

SERMON XXX.

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HOW THE RELIGIOUS OF A NATION ARE THE STRENGTH OF IT.

But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten : as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves : so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.—Isaiah vi. 13.

THE prophet was sent with heavy tidings to the people :—

1. Of *spiritual* judgments like to befall them ; blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, to which they should be left,—the most dreadful plague on this side hell. (Verses 9, 10.)

2. Of *temporals* too : “ Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.” (Verses 11, 12.) God many times sends spiritual judgments with temporal : they that are under the former, cannot be secure against the latter ; they that are insensible of the one, may be made to feel the other. But lest it should make the hearts of the few righteous among them over-sad, and should prove in the event a temptation to despair, and deject, instead of humbling, them, he hath a more comfortable message put into his mouth,—some glad tidings to balance the evil. Saints sometimes tremble at those truths in which others are most concerned ; and wicked men, that should most fear them, least regard them. This verse, therefore, brings a cordial for the saints, as the four former did a bitter dose for the ungodly among them. A gracious promise we have here of a remnant to be left in the midst of and after the dismal calamities before-threatened : “ But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten : as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves : so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.”

In it—In “ the land,” mentioned verses 11, 12.

A tenth—A definite number for an indefinite : “ a tenth,” that is, a small remnant, a few in comparison of the whole body of the inhabitants. It was a severe punishment among the Romans, when, for

* In the manuscript announcements of authors' names, prefixed to a few presentation-copies of the “ Continuation ” of the Morning Exercise at Cripplegate, this sermon obtained no other notice than that of the signature N. N. But, soon after Mr. Collins's death, its authorship was ascribed to him, by one who possessed the best means of information,—Dr. Cotton Mather, in his “ History of New England,” book iv. p. 200.—
EDIT.

some great miscarriages in their armies, they would decimate the offending legions,—put every tenth man to death. But here is a more formidable severity, when God would destroy nine parts, and save only a tenth; they that were cut off, should be far more than they that were delivered.

It shall return, and shall be eaten—Either, as some, “return” from its captivity, and be inhabited again, and fed upon again; or, as others, “It shall be eaten,” that is, consumed, or removed, or burnt; the Hebrew word will bear any of these interpretations. “Returning,” then, must signify, by an usual Hebraism, the iteration of the thing mentioned, the repetition of the judgment; and so to “return and be eaten,” is to be eaten again, or consumed again; which here must be understood of the remaining tenth. If we take it in this sense, it is not unlike that of Zech. xiii. 8, 9; where two parts are to “be cut off and die,” and the third to be left; and then that third part is to be “brought through the fire.” If we thus understand the words, the former part of the verse is rather a threatening than a promise, which yet I conceive the whole to be; and so it is, if we take this clause in the former sense.

As a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them—What the trees here mentioned are, whether the same with those that are so called with us, or any other peculiar to those countries, as expositors are not agreed, so we are not much concerned to inquire. It is more material to see what is meant by “substance,” and their “substance being in them.” מַצְבֵּת the word here rendered “substance,” is translated by some *statio, locatio*,* “standing, or placing,” agreeably to the root צָבַע from whence it is derived; by some, *statumen*; † by others, it is taken for “the trunk” of the tree, ‡ or, as our margin, “the stock or stem.” The word is sometimes taken for “a statue or standing image;” sometimes for “a pillar:” so, “the pillar of Rachel’s grave,” (Gen. xxxv. 20,) and Absalom’s “pillar.” (2 Sam. xviii. 18.) I take it in the second translation, for “the stock or body” of the tree; which yet is not much different from the last; “the trunk” or upright part of a tree being that which most resembles “a statue or pillar.”

Whose substance is in them—Whose stock or trunk is in the tree, remains to it, still abides and continues; and so it is opposed to that which follows,—its “casting its leaves.”

When they cast their leaves—בְּשִׁלְכָתָם. “In their casting.” “Leaves” is not in the original, but supplied by the translators. Some take the word for a proper name of a place. In 1 Chron. xxvi. 16, mention is made of a gate belonging to the temple, called Shallecheth; where, they say, there was a “causeway” leading up to the temple, which they suppose planted with trees on both sides; which not only beautified the place, but strengthened it; the roots of the trees knitting and keeping up the earth which had been there cast up to make the way. This may have a good sense, if the words in the original will bear it. I conceive our own translation (with which others agree) to

* PAGNINUS.

† TREMELLIUS. “A prop, or support.”—EDIT.

‡ MERCERUS.

be best : "When they cast their leaves ;" and so the opposition is clear between the standing of the stock and the falling of the leaves ; and it notes the strength, firmness, and lastingness of the tree itself, though it lose its present beauty and verdure. The stateliest trees may cast their leaves ; but then their trunks continue firm and fast in the earth, which may afterwards spring and flourish afresh.

The holy seed—Or, "seed of holiness," by an usual Hebraism : so "a godly seed," or "seed of God." (Mal. ii. 15.) I doubt not but it is to be understood of the really religious or righteous among that people, who are indeed the only true "seed of God," which others only seem to be.

Shall be the substance thereof—The body of the people are here compared to a tree ; the holy seed, to the stock or stem of it, the rest to the leaves. A tree in winter casts its leaves, the sap retiring toward the root ; but yet still the stock remains firm and unmovable, and the sap that is in it will afterwards cause it to shoot forth anew. The tree, though bare, is not dead ; it hath lost its leaves, but not its life. So, when carnal men and common professors drop away, like leaves from a tree, in the winter of affliction ; or, as withered boughs and branches, are broken off by the violence of persecutions, and storms of worldly troubles ; then "the holy seed," the truly religious among them, are like the trunk of the tree, which is not blown down nor rooted up, but still continues, still lives, and is likely to flourish again. What is here spoken of the Jews is not peculiar to them, but may likewise be affirmed of other professing people, the great staple privileges of the church being the same both in Jews then and Gentiles now. The seed of God is the stock, whether Jews or Gentiles be the branches : there may be a change in the branches, but not in the stock ; that is still the same, when wild branches are grafted in, as it was before the natural were cut off.

The doctrine [which] I observe from the words thus explained, is in answer to the question propounded.

DOCTRINE.

That the truly religious of a nation are, under God, the strength of it.—What I shall say of this doctrine may be reduced to these heads :—I shall show,

- I. *What we are to understand by "the religious" of a nation.*
- II. *How, and in what respects, they may be said to be its "strength."*
- III. *Upon what accounts.*
- IV. *Make application of it to practice.*
- I. *Who are the religious of a nation.*
1. *Negatively.*

(1.) *I understand not "the religious" here in a Popish sense, for those that are under a religious vow, or in a religious order.*—This is an abuse of the word, and a restraining it to those that know little of the thing.

(2.) *I do not restrain it to any particular party or way or persuasion, even among those who, as to their profession, are really of the*

true religion.—Though I am far from so loose and extravagant a charity, as to judge that men may be saved in any religion whatever, if they do but live suitably to the principles and rules of that religion; when there are so many false, so many idolatrous, ones, so many which deny fundamental truths, or maintain damnable errors: yet, on the other side, I am not so uncharitable as to confine true religiousness, and consequently final salvation, to any particular sect or sort or party of men professing Christianity, to the exclusion of all that dissent from them. True religion is more affection and practice than doctrine or notion, and is seated more in the heart than in the head. Men may be really gracious, and so in truth religious in God's account, who yet differ in some things from others who are no less truly religious too.

There is, indeed, but one true religion in the world; but, in that, we must distinguish between principles and conclusions, and those either nearer or more remote; between fundamentals and superstructures, and those either which touch the foundation or are farther from it; between substance and circumstances; things necessary, or not necessary, to the being or to the well-being of religion. In some things they that are wise and godly may differ without prejudice to the salvation of either. Every truth is not necessary to salvation, nor is every error *de facto* ["actually"] damning. All men's light is not alike clear, nor are all men's minds equally enlightened; some see more than others, and some more clearly; nor is every degree of light which shall be for the perfection of saints hereafter, necessary while they are here in order to their salvation. There may be the unity of faith in the main, and of love too, where yet there is some disagreement about some things believed. It is confessed that there is but one way of salvation,—that of faith and holiness; from which whatever by-paths of error lead men aside, they do at the same time carry them off from the end of faith,—the salvation of their souls; whatever is inconsistent with either faith or holiness, is inconsistent likewise with salvation. But every difference or mistake about such truths as are not necessarily saving, must not presently be looked upon as a false way, or an error certainly damning.

The way to life is called "the narrow way;" (Matt. vii. 14;) but is it therefore indivisible? Is there no latitude in it? May not two, or three, or four, or five, go abreast in it? Must all go in the self-same track or path? May not several paths be in the same great road, or run along by the side of it, and lead to the same place; which, if sometimes they decline a little from the road, yet, before the end, fall-in again with it, and for the main are parallel to it? It is as certain that truth is *simplex*, error is *multiformis*,—truth is but "one," and error is "various,"—and whatever in the least deflects from truth must be a degree of error, as it is that there can be but one perfectly straight line between any two points. But may not a line that divaricates a little from the straight one, and is so far crooked, run-in again to it? Doth any saint on earth attain to the whole of truth, without any mistake so much as in lesser things?

Doth any keep exactly to the straight line, so as never to take a crooked step, never in any thing to go off from it? Some indeed may miss it in fewer things, some in more; and yet both, keeping to what is necessary, hit it in the main. Some may go to heaven more directly and with fewer wanderings; when others may go farther aside, and fetch a greater compass, and yet at last arrive at it.

