidings, great distress, and long desolations of Jerusalem. (Neh. i. 4.) When you inquire with Jeremiah's wish, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. ix. 1;) such a heart doth as naturally pour out itself in prayers as it doth into tears, and doth as naturally rejoice with the rejoicing church as it either wept or prayed before. When Christ foresaw and foretold the doleful state that Jerusalem should fall into, he wept over her; and so must every Christian weep over desolate and disconsolate Jerusalem, when he hears her sorrows, and prays for her relief. Among natural relations, few there are who are not affected with grief for the sorrows and troubles of a brother: there should not be one among spiritual relations, but should with hearty grief entertain the news of sorrows and distress upon the church, and give God no rest till he make her a quiet habitation, till he turn her mourning into joy, till he take away the garments of her widowhood, and clothe her with the garments of his salvation. When we hear the sad tidings with such a heart as [that with which] Josiah heard the threats of the law read in his presence, then we are likely to do as he did,—to seek the Lord, to return to him, and make a covenant with him to serve him, that he may turn away his displeasure and spare his people. Josiah heard the news with a "tender heart," (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27,) a melting heart; and sent to inquire of the Lord, that he might know what was to be done by him and his people, to prevent or defer or lessen the threatened evil.

Fifthly. When you inquire into the present news that concerns the church, that you may the better pray for the church, or praise God on behalf of the church, *inquire into the sins of the church with an humble, mourning, and repenting heart.*—So did Josiah, in reading the law, and comparing Judah's former behaviour,—how that people had sinned against the law of God; and by this he discovered what sins,

1. Brought them into the danger of captivity and utter desolation;
2. Which were likely to increase their danger or continue it;

3. [Which] were likely to lessen the deliverance expected and prayed for ;

4. Which God hath long borne with, and at last pardoned ; that he might deliver a sinful and unworthy people, though his own.

This will in all probability bring the inquirers on their knees, to confess their own and their fathers' sins ; to be thoroughly apprehensive what need [there is] of earnest prayers, that the Lord would purge, pardon, deliver, and fully save his churches. This will make them admire the Lord's long-suffering, justify his righteous judgments, and give him praise due to him for leaving us a remnant that at last shall see his full salvation.

Sixthly. Would you as Christians inquire into the news of the present times, the better to manage prayer and praises for the church ? *Inquire, then, what are the effects of either good and welcome, or of sad and mournful, news upon such as are nearest concerned in both.*—Do judgments awaken and frighten sinners in Zion from their sins ? Do the punishments of their sins work them to deep humiliation, to public repenting and reforming ? Do they return to the Lord that smiteth them ? Or are they as sinful, secure, and as fearless as ever ? What effect have God's mercies upon his churches ? Do his mercies prevail with them "not to conform to the present evil world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds ?" (Rom. xii. 1, 2.) Doth prosperity make them now (as it did, between 1647 and 1660, make professors) worldly, proud, quarrelsome, unjust, persecuting one another, irreconcilably divided one from another, enraged one against another with that mad, unreasonable fury as to venture the ruining of the whole church to satisfy the revenges of a party ? When I think on these and such-like sad miscarriages, I can see little cause given by the church to rejoice, but much to mourn. Here is need of prayer, little matter of thanksgiving, in the deportment of the church. Indeed, we ever ought to praise the Lord for his mercies to his people ; but we still want that proper subject of praise to God which a reformed, united, holy, and heavenly church would be to us. When unexpected and stupendous revolutions make the generality of Christians to leave their sins, and return to God, and live more suitably to their heavenly calling, and love one another, as Christ commandeth ; then we have abundant cause to bless and praise our God, and continue our prayers for a people near to a full salvation.

Seventhly. Would you as Christians better manage your prayers and praises for the church on any new occurrences ? Then *inquire what is the temper and deportment of the church's enemies.*—Are the enemies of the church,

1. *Atheistical and blasphemous ?*—As he was, who spake as contemptuously of the Lord of hosts, as of the idols of the nations whom his father had destroyed. Are they grown up to Sennacherib's height of atheism and blasphemy ? Do, then, as Hezekiah, Isaiah, and the people of Judah did. It is probable the enemy is near his fall ; you, near to the answer of your prayers ; and the church, near to the days of thanksgiving and praise to God. Read the story in

2 Kings xviii., and 2 Chron. xxxii., and Isai. xxxvi., xxxvii. Atheism and blasphemy are the temper and deportment of the antichrist which, we expect, shall be destroyed. (Rev. xiii. 1—6.)

