

A SERMON

PREACHED TO THE

SOCIETIES FOR REFORMATION OF MANNERS,

AT SALTERS HALL, ON MONDAY, JUNE 30, 1712.

PSALM vii. 9.

O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end ; but establish the just.

In all your religious assemblies, it is as much the business of your ministers, who preside in them, to pray with you, as to preach to you ; to be your mouth to God, as to be God's mouth to you. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee,*^a is as natural an inference as, he is a prophet, and he shall teach thee : and in these two the apostles themselves summed up the business of their apostolical office, *We will give ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word:*^b and those, who herein obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful, are their most genuine sons and successors. And it is as much your business in your attendance on religious assemblies, seriously to join in the errands they go upon to the throne of God's grace, as dutifully to receive the messages they bring from the throne of God's government ; always remembering that God speaks to us, and we to him, by his Son.

In this religious assembly of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, we having now, by solemn prayer, committed them and their pious undertaking to God, having humbly begged the continuance of his presence with them, and his favour to them, to carry them on and succeed them in it, and make it a means of great good to our land, I look upon it that the work of the day is more than half done ; for I am sure God's grace can do wonders without any services of ours ; but the best of our services can do nothing without his grace ; which we have as necessary and constant a dependence upon for all the good that is to be done by us, and all the good effect

of it upon others, as we have upon the providence of God, for the actions of the natural life ; and that grace must be fetched in by prayer. If, therefore, the God of Israel grant us the things we have now requested of him, our point is gained ; your work goes on successfully.

And, therefore, I see not how I can better befriend the Societies, nor do more to serve their pious design, in what remains of my work at this time, than by doing what I can to engage the continuance of the prayers of all who hear me this day, for the prosperity of them and it ; and that is what I aim at in the choice of this text.

The undertaking is bold and great, and one in which the spirit of a truly Christian hero appears, as much as in anything,—a catholic spirit ; the spirit of one who seeks the things of Christ more than his own things. It has a direct tendency to the advancing of the honour of God, and of his kingdom among men, and the interests of that holy religion which we make a profession of, and the weakening of the devil's kingdom ; it aims at the good of the souls of men, and the welfare of the public : and, therefore, *Men of Israel, help ; help, by your prayers,*^c to forward this good work. From this part of the service I am sure there is none can excuse, can exempt, themselves ; you are all therefore, in this way, summoned “ to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty ; ” it is at your peril if you disobey the summons.

I hope I speak to a praying people ; who make conscience of prayer, who make a business of prayer, who dare not live without prayer, (for those who do, live without God in the world,) who would not live without prayer, for it is their delight to approach unto God. I hope I speak to those who pray for the

^a Gen. xx. 7.

^b Acts vi. 4.

^c Acts xxi. 28.

^d 2 Cor. i. 11.

peace of Jerusalem, preferring it before their chief joy; you are not Israelites indeed, if you are not of the generation of them that seek God, and wrestle with him; if you do not seek him, and wrestle with him for the welfare and prosperity of Israel: let me therefore press it upon you with all earnestness, to take this concern of the "reformation of manners" into your daily prayers—alone, and in your families—as those who have sincerely espoused this righteous cause, have laid it near your hearts, and who keep it there, and have an entire dependance upon the almighty grace of God to make it successful.

My text is a prayer, and will be of use to direct us herein; it puts words into our mouths; not many, to burthen our memories, but very proper and suited to our purpose, for we are here taught to pray against all sin, and for all saints.

1. We are here taught to pray against all sin, to pray it down; to pray it, if possible, out of the world: *O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end!* And in praying against the sin, we pray for the sinners; for whatever makes against the disease, makes for the patient.