2. *Positively.* By "religious," I understand those,

(1.) *Who, as to the doctrine of Christianity, "hold the Head."* (Col. ii. 19.)—Keep to that only foundation which God hath laid,—the Lord Jesus Christ; though, perhaps, they may build some things on it which are not suitable to it,—“wood, hay, stubble:” (1 Cor. iii. 11, 12:) such whose “works shall be burned,” yet “themselves saved,” though with difficulty and “as by fire.” (Verse 15.) Such I mean, therefore, as own so much truth as is necessary to the life of faith and power of godliness, and maintain no error which is inconsistent with either.

(2.) *Those who, as to the practice of Christianity, "fear God, and work righteousness."* (Acts x. 35.)—They that not only believe in Christ, but live in obedience to him; not only “have received Christ Jesus the Lord,” but “walk in him.” (Col. ii. 6.) All true religion consists in faith and holiness; it is nothing else but a glorifying [of] God by believing and obeying; a seeking salvation in that way and method, in which alone God hath determined to bring men to it; that is, “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” (2 Thess. ii. 13.) Whoever, therefore, they are that do unfeignedly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live up to that faith, [they] are truly religious; though in some lesser things they may dissent from others who have the same faith, and practise the same holiness. So that, from being thus religious, I exclude not only atheists that have no religion, idolaters, damnable heretics, and all those whose principles are inconsistent with or repugnant to the truth of the gospel, and so are of a false religion; but even among those that profess the truth, I exclude,

(i.) *Those that are grossly ignorant.*—Know not the first principles of Christianity, understand not what they own and pretend to believe.

(ii.) *Those that are profane, scandalous, vicious livers, despisers of them that are good, persecutors of powerful godliness.*—These are not real saints, but a profane generation; the seed of the serpent, not of God.

(iii.) *Hypocrites.*—Masked professors, that make a show of religion to serve a carnal interest; that “have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof;” (2 Tim. iii. 5;) have unsound hearts, though under never so smooth faces. In a word, all those that are destitute of true faith and real holiness; that allow themselves in any way of known sins, whether more often, as the second sort, or more secret and close, as these last.

II. *How, or in what respects, the religious of a nation are the "strength" of it.*—In order to the stating of this, I shall premise

one distinction :—"The holy seed," or religious, in a nation may be considered either,

1. *As being actually in the world, and actually in a state of grace.*—Brought into Christ's fold, engaged in God's ways, effectually called and sanctified.

2. *Or as being in the world, but not yet converted.*—Though in God's time to be converted ; elect unbelievers. He that is a sinner at present, may be a saint in time ; a publican may come to be an apostle ; nay, a persecutor of the saints may be called to "preach that faith which once he destroyed." (Gal. i. 23.) They that are Christ's sheep by election, may in time, nay, certainly must, be so by actual calling : "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." (John vi. 37.)

3. *Or as not yet actually in being in the world, but in the loins of their parents, whether saints or sinners.*—God may have a seed even among the children of wicked men ; and as sometimes he may pass by the children of gracious men,—the parents may be a seed of God, and children not,—so sometimes he may overlook the parents, and take the children ; the parents may be wicked, and the children holy. God is a Sovereign, and may choose where he will ; and sometimes he pitcheth upon the most unlikely subjects. A wicked Ahaz may have a godly Hezekiah for his son, and a good Josiah a wicked Jehoikim for his.

This distinction I lay down, because, though I understand the doctrine in the first place of the religious actually in being among a people, yet not only of them, God sometimes acting for a nation with respect to those [whom] he is to have among them. This premised, I come to show in what respect the godly may be said to be the "strength" of a people ; and this I shall [do] by a little following the metaphor in the text. "The holy seed" is here called "the substance," or "stock," of a people ; so that in what respect the strength of a tree is in its stock, in those, or several of them, the strength of a people is in the religion of them.

1. *The stock of a tree is the most firm and durable part of it.*—When the leaves are shaken off, the branches many of them dry and withered ; nay, though it be close lopped, and all the boughs cut down ; yet still it continues and lives, keeps its place and retains its sap. So it is with the truly religious, at least as to their spiritual state : (as we intimated in the explication of the text :) when hypocrites and temporaries drop off from the body of professors, and quit their stations in a church and their religious profession, yet the godly still continue, hold their own, keep their standing. They are all united to Christ the Root, as well as to each other in the body, and as parts together of the same stock ; and so are preserved and continued in life by sap derived to them from the Root,—the constant supplies of the Spirit and grace of Christ. In this respect we may say, "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever ;" (1 John ii. 17;) and, They that "have an unction from the Holy One, abide in him." (Verses 20, 27.)

2. *The stock is that which propagates its kind.*—Cut off all the boughs ; and yet the stem will shoot forth again, send out new leaves and fruit and seed, from which other trees will come. So here the righteous propagate their righteousness, communicate to others, beget children to God, are spiritual parents, and have a spiritual offspring. How many children come in upon their parents' covenant, not only as to outward privileges in the church, but as to real grace ! “The promise is unto them, and to their children ;” (Acts ii. 39 ;) and as it takes place in all of them as to church-membership, so it doth in many as to saintship. And besides, how many are wrought-on by their instruction, won by their example, awakened by their admonitions, overcome by their persuasions ! How many have cause to bless God for religious parents, religious acquaintance, religious instructors, (as well as godly ministers,) who have been instrumental in their conversion ! Thus, when many particular branches of righteousness are plucked off as to their temporal state in this life, yet “the holy seed” continues, the stock is perpetuated in a succession of righteous ones.

Men usually spare the tree for the sake of the stock. “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not ; for a blessing is in it :”—a man finds a cluster or two of grapes on a vine, and by those few perceives that there is life in the tree, and some hopes of more fruitfulness hereafter, and therefore doth not cut it down :—“so will I do,” says the Lord, “for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.” (Isai. lxxv. 8.) He spares the rest, or many of them ; doth “not destroy them all, for his servants' sakes,” for the sake of the righteous among them. “He shall deliver the island of the innocent :” (Job xxii. 30 ;) according to marginal reading, “The innocent shall deliver the island ;” which suits best with the following clause : “It is delivered by the pureness of their hands.” Eliphaz tells Job before, what advantage he should himself have by returning to God, and “acquainting himself with him ;” (verse 21 ;) from whom he supposes him to have departed, and to be estranged by sin : and here he tells him what benefit should redound to others ; his goodness should not only do good to himself, but keep off evil from them. For the better understanding [of] this, take two things by way of *concession*, and a third by way of *position*.

(1.) I grant, that the religious part of a people may not always be active as men, in a natural or civil way, in delivering them or keeping off evils from them.—They may have no proper and direct efficiency in it ; for,

(i.) *Sometimes they may want power and ability for it.*—They may be but few and inconsiderable for number : “the holy seed” may be very thinly sown ; there may be but a few grains of corn among a great deal of chaff, but a little wheat among abundance of tares. Or, those that are, may be weak and low as to their outward condition in the world ;—for, “not many mighty, not many noble, are called ;” (1 Cor. i. 26 ;)—and so may be in ill case to contribute much by an active concurrence to the help of others.

(ii.) *Sometimes they may be simple and unskilful in outward*

affairs.—Want that wisdom and worldly policy, which might be needful in many cases for the warding [off] of imminent dangers, or removing incumbent troubles. “Not many wise men after the flesh are called,” as well as “not many mighty or noble.” Saints may be wise for their souls, prudent and knowing in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and yet but babes in other things. The wisdom [which] they have is “from above,” (James iii. 17,) and respects things above; and they may be mere ignoramuses in any thing else.

(iii.) *They may have no hand in public affairs, no share in the government.*—Nor be intrusted or made use of by those that are in power. They may be suppressed and brought into bondage by others, as the Israelites were in Egypt, and the Jews in Babylon: they may be so much in suffering by others, that they be in no capacity of acting for them.

(iv.) *Sometimes God’s judgments upon a people may be such as no instruments, and so not the holiest men among them, can keep them off by any natural efficiency, and all attempts in such a way may be in vain.*—Such was the destruction of the old world by the flood, and of Sodom by fire and brimstone, and of several places by inundations, earthquakes, &c.

(2.) I grant, *that sometimes the religious actually in being among a people may not be able by any means to deliver them, or keep off the greatest evils from them.*—For,

(i.) *Sometimes they cannot keep off such evils from themselves.*—Sometimes they may suffer as deeply as any in the common calamities of a nation, and perish themselves as to their outward condition, be crushed in the ruins of the state where they are. Jeremiah and Baruch could not hinder the destruction of Jerusalem, nor prevent the captivity of their nation; but suffered themselves in a great measure among them. And if we look to the external state of the best in the world, how often doth God “destroy the perfect,” as well as “the wicked!” (Job ix. 22.)