2. *Combined and confederate against the church?*—So were Moab, Ammon, and Amalek, to “cut off the name of Israel.” (Psalm lxxxiii. 3—7.) So did Gog and Magog; (Ezek. xxxviii. ;) if that refer to Antiochus Epiphanes, or to any other already past. So will the Gog and Magog mentioned in Rev. xx. So hath the antichristian Papal kingdom done against the church; and it is probable, such a confederacy may be again made against the church of God. Now, when rooting-out of Israel is the end of the confederacy, the church is furnished with many prevailing arguments to use in prayer for the church.

3. *Confident and proud, promising themselves an assured success, answerable to their preparations and resolutions?*—So Sennacherib: “As I have done, so I will do;” (2 Chron. xxxii. ;) and Gog and Magog: “I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn mine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.” (Ezek. xxxviii. 11, 12.)

So will [be] the pride and confidence of Babylon, the enemy of the church; Babylon, that will say, “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” (Rev. xviii. 7.) How seasonably may the church plead with the Lord to execute his just threats upon her, and bring her sorrows on her in a moment!

4. *Cruel and merciless?*—So was Babylon of old; so is Babylon at this day. This ministered occasion to the captive Jew to pray, and move the God of mercy to remember their low and sad condition, and rescue them from those cruel hands which delight in blood. In the temper of those who have for many ages wasted the church of Christ, and in these last three or four years have laboured to destroy it in France, most unparalleled cruelty hath been practised upon the members of Christ. “How long, O Lord, holy and true?” (Rev. vi. 10.)

Eighthly, and lastly. Would you as Christians inquire, in order to the better management of your prayers and praises? Then, *whatever news of moment you hear concerning the state of the churches of Christ, be sure, to your best knowledge, compare those news with these things that are signs of approaching deliverance and fuller salvation from its own sins and self-created troubles, and from the furious rage of enemies.*

1. *Compare the state of the church, and your news of it, with the divine providences over the church in the like circumstances in times past.*—Find out some instance parallel to your present case in the scriptures; and in prayer plead it with God for the like, nay, for greater, help. The various cases of the church recorded in scripture, are glasses in which we may see what troubles we must expect; and

God's providences to his people are exemplaries for us to conform our hope and confidence unto. We may read his deliverances, and in like cases say, "This God is our God, as theirs; he will lead us, preserve, and deliver us, as them." Hence it is [that] you do so often find the people of God concluding and expecting relief, because he did in like case hear prayer, and give his people matter of praise, in times past.

2. *Compare the news you hear with the expectations of the generality of the observant, praying, meditating, scripture-wise Christians.*—Consider well what the body of these look for; whether good, or evil. A single man, or a few of them, may easily mistake in their conjecture; but it is seldom that the whole body of them mistime their expectation. Deliverance out of Egypt was expected by the best and wisest, by those who knew the promise to Abraham, much about the time that God sent Moses; and therefore it is observed of Moses, that, when he vindicated the injured Hebrew and slew the Egyptian, he supposed they would have known him to be the person [whom] God had sent to deliver them. Near the time of the return from the Babylonish captivity, many of the Jews expected their deliverance: some that were very aged could reckon the number of years by their own age: and Daniel searched into the nearness of it "by books." (Dan. ix. 2.) And we may now hope [that] some great (perhaps the last and full) deliverance from antichristianism is near at hand; the generality of God's people do expect as well as pray for it. Pray ye as they do.

3. *Compare your great news abroad, when kingdoms and states are shaken, with the threats that are denounced against the enemies of the church.*—Consult the word of God in this thing. You may discover much of the approaches of mercy in deliverance of the church by the executions of threats against the enemy. When Moses and Aaron began to execute judgments upon Egypt, Israel might well conclude their deliverance was near at hand: when the rivers were turned into blood, Israel might hope their God was coming to avenge their blood. The Jews had good ground to conclude, when the Medes and Persians began the war against Babylon, that their captivity drew on to an end: and when they read the man's name who was the great commander in that expedition, Cyrus, by name foretold the deliverer of God's captives and builder of the temple; if then they did not pray earnestly and praise God heartily, they were inexcusably stupid, and wanting to their own release. It will much help you in prayer at this day, if you will look into the several menaces pronounced in the book of the Revelation against Babylon, and observe which of them are in part executed, which are now executing; which of the trumpets we are under, and which of the three woes are now executing, &c. By this we might conclude the sounding of the seventh trumpet near, and [that] the kingdoms of the world ere long are likely to be the kingdoms of Christ.