Observe with what a pathetic strain of devotion the Psalmist breathes out this petition, and teaches us to do so; *Oh! let it come to an end! when shall it once be?* In prayer, as there should be a fixedness of thought, and a firmness of faith, so there should be a flame and fervour of pious and devout affections. Cold desires do but beg denials; and lifeless wishes are fruitless ones; but it is the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that avails much. When Jacob wrestles with God he commences "Israel, a prince with God." The original word *was* here used to express the emphasis laid upon this request, is sometimes translated *now*; *O that the wickedness of the wickedness might speedily come to an end; the sooner the better.* Sometimes it is translated *obsecro*—*I pray thee*, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; this is that for which I would be very importunate; *O that I might have my request, and that God would grant me this thing which I long for!*

Some of the critics read it, *Evil shall consume the wicked*; and so it is a prediction of the gradual and final destruction of all impenitent sinners: they who will not be reclaimed shall be consumed; *Evil shall slay the wicked.*^o Their sin will be their ruin, if they repent not. The man of sin, that wicked one, shall be consumed; and we are to pray for the hastening of the day when God will do this, as the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment.

But it is rather to be taken as we read it; it is a prayer, not that the wicked may come to an end, but that their wickedness may; that that may be consumed; let it not only be restrained and curbed, and

driven into corners, but let it be utterly abolished, that we may not see it, or hear it, or hear of it, any more. God is calling to mankind from heaven by his word, *O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.* *O that sinners would cease to do evil, and learn to do well! Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.* He says to the fools, *Deal not foolishly; let him that stole, steal no more.* This is the burthen of every song, *Turn ye, turn ye.* Now we must, by our prayers, concur with him herein; as those who are of God's mind; *Amen*, so be it; *O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.* God commands that men forsake their sins; we pray, that he would by his grace turn them from it, as those who are of his mind, and say in sincerity, *Thy will be done.*

2. We are here taught to pray for all saints, for all good people; *But establish the just.* Lord, let not those who are filthy be filthy still, but let those who are holy be holy still; let the bad be made good, and the good be kept so, and made better; let the same grace that first made them just, and wrought righteousness in them, secure and carry on that good work in their souls; as the same word of power that first made the world still upholds it.

The conversion of sinners, and the confirmation and edification of saints, are the two great things ministers are to aim at in their praying and preaching; to bring souls to Christ, which will effectually bring their wickedness to an end; and then to build them up in him, which will be an effectual establishment of the just.

Or, by the "just" here, we may understand those who are not only just themselves, but, like Phineas, execute judgment and justice upon daring criminals, for the staying of the plague. Lord, establish them in their good purposes, and strengthen their hands.

This is the prayer which we at a distance in the country have many a time put up to God for you here, and those in other places, who have set their hands to this good work. St. Paul, in his epistles, often tells his friends what it was which he asked of God for them, making mention of them always in his prayers, that they might know what to ask for themselves, and might be encouraged to hope for all that grace from God, which one who had so great an interest at the throne of grace, as Paul had, prayed for, for them; this is that which we desire of God for you, that God would spirit you for your work, by establishing your hearts; and that he would succeed you in it, by bringing the wickedness of the wicked to an end. And we desire that all praying people would frequently put up this prayer to God for you.

It is easy to gather from these words,

That it is, and ought to be, the desire and prayer of all good people, that God by his grace would put an end to the wickedness of the wicked, and establish the just.

Now, 1. This supposes that there are two contrary contesting interests in the world, visibly appearing in most places; that of the wicked, and that of the just; the children of God, who bear his image, and do his will, and the children of the devil, in whom he works, and who are led captive by him, as all the children of disobedience are. This is a distinction which is as old as Cain and Abel, and will last as long as heaven and hell.