(ii.) *Sometimes the sins of a people may be such, that God will not pardon them as to temporal punishments; nay, not to the godly themselves.*—Even they may have been partakers with others in their sins, or may have so provoked God themselves, and sinned in such a way as to cause his name to be blasphemed; so that he is concerned in honour to bring some exemplary punishment upon them. So it was with David: (2 Sam. xii. :) though he pardoned him as to the guilt of eternal death, saved his soul, and spared his life, which was forfeited to Divine Justice for the murder of Uriah; [yet the prophet announced,] that smart afflictions must come on him, the sword must “never depart from his house,” (verse 10,) and the child begotten in adultery must die, (verse 14,) and his wives must be given to his neighbours. (Verse 11.) So, in Psalm xcix. 8, it seems to be spoken of Moses himself, and other godly among the Israelites who died in the wilderness, and were not permitted to come into the land of promise, that “God forgave them,” yet “took vengeance of their inventions.” And, in Jer. xiv., as God would not hear the Jews’ prayers

for themselves; (verse 12;) so, nor the prophet's prayers for them, who is therefore forbid to pray for them. (Verse 11.) And it is said expressly of "the sins of Manasseh," and particularly "the innocent blood that he shed," that God "would not pardon" them. (2 Kings xxiv. 3, 4.) Pardon them he did to Manasseh, who humbled himself for them, so as to save his soul and remit his temporal punishment in part; for he brought him back from his captivity: but to the body of the people, who had been partakers with him in them, and never repented of them, he "would not pardon" them, but they must be destroyed, or go into captivity. In this case the religious of a nation may not be able, by all their intercessions and with all "their righteousness," to "deliver" any more than "their own souls;" as is said of Noah, Daniel, and Job, though so eminently holy. (Ezek. xiv. 14.)

(iii.) *Sometimes God may make a difference between "the holy seed" and the sinners in the same people, so as to deliver the one, when he destroys the other.*—So he provided for Noah, when he drowned the world; and saved Lot, when he destroyed Sodom; and the Christians at Pella, when Jerusalem was sacked by Titus. God may sometimes hide them, when he exposeth others; "cover their heads in the day of battle," when his "arrows are sharp in the heart of his enemies." (Psalm cxl. 7; xlv. 5.) He may "set a mark upon them that cry and sigh for the abominations" of a land; and command the destroying angel, when he slays others, "young and old," and "begins at the sanctuary" too, yet "not to come near" them. (Ezek. ix. 4, 6.) By what hath been said, it appears that the proposition is not universal,—That God always spares a people for the sake of the holy seed among them,—at least, that are not actually in being. I add, therefore,

(3.) By way of position,—*that the religious of a nation, either that are or are to be among them, are frequently, ordinarily, the means of a people's deliverance.*—And when God spares the sinners of his people, it is usually for the sake of the saints; and were it not for them, he would not have any respect to the others; even as the prophet would not have looked to the king of Israel, had it not been for the presence of Jehoshaphat. (2 Kings iii. 14.)

(i.) *Sometimes judgments may be kept off from a people for their sake.*—Had there been but ten righteous in Sodom, God would have spared it. (Gen. xviii. 32.) And he tells Jeremiah, that "if there were any in Jerusalem that executed judgment, and sought the truth," he would "pardon it." (Chap. v. 1.) Jeremiah himself there was, and Baruch, and Ebedmelech, and, it may be, some few others; but the generality were corrupt, and the godly so few that they were next to none,—none to speak of, as we say; as few in Jerusalem, proportionably, as in Sodom in the time of Abraham. And, indeed, it is compared to Sodom; (Isai. i. 10;) and probably from this reason, among others: and God calls them "all grievous revolters, all corrupters." (Jer. vi. 28.) The few righteous ones among them are otherwise provided for; and they were a people

whom God "would not pardon," (as before was said,) and in honour could not. And yet in another case we find a city saved for the sake of a saint: two thousand were not destroyed at Lot's entreaty. (Gen. xix. 21.)

(ii.) *Sometimes judgments may be deferred, and a people's peace and tranquillity lengthened out, for the sake of the religious among them.*—There was to be "peace and truth in Hezekiah's days," though dreadful times to come after. (Isai. xxxix. 8.) And Josiah was to go to his "grave in peace," and not see the evil that should come after his death. (2 Kings xxii. 20.) God "takes away the righteous from the evil to come;" (Isai. lvii. 1;) which implies, that God defers the evil, till he hath taken the righteous, and secured them. It was a sign that evil was coming on that people, because the righteous perished; and it was their sin that they did not observe it: the death of the righteous was the forerunner of judgments, which were deferred while they lived. While God hath any corn in the field, he keeps up the hedges; but when that is once housed, he breaks down the fence, and lets in the beasts. He may not "sweep" a land "with the besom of destruction" for a time, (Isai. xiv. 23,) because he may have some jewels among the rubbish; but when he hath picked them up, he defers no longer. Thus, though he would not spare Sodom for Lot's sake, yet he delayed its vengeance, till he was clear of it. "I cannot do any thing," says the angel to him, "till thou be come thither," that is, to Zoar. (Gen. xix. 22.) And God would not bring-on the deluge, till Noah were safe in the ark. The Romans could not conquer Jerusalem, till the Christians were got out of it; and the judgment of mystical Babylon is deferred, till all God's people be gone out from her. (Rev. xviii. 4.)

(iii.) *Sometimes judgments, though they do come upon a people, yet may, for the sake of the godly among them, be abated and lessened and mingled with mercy.*—So, Matt. xxiv. 22: "For the elect's sake those days," days of "great tribulation," (verse 21,) "shall be shortened." And in Rehoboam's time, God "would not" utterly "destroy them, but grant them some deliverance;" (2 Chron. xii. 7;) partly because "they humbled themselves," and withal "in Judah things went well," (verse 12,) or, as the margin reads it, "Yet in Judah there were good things;" they were not yet universally corrupted, though they had much declined; there was still a stock of old saints left, that did sincerely cleave to God. So, when God "makes a consumption, even determined, in the midst of a land, yet a remnant" shall be left, and "the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness." (Isai. x. 22, 23.) And when God "destroys the sinful kingdom," yet he "will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob;" and though he "sift the house of Israel, yet shall not the least grain fall to the earth." (Amos ix. 8, 9.)

(iv.) *Sometimes God removes judgments from off a people for the sake of the godly.*—So, at least in part, for the sake of Hezekiah and Isaiah, and the rest of the faithful in Jerusalem, God delivered the land from Sennacherib, with the destruction of his army and himself

soon after, when he had taken "all the defenced cities of Judah." (Isai. xxxvi. 1; compared with xxxvii. 4, 15, 36, 38.) Only it is worth our observing here, that God hath in such cases a respect to his saints, whether dead or alive or yet unborn. So, in delivering Judah out of the hand of Sennacherib, he had respect not only to the righteous of a nation then in being, as Hezekiah and Isaiah, &c.; but to David, though long since dead; (having promised a kingdom to be continued to his posterity, he would make good his word;) nay, to those that were yet to come. "The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant." (Chap. xxxvii. 31, 32.) This "remnant" were not only they that were then living, and escaped Sennacherib's fury, but many that were yet to come. All that escaped the present danger were not godly, but yet godly ones were to be born of them. And is it not a great truth, that in all the deliverances of that nation, as God had a special regard to Christ, that was to proceed from them according to the flesh, so likewise [he had a special regard] to the elect [whom] he had from eternity given to Christ, and who were to be, in their several generations and successions, "a seed to serve him?" (Psalm xxii. 30.) Other instances might here be brought, but I shall meet with them under another head.

4. *The stock of the tree is that for the sake of which the tree is dressed and watered and looked after.*—Men take care of the trees so long as there is life in the stock; they do not only not grub it up, but prune it, and bestow upon it what cost and labour is fit for it. Many a blessing, both temporal and spiritual, comes upon a nation for the sake of the religious in the midst of it. Who watcheth or waters a vineyard, when all the vines are dead? When the stem of the vine is alive, though many branches be withered, they may lay open the root, and dung it; and all the labour they bestow upon it, is for the sake of the life [which] they see in the body of it. That God "keeps his vineyard, and waters it every moment," (Isai. xxvii. 3,) it is because he sees life in the plants, though there be little fruit on the branches.

(1.) *Temporal good things* we find him sometimes bestowing upon others, for the sake of the godly that are with them; as he blessed Laban, though an idolater, for Jacob's sake; (Gen. xxx. 30;) and Potiphar for Joseph's. (Chap. xxxix. 5.) Peace and plenty he may afford to a people, that his own servants may have their share of it, for their encouragement in holiness. So, that Babylon had so long peace before its downfall, it was that God's people in it might have peace. (Jer. xxix. 7.)

(2.) *Spiritual.*—God gives the means of grace, his oracles and ordinances, and the offers of salvation, to a people, especially for the sake of those that belong to him. It is no small mercy to have an external call, an offer of Christ, to be brought into a salvable condition. If men neglect their opportunities, forsake their own mercies, lose the benefit of them, it is their own fault; the privilege is not

less in itself. Now, where God hath none to call effectually, he doth not use to send the gospel. The apostle Paul was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia;" and when he would have gone into Bithynia, "the Spirit suffered him not." (Acts xvi. 6, 7.) And why was it, but because God had not any people there who were as yet to be called by his grace? But he is sent into Macedonia, (verse 10,) because there God had work for him, several that were presently to be converted by his ministry. Had not God had a seed among the Macedonians, they might have still continued in the same darkness that the others were in. So likewise God continued Paul so long at Corinth, and tells him that "no man should set on him to hurt him," because he "had much people in that city." (Acts xviii. 10, 11.)