4. *Look to promises made to the church for her deliverance, when you hear of or inquire after any great news among the states and kingdoms of the world, among which the churches of Christ sojourn, and*

among which the saints of God have and still do suffer.—It needs not a particular proof, that there are many express promises that the church shall be delivered; that there is a fixed time for the beginning, progress, and full accomplishment of these promises; that their accomplishment shall be gradual, and such as will clear itself; and though we cannot say when the full accomplishment [will take place] to a day or month or year, yet, by comparing transactions and occurrences with promises, we may without doubt discover somewhat of the promise made good to the church, for which we ought to praise the Lord; and all the rest of the promises shall be fulfilled, and for this we should earnestly pray to the Lord.

5. *Compare the great news in the present revolutions, with the times [which] God hath been pleased to make known to us in his word.*—By this you may discern what encouragement and awakening considerations are given to us to pray and praise our God for what is already done, and for what is doing, and what ere long is to be finished. Here is work for learned men, for ministers, for understanding saints. There are in the Revelation two distinct numbers mentioned, which, were they clearly unfolded, would enable us, as very wise Christians, to receive, seek, and improve the great news that is abroad in the world.

The *first* period is that in Rev. ix. 15: They—that is, the four angels bound at Euphrates, that is, the Turkish power—“were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year;” that is, for three hundred and ninety-six years, and a very little more. Now, from 1300, in which Osman, or Ottoman, was elected king of the Turks, they have been the destruction of the Christians; and were to be, until three hundred and ninety-six years were expired; that is, till 1696, which will in likelihood end their empire: and how great hope of this now! This calls us to pray for their ruin.

The *second* great period is of the forty-two months, (Rev. xiii. 5,) that is, one thousand two hundred and sixty years,—the time the beast was to persecute the church; and then the beast was to perish, that is, the Papal kingdom shall be destroyed. Now, these one thousand two hundred and sixty years in likelihood began about 475, or somewhat sooner; and by this account, you may suppose, the news you still hear of both Turk and Papacy will encourage you to hope for a speedy deliverance of the church from both.

It will be worth your while to read those excellent pieces—of Mr. Joseph Mede, who wrote his “Key of the Revelation” above three-score years ago in Latin: I cannot say whether it be translated into English, having always kept myself to the Latin copy; but it is a thousand pities it should be confined to Latin,—a book fit to be published in all languages:—of Mr. Jurieu, “Accomplishment of Prophecies,” translated out of French into English:—of a nameless author, newly written in French, and translated into English, printed lately under the title of “A New System of the Apocalypse,” &c.

I commend to you who would know the importance of public news,—how to pray and praise God on hearing it, how to wait for

deliverances,—to read diligently those books in which are greater and better news than any packets, than all gazettes or coffee-houses, can yet afford to you. When you have read these books, then long for 1696, or 1700; and hope, if you live to that day, to hear Mahometanism in the Turkish empire destroyed with that empire. Wish for 1735, or 1740; and remember, I do not pretend to prophesy, but I do dismiss with a conjecture that, between this time and that, you will see great deliverances to the churches of Christ, and as great distresses and judgments executed on the antichristian kingdom; it may be, the total ruin of that kingdom, which was to last but one thousand two hundred and sixty years, and, I think, will have outlasted that period before 1740.

SERMON XVII.

BY THE REV. DANIEL BURGESS,

OF MAGDALEN-HALL, OXFORD.

WHEREIN MAY WE MORE HOPEFULLY ATTEMPT THE CONVERSION
OF YOUNGER PEOPLE, THAN OF OTHERS?

OMNIPOTENCE can suffer no difficulty, and that which is immense can admit no limits. Unto the Divine power all things are as perfectly easy, as they are certainly possible: and the heavenly grace is fruitful equally of all things consistent with its spotless purity. God-Creator did strain no harder to make this great world, than to make the smallest atom of it. And God-Redeemer saveth Mary-Magdalenes, as well as Virgin-Marys: very Samson, we are sure, is in heaven. (Heb. xi. 32.)

But, in respect of things themselves, and of their appearances unto us, all effects be [are] not of equal facility, nor all events to be alike hoped for. Much easier is the bending of a green twig, than of an old oak; more hopeful the cure of a green wound, than of an old putrefied sore. There is more to be done to convert a man of Belial, than a child of Belial; and to convert an old man, than any other man: and we may justly expect better success when we call unto God the boys and girls playing in the streets, than when we call old men and women that can scarcely walk in them.

This I am desired to show: and I shall endeavour it in the best way, unto the best end; to wit, the promoting of early piety. I have fair and full occasion given me, if I can take it, from the text; which I therefore commend to your observation:—

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth: or, as some read it, Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy choice.—
Ecclesiastes xii. 1.