Look abroad into the world, and you will see persons of very different characters, the reverse to each other; one would wonder how those of the same nature, education, and conversation, should be so unlike one another. When Solomon is observing, that in the course of providence there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, yet at the same time he industriously and very particularly shows, that notwithstanding that, there is a vast difference between them, in the temper of their minds, and the tenor of their lives; for one is clean, and the other unclean; one sacrifices, and the other sacrifices not; one swears, and the other fears an oath.^f Some make conscience of what they say and do, are in care to do right, and afraid of doing amiss; while others live at large, and walk at all adventures. Some are sober and temperate, and keep their appetites in subjection to religion and right reason, while others run to an excess of riot, and wallow in all manner of uncleanness. Some are honest and just in their dealings, while others are false and deceitful, and there is no confidence to be put in them. Some speak the language of Canaan, others the language of Ashdod. Some take time every day to call upon God, and converse with him, and sanctify the Lord's day to his honour, while others cast off fear, and restrain prayer, and make no difference between sabbath time and other time. Now which of these two will we recommend ourselves to, herd ourselves with, and cast in our lot among? Which of these will we take for our people, will we associate with of choice, and will we study to conform ourselves to? As our choice is, so will our doom be; and to them whom we take for our people, death will gather us, which if we duly consider, it will be our prayer, *Gather not my soul with sinners.*^h

Abundance of wicked people there are in this world: it is therefore said to lie in wickedness; the whole world does so.ⁱ It is strange, it is sad, it is very sad, it is very strange, that among men, who are reasonable creatures, and depending upon their Creator, that there should be so many wicked, who act in a constant contradiction to the right reason of

man, and a constant rebellion against the rightful authority of God: but as says the proverb of the ancients, so says the observation and experience of the moderns, *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked; for do men gather grapes of thorns? or do they expect good things in the life, from an evil treasure in the heart? No; though some men's sins are so artfully concealed and disguised, that it must be left to the day to declare them; and it is only the heart-searching God who can say, It is iniquity, it is hypocrisy, even the solemn meeting;*^k and to him the judgment of such sins must be left; yet there are others whose sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment;^l of which any one may say, as the angel to the prophet, *This is wickedness;*^m and wickedness of this kind we may and must in our places witness against. Do I need to tell you what that wickedness of the wicked is, which we must endeavour in our places to put a stop to? Your own hearts will tell you; some of the instances of it even the heathen were convinced of by natural conscience. You know it is wickedness for men to profane the holy name of God, and by their ludicrous or passionate appeals to him, to make him altogether such a one as themselves; or to abuse themselves, their own bodies, and the gifts of God's providence, and by their drunkenness and uncleanness to make themselves altogether such as the beasts, and more vile. Do I need to tell you who the just are? Your own hearts tell you. They are not those of this or that dividing name or party: no, far be it from us to monopolize the character; for *in every nation, and under every denomination of Christians, those who fear God, and work righteousness, are accepted of him,*ⁿ and must be so of us. The just are they who live in the fear of God, and make conscience of rendering what is due to him, to themselves, to all with whom they have to do: these are they whose establishment we should seek.

2. This directs us which of these two interests to espouse, and side with, and make our own; as those who are convinced which is in the right, and which in the wrong, which will make us happy, and which will ruin us; particularly we are directed which of these to serve with our prayers. If we would be found on the Lord's side, in the day of inquiry, we must by our prayers act in concert with the just, and in communion with them, and help to establish them; and in contradiction to the wicked, and their wickedness, which we must do all we can to bring to an end.

For the opening of this I shall endeavour to show. I. What it is we are directed in the text to desire and pray for. II. Why it is, and ought to be, the desire and prayer of all good Christians. And then make the application.

^f Ecc. ix. 2. ^h Ps. xxvi. 9. ⁱ 1 John v. 19. ^k Isa. i. 13.

^l 1 Tim. v. 24.

^m Zech. v. 8.

ⁿ Acts x. 35.

I. That which we are to desire and pray for, is in short this, That wickedness, that root of bitterness, may be rooted out of this world, and that righteousness, that plant of renown, may be planted and rooted in it. This I say we must desire and pray for; it is not enough in word and tongue to pray for it, but we must sincerely and in heart desire it; nor is it enough in heart to desire it, but we must by prayer offer up our desires to God, in the name of Christ, for the plentiful effusions and powerful operations of that grace upon the minds and spirits of men, which are necessary to the effecting of these good works, and the attaining of these good ends; that that grace may be sufficient.