QUESTION. If it be asked, "Why doth God show such respect to others for the sake of the godly?" not to mention other reasons here, I will give but two:—

ANSWER I. *In respect of the godly which are to be gathered in, he doeth it that they may be gathered.*—Many saints may be in the loins of wicked men, as hath been said; and should God cut off the parents, the children would never have a being; or should he not continue the means of grace to them, how should those that come of them be converted? And therefore he keeps off such evils from the parents as might prevent either the birth or the conversion of such as are to be born of them, and bestows upon them such blessings and privileges as may promote and further it. He spares and dresses the tree, for the sake of the fruit [which] he intends it shall bring forth.

ANSWER II. *In relation to those that are already called, God shows kindness to others for their sakes, that there may be time and opportunity for all the work [which] he hath determined to do either in or by them.*

(1.) *In them.*—A people may be spared, that *they* may be spared among them, and share in their deliverance; and the means of grace may be continued to the body of a people, till God hath wrought all that grace in the hearts of his children which he hath designed for them. Should they fall with others, or should the means of grace be taken away, they should want them, and what were lacking in their graces would not be made up. God, therefore, usually continues the gospel to a people, so long as there are any among them to be called in or built up; and when he takes it away from a nation, it is a sign [that] it hath done all its work there which he sent it to do.

(2.) *By them.*—That they may have opportunity for doing what God appointed them to do. Were they taken off with others, they should not have time for their work; were they continually under pressures, always loaded with afflictions, they might be disheartened in it; were the means of grace gone, they might want quickening to it; nay, should God take away the whole set of wicked men from them, they should want much matter for their graces to work upon. Much of the grace of the saints respects their enemies,—love to them, meekness and gentleness in dealing with, patience in bearing

injuries from, them, courage in reprovng their vices, and zeal in opposing or hindering their wickedness, &c. ; and God may spare them sometimes, that they may be matter on which the graces of the saints may be exercised, and thereby the excellency of a true Christian spirit discovered.

III. *On what account the religious of a nation may be said to be its strength, or what influence they have on the welfare and security of a people.*—And this will yet farther evidence the truth of the doctrine.

1. *As they are God's favourites.*—His children, his "jewels," (Mal. iii. 17,) his "treasure," (Exod. xix. 5,) his "portion." (Deut. xxxii. 9.) They are most nearly related to him, most dearly beloved by him. And though several of these titles are attributed to the body of a people, yet they primarily belong to the truly religious among them, and either are given to the rest with respect to them, or only according to what they appear to be, though in reality they are not. The godly have the greatest interest in God, as well as he hath an interest in them ; and therefore they can do most with him, and he doth most upon their account. Men will many times use their servants well for their children's sake ; be kind to a stranger whom they know not, for the sake of a friend whom they do know ; save their bags or trunks, though little worth, if their jewels or treasure be in them : and princes will gratify whole societies for the sake of some particular favourites. God is not less concerned for his friends and favourites, than men are for theirs ; and many a boon (so to speak) he gives to others, out of the respect he bears to them. Men are ambitious of being great, and those that have an interest in princes, to be members of their communities and corporations, because they reckon [that] the whole will fare the better for their sakes, and many special privileges may be indulged them in favour to such honourable members. Why should they not judge the same in the case before us ? Is not God wont to do as much for those [that] he loves, as men do for those [whom] they love ? Happy is that society where God hath many friends, if men be but so wise as to be friendly to them : it is pity but that the favourites of heaven should be *their* favourites too. Abimelech, king of Gerar, thought so, (though a Heathen,) when he would "make a covenant with" Isaac, because he "saw that the Lord was with" him. (Gen. xxvi. 28.)

2. *As they improve their interest with God for a people.*—They are they that intercede with God for them ; "stand in the gap, and make up the hedge," when by other means they cannot, yet by prayer, that so God may "not destroy" them. (Ezek. xxii. 30.) Thus Moses interposed with God for Israel, when under God's great displeasure ; (Psalm cvi. 23 ;) and Abraham prayed for Abimelech's household, (Gen. xx. 17,) and Samuel for the Israelites : "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." (1 Sam. xii. 23.) And still the religious part of a people are the praying part of them, and thereby do most for them ; they pray most and best and to best purpose.

(1.) *Most.*—"I give myself unto prayer." (Psalm cix. 4.) The Hebrew hath only, "I prayer;" as if he had said, "I am all prayer; prayer is my business, my whole work." Prayer, indeed, is the very breath of the new man; a prayerless person is never a religious one, no more than a child can be alive which doth not breathe. No sooner did Paul cease persecuting the godly, and came to be in the number of them himself, but he fell a-praying. (Acts ix. 11.) And generally the most eminent in holiness are most eminent in prayer; but still they that are really God's people, are a praying people. Others may pray by fits; but they, constantly: others may "visit him in their trouble," and "when his chastening is upon them;" (Isai. xxvi. 16;) but they do it even when the greatest blessings are upon them: others cry to him when they need him most; but they, even when they seem to need him least. They pray "always," (Eph. vi. 18,) "without ceasing;" (1 Thess. v. 17;) and that not for themselves only, but for others,—for their enemies; (Matt. v. 44;) and much more for their neighbours, and those of the same community with themselves. And that not only,

(i.) *Because they are themselves concerned in their welfare, as being of the same body.*—And so count it their interest, the welfare of the whole being the welfare of the members.

(ii.) *But because they love others, and pity them, and out of compassion pray for them.*—They are friends and well-wishers to them, and would have them partake of their mercies: they grudge them not the enjoyment of the greatest good things; would have them be as good as themselves, as much in the favour of God as themselves, and every way as happy; and therefore beg that they may be so. It grieves them to see the misery of others, when they themselves are most secure, most free from it.

(iii.) *They have tried prayer most, both for themselves and others; and experienced the sweetness and efficacy of it.*—They pray, because they have prayed, and their prayers have not been in vain; and they pray for others, because they have been heard for others; as well as pray for themselves, because they have been heard for themselves.

(2.) *They pray best.*—Grace will out-pray nature. In carnal men prayer is but the voice of nature or conscience; but in the godly it is the language of grace. Others *make* prayers; these only *pray* prayers. Others pray either in their forms, or in their gifts, or their parts; these only "pray in the Holy Ghost." (Jude 20.) And this, too, I understand not only of their praying for themselves, but likewise for others. For,

(i.) *They have most to plead with God for others, or know best what to plead.*—They that are best acquainted with the word, have most "observed the operation of God's hands," (Psalm xxviii. 5,) the methods of his providence, the issue of his various dispensations in the world; those that are most public-spirited, so as to concern themselves most for the welfare of others, especially of God's people, and for the glory of his name;—have most to plead with God on their

behalf; and so most materials and furniture for prayer, and most arguments for faith to present to God in prayer.

(ii.) *They have faith to urge their pleas.*—They are, indeed, the only persons that have true faith; and it is faith especially [that] makes men plead with God, and improve all the arguments they can, so far as the word, which is the ground of faith, will warrant them. So Moses pleads for Israel; (Exod. xxxii. 11—13;) and Jeremiah for the Jews, in the case of the famine. (Jer. xiv. 7—9.) The more faith in prayer, usually the more pleading in it; and this prayer is always best, because of the faith that is acted in it. The goodness of prayer is not to be judged of by the curiousness of the composition, the elegance of the style, the vehemency of the expression; but by the workings of faith. It is “the prayer of faith” that is called for, and to which the promise is made. (James i. 5, 6; v. 15.)

(iii.) *They urge them with most fervency.*—There is a natural fervency in prayer, which ariseth from natural affections, excited and quickened by some pressing trouble or distress; and there is a gracious fervency, which proceeds from faith. Nothing makes men more earnest and warm in prayer, than faith doth; the more firmly a man believes, the more importunately he asks; the greater hope he hath of prevailing, the more vehement he will be in begging. It was Jacob’s faith [that] made him so importunate in prayer, that he wrestled with God, and would not let him go unless he blessed him; (Gen. xxxii. 24—26;) for he had a promise of being blessed, and all nations in him; (chap. xxviii. 13, 14;) it was the faith of that promise [which] stirred up this fervency. And that great example of importunity in prayer, the Syro-phenician woman, is no less an example of faith: “O woman, great is thy faith.” (Matt. xv. 28.) So that we may conclude, the religious of a people pray best, because both with true faith and spiritual fervency.

(3.) *They pray to best purpose, with most success.*—If ever any prayer be “effectual,” it is “the fervent prayer of a righteous man;” (James v. 16;) which is the same with “the prayer of faith.” (Verse 15.) When God abhors the prayers of others, he hath respect to his; when “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to” him, “the prayer of the upright is his delight.” (Prov. xv. 8.) “He will fulfil the desires of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.” (Psalm cxlv. 19.) They pray “according to his will,” and he “heareth” them. (1 John v. 14.) They, having most interest in God, (as before,) can prevail most with him, and get most of him. The favourites of a prince will many times prevail with him, when the petitions of common subjects, and much more of rebels, are rejected by him. The prevalency of godly men’s prayers is well known, and hath been often experienced by their enemies themselves. Pharaoh himself believed it, when he desired Moses’s prayers; (Exod. ix. 28;) and Simon Magus, when [he desired] Peter’s. (Acts viii. 24.) Such are conscious to themselves of their want of an interest in God, and their being obnoxious to him, and that the truly godly are in favour with him; and therefore, when their hearts fail them, and

they have not the face to look up to God, they will beg the prayers of those that have. When they are in great distresses or dangers, on sick beds; when conscience teaseth them, death looks grimly on them, hell gapes for them, and heaven frowns upon them; then they must have some good men to pray for them: they think God is ready to hear such, when he is angry with themselves. Thus, Saul would have Samuel come back, and worship with him: (1 Sam. xv. 30 :) he thought God was angry with him and would not look to him, but Samuel might be accepted. It was a good testimony given by a queen to the efficacy of the saints' prayers, when she professed herself more afraid of one poor minister in the pulpit, than of a numerous army in the field. And a good bishop once told a great king concerning a godly gentleman that was under some disfavour for his plain speaking, that he had not a better subject in his kingdom, being a man that could have what he would of God. The Romans themselves took notice of the prevalency of the prayers of the Christian legion among them, in that great deliverance obtained by them in the time of the emperor Marcus.

It is usually a sign of mercy to a person or people, when God opens and enlarges the hearts of his servants in prayer for them: when God intends to do them good, he puts it into the hearts of such to seek it for them. When the time of the Jews' return from their captivity drew near, he set Daniel at work to pray for it. (Chap. ix. 1—3.) And it is as bad a sign, when the hearts of the godly are shut up and straitened, so that either they drop others out of their prayers, or cannot be earnest with God for them: he doth, as it were, secretly forbid them to pray for such; he hinders them, by withdrawing his Spirit from them. The mercies [which] he gives out to others being frequently at the request of his saints, when he stops those requests, it is a sign he hath no mercy for those for whom they were to be made: when a petition is prevented, it is a sign it should not have been granted. When God doth not "prepare" his servants' "hearts," he doth not incline his own ear: (Psalm x. 17 :) as, on the other side, when he intends to hear, he stirs up prayer; even as princes will sometimes give a private intimation to those for whom they design a favour, to petition them for it. To conclude this: the sum of all is,—The religious of a nation are upon this account the strength of it, for that they pray most and with best success for it.

3. *As they are a means many times to stop the current of wickedness, which is ready to overflow a land with judgments, and to bring swift destruction on it.*—For they are thereby a means to prevent or lessen those judgments. It is the sin of a people that lays them open to wrath; and he that would keep off wrath, must endeavour to keep out sin; he that would hinder the effect, must obviate the cause. It is the devil's damnable policy, to draw men into sin, that he may expose them to punishment. This he taught his disciple Balaam, who taught the Midianites "to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." (Rev. ii. 14.) He could not otherwise hurt that

people than by setting God against them ; and that he could not do by any means but bringing them to sin against him. None are greater enemies to a people, nor can go a readier way to ruin them, (of which more hereafter,) than they that draw them into sin, and thereby into God's displeasure : and, on the other hand, none are greater friends to them, than they that labour most to keep them from sin ; for that is the surest way to keep them from suffering ; or, in the words of Phineas in such a case, to " deliver them out of the hand of the Lord," (Joshua xxii. 31.) that is, to keep them from falling into it. Now, who is it that hinders sin most, and stops the dam to prevent an inundation of it, but the religious part of a nation ? Is it they that reprove it, and bear their testimony against it, and by their authority (so far as they are in a capacity) suppress it, and by their example discountenance it. None so active, none so zealous, in opposing sin, as they that are most holy. They not only fear it in themselves, but labour to prevent it in others : if it were in their power, they would neither sin themselves, nor let any else ; though they set themselves especially against the most crying sins, and [those] which are most likely to stir up wrath in God against a people. And when sin is that for which threatenings are denounced and punishments inflicted, they that fear God among any people do most effectually keep off punishment by preventing sin. To prevent it, therefore, is their first care : and if that cannot be, they bewail it, and mourn over it ; they " sigh and cry for the abominations " of a land. (Ezek. ix. 4.) So David " beheld the transgressors, and was grieved : " (Psalm cxix. 158 :) " rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because they kept not God's law." (Verse 136.) And Jeremiah " wept in secret places for the pride " of his people. (Chap. xiii. 17.) This is not a direct and formal stopping [of] the course of sin in a land in respect of others ; yet it is a kind of check to it, so far as it keeps sin from being so general as to overspread themselves : while they thus lay to heart the sins of others, they are not themselves partakers of them, nor sharers in the guilt. These sins are not universal, when there are some that testify their dislike of them by their sorrow for them. The more general sin is, the more dangerous ; and the more likely to bring-on judgments, when the godly themselves become guilty, though not by commission of it, yet by not bewailing it, which is a degree of fellowship with it. But when they mourn for sin committed by others, they free themselves from the guilt of approbation or connivance at or communion in it, and so may be instrumental in keeping off at least more general judgments.

4. *As they not only check the progress of sin, but propagate goodness to others, as well as promote it in themselves.*—This they do by their counsels, admonitions, example. They make it their business not only to do good themselves, but to make others good, and bring them to holiness, as well as keep them from sin ; and so not only themselves live in the exercise of these graces to which the promises are made, " executing judgment, and seeking the truth," (Jer. v. 1.) but they labour to gain others to the same gracious conversation.

Grace, wherever it is, is communicative, spreads itself what it can. They that love God, see so much loveliness in him, that they would fain persuade others to love him too: they that walk in his ways like them so well, and find so much peace and pleasantness in them, (Prov. iii. 17,) and expect such a reward at the end of them, that they are solicitous to get others into them. They know, he whom they serve is bountiful enough and rich enough; there is glory enough in heaven for all, "mansions" enough in Christ's "Father's house" for all; (John xiv. 2;) and the multitude of fellow-servants will neither hinder their work, nor diminish their wages. Nay, they know that they "that win souls are wise," (Prov. xi. 30,) "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever;" (Dan. xii. 3;) and therefore they are desirous to be in the number of them. It is their design to advance God's name and glory; and they would have others help them in the work. And, indeed, God often makes use of, not only ministers in their preaching, but private Christians in their conversation, to promote the conversion of sinners; and commonly when he intends any great reformation among a people, he makes use of those that are already gracious in carrying it on. And "godliness having promise of the life that now is," as well as "of that which is to come," (1 Tim. iv. 8,) so far as the religious part of a people promote godliness, advance religion among them, so far they are instrumental in procuring their welfare, and keeping off their ruin.

5. *Sometimes the religious of a nation may have an influence upon its public welfare, by doing some eminent service, wherewith God is much pleased, and to which he hath a special respect.*—"Phinehas stood up, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed." (Psalm cvi. 30.) "Phinehas hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy." (Num. xxv. 11.) And he is said to "make an atonement for" them by that act. (Verse 13.) Not that any thing done by a mere man can be a full satisfaction to Divine Justice for a man's own sin, and much less can it be for the sin of another: but however, as sometimes temporal evils, inflicted upon saints themselves, because they have a respect to their sins, though they are not properly penal, yet in a larger sense are called "punishments," and sometimes "vengeance;"—"Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions;" (Psalm xcix. 8;) Moses himself seems to be included: (verses 6, 7:) here was "vengeance" on those who yet were pardoned; which cannot, therefore, be strictly such;—so, likewise, some good the saints do which is pleasing to God, and accepted of him in Christ, on the performance whereof he turns away his anger; (thereby to show his approbation of what is done, and to encourage to more;) and this may in the same large sense be called "an atonement," though properly it be not so. Yet this act of Phinehas hath something in it that resembles an atonement, and may on that account be so called: for his killing Zimri and Cozbi was a fulfilling [of] that

law which required the death of the parties offending in such a kind ; and the holiness of God, which had been contemned by the transgressors, was in some measure vindicated, and in the eyes of the people, by their exemplary punishment.

Another instance we have in Joshua : (chap. vii. :) the Lord was angry with Israel for Achan's trespass ; (verse 12 ;) Joshua hath him stoned to death ; (verse 25 ;) and then "the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger." (Verse 26.) So, when there was a famine in the land for Saul's killing the Gibeonites, (2 Sam. xxi. 1.) David hangs up seven of his sons ; (verse 9 ;) and then the Lord "was entreated for the land." (Verse 14.) When such sins as are public defilements to a land are not punished, the whole land becomes guilty, and usually is visited with some public judgment ; but when they are punished, that judgment is either prevented or removed. No question but Josiah's zeal in reforming religion and destroying idolatry, wherewith the land was so universally polluted, had a great influence on the keeping off God's judgments from it while he lived.

6. Lastly. *God may sometimes spare a people for the sake of his children among them, that they may be useful and helpful to them in his work.*—This end God had in sparing the Gibeonites ; he intended they should be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for his sanctuary, and so assistant to the priests and Levites in their service. (Joshua ix. 27.) So, Isai. lxi. 5, 6 : "Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of aliens shall be your ploughmen and your vine-dressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord : men shall call you the Ministers of our God." Not that saints are to be all officers or all rulers, and carnal men their slaves and drudges ; (for, as to their worldly state, worldly men may be above them, and they may owe subjection to them ;) but that they shall be, in their worldly employments and callings, useful and serviceable to the saints in the things of God ; and, either of their own accord, or as overruled by divine disposal, be assistant to them in maintaining and promoting the interest of true religion. God can make even Moab "hide his outcasts ;" (Isai. xvi. 3, 4 ;) "the earth help the woman ;" (Rev. xii. 16 ;) Ahab favour a good Obadiah, that [he] may hide the Lord's prophets ; (1 Kings xviii. 3, 4 ;) a heathen Cyrus "let go his captives, and build his city ;" (Isai. xlv. 13 ;) a Darius, an Artaxerxes, an Ahasuerus, countenance and prefer a Daniel, a Nehemiah, a Mordecai, public instruments of good to his people. Sometimes God may raise up such on purpose, as he did Cyrus ; sometimes preserve and maintain them in their power and places, for his servants' sake, and that they may be helpful to them. Nay, sometimes he may so twist and combine the interest of worldly men with the interest of his children, that they cannot promote their own, without helping on the others'. Sometimes religious and civil liberties may be both together struck at, so that, if the former go down, the latter will be ruined too ; and then it is the wisdom of those that are not truly religious, yet to favour those that are, it being, as it were, in their own defence and for their own securities ; and in such a case God may help them out of respect

to his own, and keep some from civil slavery, that he may keep others from spiritual.