1. We must desire and pray, that God by his grace would bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end, to a full end; that, by his Spirit, he would counter-work and overrule that evil spirit, which works and rules in the children of disobedience.

This charity must begin at home; we must in the first place pray, that God by his grace would bring the wickedness that is in our own wicked hearts to an end; that our corruptions may be mortified and subdued, and the power of our inordinate appetites and passions crushed and broken, and that we may be kept from every evil work and way.

But though it must begin at home, it must not end there; we must pray that the wickedness of other wicked people may come to an end, in the places where we live, in the city, in the nation, all the world over.

It must be our heart's desire and prayer,

(1.) That wicked principles may be exploded and abandoned, and that men may be set right in their judgments concerning good and evil, right and wrong, God and themselves, this world and the other; that the beast may be wounded in the head, and that will be a *deadly wound*;° that a blow may be given to the root of wickedness, by rectifying the mistakes of the understanding; that salt may be cast into the springs, and so the waters may be healed; for this is God's way of gaining the will and affections, by opening the understanding; and it is the regular way, it is coming in by the door. Till the peccant humours in the blood be purged out, in vain is application made to the external eruptions of the disease. Those who are bad, are so upon some bad principles, with which the god of this world has blinded their minds, and till those are conquered and laid aside, the wickedness of the heart and life will not be brought to an end.

O that men may be made to see the folly and falsehood of those atheistical notions and schemes, by which their fear of God, and their dread of sin, and the fatal consequences of it, are abated, and by degrees worn off, that they may no longer, as they have

done, call good evil, and evil good, put darkness for light, and light for darkness. O that sinners may be convinced of the absurdity of that with which they support themselves in their sinful ways, and are encouraged to say, *They shall have peace though they go on*, and that they may see their mistake before it is too late to have it rectified! O that God's grace would open men's eyes before the flames of hell do it! That the fallacy of that which pretends to wit may be discovered, and made contemptible by that which is real wisdom. The word of God, which is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, has intimated to us what the principles are that sinners go upon; they say in their heart, *There is no God*;^p or, *The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it*;^q *He hideth his face, and he will not require it*.^r Nay, they have the impudence to say, *Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord*;^s or, *Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?*^t O that men might be beaten off from these strong holds, and that the hail might sweep away this refuge of lies; and these high thoughts might be captivated and brought into obedience to the power of divine truth. These corrupt principles are commonly concealed, and those who are fond of them are ashamed to own them; I wish the sinners you deal with, could be brought to discover them, and to confess what the tempter suggested to them, when he drew them into his snares; that some course might be taken to inform them better; to give them right thoughts of the differences between good and evil, of the holiness and justice of God, the strictness of his law, and to convince them, that for all these things God will bring them into judgment.^u O that men were brought to shake off the loose thoughts they have of the Scriptures, the low thoughts they have of religion and godliness, and the slight thoughts they have of sin, and to receive the truth in the light and love of it.

O that popery, which is so great a friend to sin, might be known to be, what really it is, a mystery of iniquity, sin in disguise, which when it is revealed and set in a true light, is soon consumed by the breath of Christ's mouth, his word, and Spirit, and the brightness of the coming^v of his truth into the soul. Idolatry was always an inlet to immorality and all impiety; and, therefore, it is necessary to the reformation of manners, that the principles upon which we reformed from popery, be closely and faithfully adhered to, by which the honour of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the strictness of the divine law, are supported. These will help to reform the manners of the nation; and in return thereof, the more the manners of the nation are reformed, the better fortified it will be against popery; for the mystery of faith is best held in a pure con-

° Rev. xiii. 6. p Ps. xiv. 1. q Ps. xciv. 7. r Ps. x. 11, 13.

s Mal. ii. 17. t Rom. ix. 19. u Eccl. xi. 9. v 2 Thess. ii. 8.

science ; * our enemies know, that profaneness paves the way to popery.