IV. APPLICATION.

USE I. BY WAY OF INFORMATION.

1. *If the religious of a nation are the strength and defence of it, then the same may be said of the religious of the world,—they are the substance of it, the support, the strength of it.*—The world itself is preserved chiefly for the sake of the godly in it, “the holy seed.” The world is a great field, in which the good grain bears but a small proportion to the abundance of tares; and that God doth not pluck up the tares and burn them, it is lest the good corn should be plucked up with them. What is God’s end in preserving the world, and holding it up in its being, but the glorifying [of] himself in his several attributes,—wisdom, power, goodness, but especially his holiness, in the service [which] he enables his saints to do him; and his grace, in the salvation [that] he affords them? That, therefore, he may have that glory, it is needful there should be a continuance of some to serve him, and that may be the subjects of his mercy and grace; and they are his elect, those “vessels of mercy which he hath afore prepared unto glory.” (Rom. ix. 23.) The world therefore shall stand so long as there be any of God’s elect in it to be brought in by actual conversion, or their graces to be completed in further degrees of sanctification; but when the number of those whose names are written in heaven is filled up, and they themselves fitted for heaven, then shall the end of all things come. It cannot be thought that God would ever endure so much wickedness as he sees in the world every day committed, or so long bear its manners with so much patience, had he not a further design in it; namely, the gathering together the whole body of those [whom] he hath given to Christ. He never made this great fabric for the lusts and pleasures of wicked men, that they might enjoy their ease, and gratify their senses, and devour their neighbours; but for his own glory: and he will have some still in it to glorify him, by serving him and living according to his laws; as well as he glorifies himself in saving them. And were there none in it to serve him, he would not suffer others continually to dishonour him; were it not for “the holy seed” [that] he hath scattered abroad in it, he would soon set the field on a flame.

2. *The religious of a nation are not its enemies.*—Not the troublers of a nation, not the pests of a state, the disturbers of a peace, as some count them. Ahab indeed reviled Elijah as one “that troubled Israel;” (1 Kings xviii. 17;) but David would not have said so. He was a godly king, and had other thoughts of his godly subjects; he calls them “the excellent of the earth,” and “all his delight” was in them. (Psalm xvi. 3.) The Jews said of the apostles, that they had “turned the world upside down;” but they were unbelieving Jews that said it. (Acts xvii. 5, 6.) The same apostles were counted “the off-scouring of all things, and the filth of the earth;” (1 Cor. iv. 13;) but it was by those that rather were such

themselves. The idolatrous Heathens were wont to condemn the Christians as the cause of all their public calamities that befell them; but they were Heathens that did so. Yet sometimes we shall find wicked men themselves under a conviction of the contrary, and clearing them of this imputation: so Joash, king of Israel, calls Elisha "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." (2 Kings xiii. 14.) Sometimes (as before) they beg their prayers; sometimes wish themselves in their condition; and, whatever they esteem them while they live, they would be like them when they die; wicked Balaam would "die the death of the righteous." (Num. xxiii. 10.) Thus conscience absolves whom malice had condemned; and when men come to be cool and sober, they purge the godly from those crimes with which, while they were heated with passion, or intoxicated with a concern for some contrary interest, they had groundlessly aspersed them.

True, indeed, the religious of a people almost every where are the occasion of divisions and distractions; and so was Christ himself. He "came to send fire on the earth;" and not "to give peace, but rather division;" (Luke xii. 49, 51;) nay, "a sword;" (Matt. x. 34;) "to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Verse 35.) And yet nor Christ nor his saints are really the troublers of the world, nor the direct and proper causes of those broils and confusions which many times have been made on their accounts; which indeed proceed from the lusts of the wicked, not the graces of the godly. Sinners cannot endure the light of the truth, nor the power of holiness in the lives of saints; and therefore quarrel with them: but are those saints to be blamed for such troubles as, only accidentally and by reason of the corruptions of others, arise on their doing but their duty? Is a bridge to be blamed for troubling the water, because, keeping its place, it stops the water's passage, and is the occasion of its swelling and roaring? Are sheep to be blamed for incensing the wolves? or doves, for provoking the hawks? Truly, just such incendiaries are God's children in the places where they live: they disquiet their neighbours only by the good things they enjoy, which others love and covet, and fain would get from them; or by the good they do, which wicked men hate, and fain would hinder in them. The quarrels of the ungodly world with "the holy seed" among them, are but like that of Cain with Abel: he "slew his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." (1 John iii. 12.)

3. *The sinners of a nation are really the weakness of it.*—It is they, of whatsoever party or sect or persuasion they are, that trouble any people, and occasion their dangers, and procure their ruin. "Righteousness exalteth a nation;" it is "sin" that "is a reproach to" it, that humbles it and brings it down. (Prov. xiv. 34.) Wicked men are they that betray nations and kingdoms, expose them to God's wrath, subject them to his judgments. Did Noah bring the flood upon the old world? or did the wicked of it, by their wickedness?

Did Lot bring down fire from heaven upon Sodom? or did the Sodomites do it by their own lewdness? Did Jeremiah by his preaching, or Baruch and Ebedmelech, and those few other godly in Jerusalem, by their praying and weeping and mourning, bring on the captivity of that people? or did not they themselves, by their idolatry, their profaneness, their swearing, their sabbath-breaking, their polluting God's ordinances, their shedding innocent blood, &c.? Were the apostles and primitive Christians the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans? or were not the unbelieving Jews, by their rejecting Christ, and persecuting those that adhered to him?

I deny not but the sins of the best of saints may sometimes contribute to the bringing down judgments upon others. Jonah's sin raised a tempest upon the mariners; (chap. i. 4;) and David numbering the people brought the plague upon them. (2 Sam. xxiv. 15.) God will not only manifest his own holiness by punishing them that are dearest to him, when they sin against him; but teach them more care and watchfulness against sin, when they find how far the direful effects of it are extended unto others. And yet what is this to the numerous instances on the other side? Which doth ordinarily do most mischief,—the sins of the truly godly, which are fewer and lesser, and mourned over and repented of; or the sins of the profane, the hypocrites, the impenitent? May we not say, that if the sins of the one have slain their thousands, those of the other have slain their ten thousands? The greatest danger any can be in, is to be liable to the displeasure of God, who is holy, and cannot endure to behold iniquity; powerful, and able to destroy those that offend him; can arm and commission innumerable enemies against them, raise the *posse* of heaven and earth upon them, let fly thousands of arrows at them, and command what judgments he please to consume them. And who are they that do ordinarily make a people naked, and lay them open to the wrath and revenge of God? Is it they that love God, or they that hate him? the obedient, or the rebellious? they that please him, or they that provoke him? they that intercede with him, or they that defy him? they that mourn for the abominations of a land, or they that commit and encourage them? they that tremble at his judgments, or [they] that dare his vengeance? in a word, they that hinder all the sin they can, or [they] that hinder all the good they can? they that dare not be wicked, or [they] that will not be holy?

4. *It is the interest of any people, where God hath a seed of righteous ones, to favour them and make much of them.*—They are their best friends that are God's friends. They should favour them most whom God favours, of whose good things they partake, for whose sakes they are preserved, receive many a mercy, enjoy many a privilege, escape many a judgment. It is their interest to be kind to those that have most interest in God, most power with him, and can get most of him. What society of men but usually favours them most whom their prince favours most? and they think it their interest to do so. They know, they may need them, and many a good turn they may do them. They that are the greatest among men, and sit at the upper end of the

world, may need the help of the faith and prayers of the meanest saints; they may need them to interpose with God for them, and ward off his blows, or remove his plagues; and when he hath no respect to a people for their own sakes, yet he may for the sake of his servants among them.

5. *It is folly in any people to persecute them that are truly religious.*—That is but to fall foul upon their friends; (and then they lie open to their enemies, or are indeed their own greatest enemies:) to pluck the stakes out of the hedge, and turn the vineyard into a common: to pull up the sluices; and then there is nothing to keep out an inundation of evils: to pull down the pillars; and then the house comes tumbling about their ears. It is, indeed, but to dig their own graves, to make way for their own destruction, by destroying those that are their preservers. For by this means they lose,

(1.) *The benefit of the saints' prayers.*—When men go on maliciously to abuse and oppress the godly among them, God may refuse to hear even *their* prayers for them. The Jews persecuted Jeremiah, slandered him as a traitor, “smote him” with their tongues, “devised devices against” him, and put him in the dungeon; and God would not hear his prayers for them. (Jer. xxxvii. 13—15; xi. 19; xiv. 11.) Their posterity persecuted the Lord Jesus Christ; and though his prayers were heard for many of them, converted (Acts ii. 41, and afterward) by the preaching of the apostles; yet when they still persevered in their persecuting those very apostles, their prayers could not prevail for them, but God gave them up first to hardness of heart and blindness of mind, (Acts xxviii. 26, 27,) and then to their enemies' sword.