(2.) We must desire and pray, that wicked persons may be converted and changed, by the grace of God. Has God given us his grace, and have we experienced the benefit of it? O let us be earnest with him to give it to those who are yet in sin ; that thus the wickedness of the wicked might be brought to an end, by the teaching of transgressors the ways of God, and the conversion of sinners unto him ; * that the public preaching of the word may be effectual for this purpose, and mighty through God for the turning of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ; that in the chariot of the everlasting gospel, the great Redeemer may ride forth conquering and to conquer.

O let us be humbly earnest with God in prayer, that the eyes of the blind may be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped ; that wandering sheep may be sought and saved, and prodigal sons brought to themselves first, and then to their father's house ; that God would translate those into the kingdom of his dear Son, who have been long subjects in the kingdom of darkness. O that they who are Satan's slaves may be the Lord's freemen, and that God would bring their souls out of prison. O that the sea might fly, and Jordan might be driven back, and the rock turned into a fountain of waters at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.† O that the Ethiopian might be made to change his skin, and the leopard his spots, and that they might yet at last be brought to do good, who have been accustomed to do evil.‡

We must not despair concerning the worst ; for while there is life, there is hope, and room for prayer: the repentance of Manasseh, and the conversion of Paul, tell us that nothing is too hard for the almighty grace of God to do. The Corinthians were many of them as bad as the worst, and as vile as the vilest ; such were some of you, and yet ye are washed, and sanctified, and justified.‡ Let us, therefore, apply ourselves to Christ, for those who have been long under the power of sin and Satan, as the father of the possessed child in the gospel, *If thou canst do any thing, have compassion upon them, and help them,*§ O snatch them as brands out of everlasting burnings ! O that drunkards and harlots might be made sober and chaste ; that those who so passionately curse and swear, may be brought as affectionately to pray and praise ; that sabbath breakers might be sabbath sanctifiers. O that Satan may be dispossessed of his strong holds, that the prey may be taken from that mighty one, and the unlawful captive may be delivered ; that Christ's throne may be set up where the usurper's seat has long been : *With men, this is impossible, but with God all things are*

possible, even this. Nay, the worse any are, the more earnestly we should desire and pray for their conversion, not only because otherwise their ruin will be the greater, but because there will be so much the greater joy in heaven for their repentance, more for one of them than for ninety-nine just persons who comparatively need no repentance.¶ How earnest should we be herein, did we consider that the converting of a soul from sin is the saving of a soul from death.¶

Those whom you reprove and inform against for their wickedness, it should be with a strong desire for their conversion, and that the trouble you give them may contribute to it ; that the uneasiness you put them to, may make them weary and heavy laden under the burthen of sin, and willing to get clear of it by coming to Christ. O that the punishing of them might prevent their perishing, and that when they are holden in the cords of affliction, their ear may be open to discipline : let your prayers always accompany your endeavours to reclaim and reform them, that while you are making them examples of your justice, God by his grace may make them monuments of his mercy. When you prosecute them, pray that God would pardon them : *Father, forgive them,* and qualify them for forgiveness. And if God forgive them, and let them know that he has forgiven them by a saving change wrought in them, they will not only forgive you this wrong, but will thank you, and thank God for you, as David for Abigail, and for the reasonable stop you gave them, when they were hastening apace to their own ruin.

(3.) We must desire and pray, that wicked practices may be prevented and restrained ; that though the root of bitterness be not plucked up, yet that it may not spring up to trouble us, and thereby many should be defiled ; and that whatever may lie hid, yet there may not appear any fornicator or profane person among us, as Esau.¶ Let us pray, that if the stream be not turned, yet it may be checked and dammed up, and may not become an overflowing deluge ; that though the lion be not turned into a lamb, yet he may be chained up and kept within grates ; that though the unclean spirit be not cast out, yet he may be silenced, and not suffered to speak, not suffered to tear. *Est aliquid prodire tenus, si non datur ultra—To this degree he may proceed, but not beyond.* O that God by his grace would restrain the remainder of the wickedness of the wicked, would set bounds to the breaking out of it, as he does to the waves of the sea, *hitherto shall it come, and no further* ; that though Balaam be still the same he was, yet he may not be suffered to curse Israel ; that though Sennacherib has still an inveterate rage against God, yet he may be made to feel that God has a hook in his nose, and a bridle

* 1 Tim. iiii. 9.