Or God may stop the mouths of his saints, that they shall not so much as pray for them; he may (as was before intimated) straiten them, and withdraw from them, when they begin to open their lips for those whom he hath appointed for destruction. Nay, he may set their hearts to pray against them, and thereby hasten his judgments on them. It is true, God's children are commanded to pray for their enemies and persecutors; (Matt. v. 44;) and there may be mercy in store with God for them, when what they do, they do as Paul did before his conversion, “ignorantly in unbelief.” (1 Tim. i. 13.) Thus Stephen prayed for those that stoned him: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;” (Acts vii. 60;) and Christ, for those that crucified him: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke xxiii. 34.) And yet Christ himself excludes the world out of his prayer: “I pray not for the world;” that is, not for the reprobate world, or the world in opposition to those [whom] his Father had given him. (John xvii. 9.)

How often doth David pray against his persecutors! especially in Psalms lxix. and cix. Though his prayers are generally prophetic, yet prayers still they are. And how often do we find him and other saints praying against idolaters, (Psalm xcvi. 7,) haters of Zion, (cxxix. 5,) obstinate and hardened enemies of God's truth and ways and people! (See Psalms lxxiv. and xciv.) And though the Jews in

Babylon were commanded to "pray for the peace of the city," (Jer. xxix. 7,) yet that must be but a limited command: they were to pray for the peace of Babylon during its time, and so long as it was to be the place of their abode; but they were not to pray for its perpetual peace and welfare; for that had been to pray against the declared mind of God in all those prophecies which foretold its ruin, and, indeed, against their own deliverance, which was to follow upon the beginning of Babylon's destruction, in the dissolution of that empire. Nay, do we not find them praying for vengeance on it? "The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say." (Jer. li. 35.)

God's children ought to pray for their own private enemies; nay, for those that at present are enemies to the public weal of Zion; as not knowing who of them may come to be her friends; God may have a seed among them. All have not sinned the "sin unto death," though many may, for whom they are expressly forbid to pray; (1 John v. 16;) and if they knew in particular who they were, they ought no more to pray for them than for the devil himself, if Austin may be believed. But certain it is, they must not, cannot, dare not, pray for the implacable, incorrigible enemies of their Lord and Master. Nay, they cannot pray for the exaltation of Christ's kingdom, but they at the same time pray for the downfall of such. Whenever they pray [that] God's "will may be done, and his kingdom come," they pray for the confusion of those that obstinately oppose his will, and whose ruin must make way for the coming of his kingdom; and so all the saints in the world are every day praying against the malignant, hardened enemies and persecutors of Christ and his people. And is it not a dreadful thing, to have the prayers of saints, of thousands of saints, of all the saints upon earth, against them? those prayers which shall not be lost, which will be heard, and not one of them be in vain. See, in Rev. xi., what power the prayers of the saints have, God's witnesses, even in their sackcloth: "And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will." (Verses 5, 6.) What is the "fire that proceedeth out of their mouth," but the judgments they denounce and by prayer bring down upon the anti-Christian world? No army with banners [is] more terrible than a company of praying saints. When saints are full of prayer, heaven is big with vengeance: and their prayers cannot go up so fast, but judgments will soon come down as fast.

(2.) They lose *the help of the saints*.—God's protection, and whatever favour he hath been wont to show them for the sake of his saints. This follows upon the former, and I shall meet with it again under the next use. To conclude this, therefore: the enemies would

fain now, as well as in former ages, extirpate God's seed from out of the earth. Their language is, as the Jews' was of Paul, "It is not fit that they should live:" (Acts xxii. 22 :) they would have "the name of Israel be no more in remembrance." (Psalm lxxxiii. 4.) But what would they get by that? Were the holy seed, the plants of God's planting, stubbed up, how soon would the vineyard be laid waste! If the green trees were out of the way, the fire of God's wrath would quickly consume the dry; and what should hinder? who should interpose with the Lord of the vineyard? who should say, "Destroy it not," when, alas! there were no "blessing in it?" (Isai. lxxv. 8.) I dare say, had some men their wish, it would be the blackest day that ever England saw; and, it may be, blacker to none than to them that wish for it.

USE II. EXHORTATION.

(I.) *To the truly religious.*—Of all sorts and persuasions, I mean. Let it appear that you are indeed the substance and strength of a sinful land. Act like those that are so: do what you can to help a poor, sinking nation; "stand in the gap, and make up the hedge;" (Ezek. xxii. 30;) and labour to convince your enemies themselves, that you are their friends, and the best they have, too.

1. *Intercede with God for the land.*—Improve all the interest you have in heaven, to keep off approaching destruction. And, to quicken you, consider,

(1.) *You know not how far you may prevail with God for the prevention of national judgments.*—When other means fail, yet prayer may prevail. Human strength and human wisdom may be able to do little; the power and policy of enemies may be too hard for the wisdom and strength of the godly: but when you can do least yourselves, you may engage God, by prayer, to do most. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength." (Job ix. 4.) If he take your part, he can turn about the hearts of enemies, disappoint their devices, befool their politics, or, if need be, break their power. Enemies are commonly the instruments of evil brought upon a land; yet they are but instruments; God himself is the principal Agent. (Amos iii. 6.) They are the rods in his hand, the scourges, which he useth or lays aside when he pleaseth. You may be helpful in diverting the evils which enemies might do, though you touch them not yourselves, but address to God, and set him against them. You may do in this case as when you have to do with men in civil things: if a prince be offended with you, and like to punish you, though what he doeth, he doeth by ministers and officers, yet you do not fall a-quarrelling with them, but apply yourself to the prince. If he be pacified toward you, his officers dare not meddle with you; his pardon is a *supersedeas* to all their actions. Try what you can do with God; if he side with you, either men shall not desire to touch you, or not be able, if they would, to hurt you.

Think, how many times have the prayers of the saints prevailed with God in the like cases. Moses's prayers prevailed to deliver

Israel, when the Egyptians so closely pursued them: "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" (Exod. xiv. 15;) and at other times. (Exod. xxxii. 14, 34; Num. xiv. 20.) Asa's prayer prevailed against Zerah and his Ethiopian army, (2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12,) and Jehoshaphat's against the Ammonites. (2 Chron. xx. 22—30.) And if prayer hath been so prevalent, why may it not be so still? It is an old, tried means, which hath not used to fail: do not say [that] these were more eminent saints, and so could do more with God by prayer than you can; but remember, you have the same God to pray-to that they had, and he delights as much in prayer now as then he did, and can do as much for us as then he could. You pray with the same kind of faith that they did, and your faith is grounded on the same promises; they are still the same: and the Mediator, who is to present your petitions to God, is still the same; and his interest in those that fear him, and his concern for them, is still the same [as] it was: and then, why may not prayer now prevail as much as formerly, and do as much with God?

(2.) *If you do prevail, it will be both your honour and comfort, to have been instrumental in keeping off public judgments, and procuring public mercies.*—So far as your prayers have been of use for the obtaining [of] such mercies, so far they are *your* mercies, and you will have comfort in them. Any mercy is sweet, when obtained by prayer; much more, such as are of advantage to others as well as yourselves. And it will be as honourable as comfortable, to be the "saviours" of a land; (as saints seem to be called, Obadiah 21;) "the repairers of breaches, the restorers of paths to dwell in." (Isai. lviii. 12.)

(3.) *If you should not prevail for public deliverance, yet your prayers shall not be lost.*—They shall "return into your own bosom," (Psalm xxxv. 13,) in deliverance for yourselves. Either God will separate you from others; you shall "deliver your own souls:" (Ezek. xiv. 14;) or, if not, God will "hide you in the grave;" (Job xiv. 13;) and, while you continue here, will sanctify your sufferings, make you rejoice in tribulation. It will be no small comfort to have done your duty and discharged your consciences, and to suffer without the guilt of negligence and not providing against sufferings.

(4.) *You will have little comfort in suffering in the common calamities, if you have not done your part to keep them off.*—If the breaking-in of wrath upon the land lie at your doors; if a nation be lost for want of your praying and wrestling with God for it. It would be sad suffering with the guilt of your own negligence or slothfulness or coldness or security upon your consciences, and having your hearts reproach you, and tell you that, had you "stood in the gap," you might have "made up the hedge;" had you prayed more, you and others might have suffered less; religion might have flourished, ordinances have continued, the gospel continued; the glory of God might not have departed, had you laboured to keep it.

(5.) *If you that are godly do not prevail, none else are likely to do it.*—Others either pray not at all, but wholly "restrain prayer

before" the Lord; (Job xv. 4;) or, if they do, yet, being such as "regard iniquity in their hearts, the Lord will not hear them." (Psalm lxxvi. 18.) Either their guilt chokes their prayers, or they have not the face to look up to God with any confidence, or the wickedness of their lives waylays their prayers,—their sins intercept their petitions, and hinder any gracious reception of them: the sacrifices of such are an abomination to the Lord, and are so far from making up the breach, that they make it wider.