† Ps. cxlv. 3, 7, 8.

‡ Ps. li. 13.

§ Jer. xlii. 23.

¶ 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.

¶ James v. 20.

¶ Mark ix. 22.

¶ Luke xv. 7.

¶ Heb. xii. 15, 16.

in his jaws.^f And O that the magistrate who bears the sword might be, as the Scripture calls him, *An heir of restraint,*^g a terror to evil doers, and that the proper means used for the suppression of vice and profaneness, may attain the end; so that though sin has blossomed and budded, yet it may not rise up into a rod of wickedness, to oppress the lot of the righteous.^h

We should desire and pray, that thus far at least the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end, that it may not be committed openly, and that the infection may not spread.

[1.] O let not wickedness be committed publicly and openly, and in the face of the sun, as it were by licence, and with allowance. Let those who will not be persuaded to hate sin, and who cannot blush for it, yet be compelled to forbear it before men; and since they will be as the horse and the mule that have no understanding, let them be held in, as they are, with bit and bridle.ⁱ Let those who will not by fair reasoning be made ashamed of the sin they have committed, by a due correction be made afraid to commit it again; and if they will not tremble at the wrath of God revealed from heaven against them, let them be afraid of the civil powers, which bear not the sword in vain.^k Let all iniquity be made at least to hide her head, and stop her mouth,^l that if men will not be wrought upon, by ministers' preaching, to break off their sins, yet by the magistrates' acting they may be driven into corners, and if they do things that are not right, they may do them secretly, and so the nation may not bear the guilt and blame of it.^m

If the laws of God and religion prevail not to be obeyed and submitted to, yet let them not be impudently affronted and bid defiance to. If the wicked will still do wickedly, and will not be made to understand,ⁿ yet let them not pass without rebuke, and a testimony borne against their wicked ways; let them not be able to make their sin fashionable, nor to bring it into reputation; but let it be made to appear, as it is, odious and scandalous, and that which all wise and good men have a dislike of. If the idols of iniquity be not driven out of the world, and quite abolished, yet let them be cast to the moles and to the bats.^o If men will be drunk, let them be drunk in the night,^p and let the works of darkness know and keep their place, but let those who are of the day be sober, and walk honestly, and as becomes them. O that the wickedness of the wicked might thus far at least come to an end, that they may not dare to declare it as Sodom,^q so as to vex the righteous souls of those about them from day to day, with their filthy conversation.^r Let the sin be the ruin of the sinner, as certainly it will be, if it be

not repented of; but let it not, by going bare-faced and undisturbed, be the reproach of the nation. Let not the fathers of our country be such as Eli was to his family, whose sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not;^s but let it ever be said, to the honour of our land, to the honour of your city, that though there be found those who boldly bend their tongues like their bow for lies, yet there are found those likewise who are valiant for the truth in the earth.^t And though there are *horns, four horns*, that attempt to scatter Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, to run down all that is sacred and just, yet there are those who lift up the head against them, there are *four carpenters* who come to break these horns, and to cast them out;^u that the horns of the wicked being cut off (though their heads be not) the horns of the righteous may be exalted.^v

[2.] O let not the wickedness of the wicked be propagated, so as to infect others. Let this plague die with those who are dying of it, because they will die; but O let the contagion be kept from spreading. Though multitudes drop into the pit daily, yet let not the bills of this mortality rise; though things are bad let them not grow worse. If the sinners themselves will not be persuaded to leave, yet let not those about them be persuaded to learn their pernicious ways. They have erred, but let their error remain with themselves, and let not others be tainted with it, nor carried away by it. O let not this leprosy overspread the whole body; let it never be said, *that from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, there is no soundness, nothing but wounds and bruises.*

We know that sinners are enticing: the wise man supposes this, *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.* They who have the plague are willing to infect others. The devil was no sooner an apostate himself, but he became a tempter to man; and they who are of that wicked one thus do his lusts. Those who are bad, I fear are more industrious to debauch others, and to make them as bad as themselves, than those who are good are to invite others to the ways of religion and virtue, and to make them as good as themselves.

We know also by sad experience, that sin is an enticing thing; it has its baits with which it allures the unthinking and unstable into the net; and there is in the corrupt nature of man a proneness to follow bad examples, and to go into the measures of those who take their measures from the world and the flesh; and to follow them straightway, without any consideration, as an ox goes to the slaughter.^w We should therefore earnestly desire and pray, as we are taught to do every day, that God would not lead either us or others into temptation, but out of it,

^f Isa. xxxvii. 28, 29. ^g Judg. xviii. 7. *Marg.* ^h Ezek. vii. 10, 11.

ⁱ Ps. xxxii. 2.

^k Rom. xiii. 4.

^l Ps. cvii. 42.

^m 2 Kings xvii. 9.

ⁿ Dan. xii. 10.

^o Isa. ii. 20.

^p 1 Thess. v. 7.

^q Isa. iii. 9.

^r 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8, 9.

^s 1 Sam. iii. 13.

^t Jer. ix. 3.

^u Zech. i. 19, 21.

^v Ps. lxxv. 10.

^w Prov. vii. 22.

and would deliver us and them from evil. O pray that the tongue of the tempters may be tied, and they may be ashamed to do the devil's work, and that the force of the temptation may be broken; pray that the ear of the tempted may be stopped, and that they may be enabled, with the shield of faith, to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Let us stand with our censor, like Aaron, between the living and the dead, between the sick and the sound, and endeavour, by our intercessions, to stay the plague. Let us desire and pray, that in wicked families the entail of sin may be cut off, that there may not rise up in the fathers' stead an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the Lord, the thing Moses dreaded, Numb. xxxii. 14. But that the son, when he sees all his father's sins, may consider, and not do like him,^a nor tread in his steps, that so the next generation, at least, may be better than this. Pray, that in wicked places, where there are many sinners, there may be no more; that men may be so wise for themselves, as well as just to the cause of virtue and serious godliness, as not to make friendship, or keep company, with the vicious and profane, lest they learn their way, and get a snare to their souls.

O let us be earnest with God in prayer, that he would give more, and yet more, of that grace which is necessary in order to the putting of this full stop to the course of sin. Pray for grace for those who do not yet desire it, or pray for it for themselves; it might do well, when we are alone with God, to be particular herein; Lord give grace to such a sinner, who is very provoking both to God and good men, preventing grace, restraining grace, renewing grace, victorious grace. Let Saul become Paul, that it may appear, that that pattern of divine mercy, which was of old set forth to them which should afterwards believe,^f may yet be copied out again, in answer to prayer, as that was in answer to Stephen's prayer; God's arm is not shortened that it cannot save the greatest sinner, nor is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear the weakest prayer, that is offered up in faith, the prayer of the destitute.

2. We must desire and pray, that God by his grace would establish the just; that religion and godliness may get ground, as vice and profaneness lose ground. Let us pray,

(1.) That the just may be established in their integrity, and may ever retain it. It is the duty of the watchmen to warn not only the wicked, that they go not a step further in their wicked ways, but the righteous also, that they turn not a step back from their righteous ways, that they do not so much as look back,^g and our desire and prayer must be accordingly, as those who are afraid, lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, not only we our-

selves, but any others of us, should so much as seem to come short.^h O that good people may be established in their good principles and good resolutions, and may faithfully adhere to them; that the righteous may still hold on their way, and those who have clean hands may be stronger and stronger. O that, though the stream be strong, the righteous may be enabled to swim against it, and may never be carried down by it; but that, like Job, in difficult, trying times, they may still hold fast their integrity; may keep themselves pure in times of common iniquity, and may, like fish, be fresh in salt water; as Noah, in the old world. Nay, we should desire and pray, that the just may be like springs of water, which, by antiperistasis, are warmest when the air is coldest; that the worse others are, the better they may be; that the more others profane the name of God, the more they may abound in praising it; the more loose others are in their conversation, the more circumspect they may be; as Noah and Lot, who were both better in the midst of temptation, than when they were out of the way of it.