(6.) Lastly. Consider, *how many there be that labour all they can to ruin the land.*—The sinners of the land are by far the greatest part of it; sin is spread over all; and sinners act as if they were weary of their mercies, weary of their liberties, weary of Christ and his saints, of his gospel and ordinances; as if they were all in a plot against the land, and resolved to try if [they] could sin it into destruction, into its old darkness and spiritual bondage. How many are laying designs against the liberties and privileges, the estates and lives, of others! How many are oppressing and persecuting and molesting those that are peaceable in the land! And how loud do so many sins cry in God's ears! You had need pray hard for mercy, when sin cries so loud for vengeance. Be up, then, and doing; set prayer against sin; if others attempt to out-sin your prayers, do you labour to out-pray their sins. Do not think that a little, cold, heartless praying will prevent or obviate the consequents of so much sinning: when there be armies of enemies and armies of sins, there needs an army of prayers too.

2. *Do not rest in prayer, but hinder all the sin you can.*—Not only in yourselves, but in others with whom you have to do, and over whom you have any power. Hinder it in your families by restraint and correction; in your neighbours and friends, by admonition and reproof. So much sin as you hinder, so much you contribute to the peace and prosperity of the nation. It is vain to think of preventing judgment, if you do not endeavour to hinder sin, which calls for it. Though punishment may not immediately follow at the heels of sin, "sentence against an evil work may not be executed speedily;" (Eccles. viii. 11;) yet, so long as sin is spared or connived at, it is all the while breeding judgment: the store of sin adds to the treasure of wrath.

3. *Do all the good you can.*—In your several places; not only your personal, but relative, capacities: by instruction, by counsel, by example, labour to propagate goodness to all with whom you converse: while others are spreading sin, do you endeavour to promote holiness. Commend the ways of God to others, by walking exactly in them yourselves. Practise those things that are "lovely:" (Phil. iv. 8:) that may be a means to make those love your religion, who hitherto never loved yourselves. The more you do for the gaining of souls, the more you do for the good of the nation: every saint [that] you are instrumental to make, will be a new stake in the hedge, a new stone in the wall, an addition to the strength and security of the land.

(II.) *To sinners.*—How many of those to whom this exhortation is

addressed will read it, I know not; and, if they do, whether they will own themselves sinners, and count themselves concerned in what is said. But this I am sure of,—that if they are not sinners and wicked, they are saints: (these two divide the land: all are either godly or ungodly, though there be different degrees among both:) and if saints they are, the former exhortation will reach them. Let them, then, act up to it, and show themselves saints; let them appear, and stand up for the public good, and interpose with God for the preservation and welfare of their land. But, sirs, if your consciences give the lie to your pretensions, and tell you that you are not saints, that you are ungodly, you then are they to whom in this exhortation I am to apply myself. If the truly religious be a defence to the nation, do you accordingly carry yourselves toward them; use them well, make much of them, be kind to them, take heed of hurting them. Be so far disobedient for once to your father the devil, as not [to] gratify him, to your own undoing, by maligning, traducing, opposing, or persecuting, those that fain would save you, and, under God, are your best benefactors; do not hinder them from being godly, from serving their Lord, and doing that whereby they are preventing your ruin and promoting your good. Take heed of touching them, or meddling with them: if the argument would move you, I would say, Take heed of it,

1. *For God's sake.*—Who hath an interest in them; whose “jewels,” whose “anointed” ones, whose children, they are, and whose image they bear. (Psalm cxix. 94; Mal. iii. 17; Psalm cv. 15.) If you do but own God as your Lord, or pretend to do so, you should have some respect to those that belong to him; and they that have no regard for saints, have none for God himself; they that hate them “that are begotten,” cannot “love him that begat.” (1 John v. 1.) I know, you will be ready to say [that] they are not saints, but a company of factious or seditious or hypocritical persons, whom you oppose. I wonder what is become of all the saints: you dare not say you are such yourselves; and all that are not like you in sin, though never so much of the same judgment with you, you call “hypocrites.” Hath God no true servants left in the land? or where must we look for them? But what, if the dirt [which] you throw upon the factious be found sticking upon the religious? What, if the wound [that] you give the hypocrites draw blood from the saints; and those that you call “the enemies of the nation,” appear to be the friends of God? It cost Zebah and Zalmunna dear, for killing those that “resembled the children of a king.” (Judges viii. 18.) Take heed of daring to put forth your hands against those that do but “resemble the children of” God; lest, when you think not of it, they prove to have been so. But if this prevail not, (as I fear it will not,) yet,

2. Take heed of troubling God's holy ones, *for your own sakes.*—It is your interest and your wisdom, (as before,) no less than your duty; for they can do more for you and more against you, than all the world beside. In Gen. xx. 7, God bids Abimelech restore Abraham his wife: “For,” says he, “he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live:” he was concerned to use Abraham well, when he

might get so much by it. "And if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine:" his wronging Abraham should cost him dear. Consider,

(1.) "*Their Redeemer is strong.*" (Jer. l. 34.)—Who that is, the next words tell you: "The Lord of hosts is his name." It is dangerous meddling with any that have great friends and allies; such may by their means be too hard for you, though in themselves they be but weak. He that is a king's son may be but a child, and so but feeble himself, and not able to resist the force of one that is strong and violent: but he hath a king for his father,—one that hath a sovereign power, and can command thousands; and by him he may prevail over a strong enemy. The godly may be but weak and mean and contemptible in themselves; but they have a Friend, nay, a Father, that is strong: "the Lord of hosts" is "their Redeemer;" one that can deal with you, over-top you, crush you, make you "perish" with the very "rebuke of his countenance." (Psalm lxxx. 16.) If he do but blow upon you, your "breath goes" out of you, you die, and "return to your earth." (Psalm cxlvi. 4.)

(2.) "*He shall thoroughly plead their cause.*"—So it follows. Assure yourselves, God will certainly do it, first or last, here or hereafter. Their cause is his cause; he "knows that for his" name's "sake they suffer rebuke," (Jer. xv. 15,) "for his sake" they are appointed "as sheep for the slaughter." (Psalm xlv. 22.) They suffer so many unworthy things, however upon other pretences, yet really because they belong to him; so that, if you strike at them, you strike at him; if you touch them, you "touch the apple of his eye." (Zech. ii. 8.) Christ at the last day will judge you according as your carriage hath been to his people; and interprets all done or not done to them as done or not done to himself. (Matt. xxv. 40, 45.) God may for a long time keep silence and let you alone, but one day will meet with you; be sure, in the other life; it may be, in this: and then, can you either,

(i.) *Ward off his blows, when he lays them on you?*—Can you withstand his power, grapple with Omnipotence? Cannot he bring those evils upon you, which it is impossible for you to keep off or resist? "The Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." (Isai. lxvi. 15.) Or,

(ii.) *Can you bear what he inflicts?*—"Can your hearts endure, or can your hands be strong," when He comes to "deal with you?" (Ezek. xxii. 14.) Alas! you cannot stand before the messengers of his wrath. How are you brought down with a little pain or sickness! a fit of the stone or cholic makes you almost mad. And how, then, will you endure, if God himself once take you to hand, if he fill you with his fury, and pour out his wrath immediately upon your souls?

Is it not, then, your interest to favour God's saints, to take heed of meddling with them to *their* hurt, when it is likely [for] the conclusion to be in *your own*? when, as they are your best friends, so they

may prove your most formidable enemies, by engaging God against you; who, when they suffer wrongfully, will not fail to take their part and be on their side, and, though he use you for a time as scourges in his hand for the correction of them, yet when he hath done with you, is then ready to throw you into the fire. (Isai. x. 12.) Remember, then, that as the religious of a nation ordinarily do most good to them, so, when they are abused and trampled upon, they do most hurt; because God pleads their cause, and espouses their quarrel. Many a judgment they bring down upon their enemies,—that is, God doth for them: the violence done to them, is severely punished upon them that do it. How was Egypt plagued for Israel's sake, and the Philistines, and others after them, and the Babylonians after them all! Nay, "who" ever "hardened himself against them, and prospered?" (Job ix. 4.) God's Jerusalem is, at one time or other, "a burdensome stone" to all them "that burden themselves with it." (Zech. xii. 3.) "The house of Jacob is a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble." (Obad. 18.) God takes notice of the least injuries done to his children by their enemies; nay, of their very omissions and neglects. The Moabite and the Ammonite were not to enter into the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation, "because they met not" the children of Israel "with bread and with water, when they came out of Egypt:" (Deut. xxiii. 3, 4 :) and what, then, will become of them that grudge God's children bread, that rob them of their spiritual bread and water of life, would take from them the allowance [which] their Father hath given them, and so would starve their very souls?

(3.) *Who ever showed kindness to the godly in vain?*—A cup of cold water, given to a disciple "in the name of a disciple," or "because he belongs to Christ," shall not want its reward: (Matt. x. 42; Mark ix. 41 :) Christ takes the least respect shown them, as done to himself. Visiting the prisoners, clothing the naked, relieving the poor, are acceptable offices, and usually followed with some blessing even in this life. And, I wonder, wherein are they that this day persecute God's children the worse for them, or for any countenance [that] they have shown them? Nor are they ever likely to be, if it be not their own fault, by stirring up God's jealousy, and pulling down his vengeance upon their own heads. Were but [this] truth effectually believed, what an alteration would it make upon the spirits of men! How would those that are at present so unkind to the truly religious, become their friends and favourers! and "the governors of Judah would say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of hosts their God." (Zech. xii. 5.)