We should especially be earnest with God in prayer for young people, who are setting out in the world, that by the grace of God they may be preserved from the corruption that is in the world through lust; that that may not be a spark to the tinder of the corruption that is in their hearts. Commit them to the conduct and custody of the divine grace. *Keep, holy Father, keep through thy name those that we commit unto thee, keep them from the evil of this present world, keep them to the end.*^b Those who have been blest with a good education, who have begun well, and promise fair, and are numbered among the just, O that they may be confirmed in the choice they have made, and may always abide by it; that when they come to the turning time of life, such a right turn may be given to their thoughts, as that they may be stedfastly resolved for heaven, as their end, and Christ and holiness as their way. Satan and his agents have a particular spite at such, and are industrious to draw them aside; O let us help them by our prayers, that they may be fortified against the temptations the world is full of, and may never lose the things they have wrought, the things they have gained; but may obtain a full reward.^c That the holy seed may be the substance of our land,^d and never the shame of it, by mingling themselves with the people of these abominations; that they may appear to be a seed which the Lord has blessed in answer to prayer, and which we shall bless him for; that the branches of the families of God's people may continue branches of righteousness.

(2.) That they may be established in their comfort and hope. In troublesome, threatening times

^a Ezek. xviii. 14. ^f 1 Tim. i. 16. ^g Ezek. iii. 19, 21. ^h Heb. iv. 1.

^b John xvii. 11.

^c 2 John 8.

^d Isa. vi. 13.

men are apt to be shaken in mind, and to fear the cause and interest of religion should be sunk in down; when they see how iniquity abounds, how cold the love of many is, how bold the sinners for hell are grown, and how bashful the disciples for Christ and his gospel are, they are ready to give up all for gone; ready to say, when they see the ungodly prosper in the world, that they have cleansed their hearts and hands in vain.^a We therefore need to pray for them, that they may be established in the belief of the promise, that the Kingdom of hell shall never prevail against the church, may encourage themselves and one another with confidence, and may never cast away their confidence in it. That the just may be established in the assurance, that God will plead his own cause, will own his own interests, will do his own work, and will be aided in his own strength. Though his truths be despised and ridiculed, yet they are great, and shall still prevail. Though his name be profaned, yet he has not forsaken it, and will glorify it yet again; he will uphold his law, and make it honourable,^b though despised and vilified, and make it contemptible. *These are the sayings of God.*

Pray, Lord, give to the just to believe in the Lord God, that so they may be established,^c and not dismayed of evil tidings, nor despair of their cause, nor so much as distrust it; for it is not the cause of the party that they espouse and embark in, but that catholic Christianity, pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, which we are sure to keep its ground, and carry the day; it is the Kingdom of God among men, which cannot be destroyed. O that the just may rejoice and glory in that this may keep their resolutions firm, and hopes flourishing, in the worst of times; that they may rejoice in God, and glory in him, and their feet being set upon this rock, they may have a new word put into their mouths.

Pray that they may be established in their undertaking to do what they can to bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end; Lord, by thy grace, strengthen their hands in their opposition to the iniquities of sin and Satan in the world. O that they may be confirmed in the principles they go upon in, and may not be shaken by any doubts or scruples, concerning the equity and goodness of the cause they are engaged in, but may be abundantly satisfied in their own minds, that in bearing testimony against, and giving a check to, immorality and profaneness, in their places, they are doing a good work, and if they sincerely aim at the will of God in it, he will graciously accept it, as he has done to him.

Pray that they may not be shaken by any discouragements they meet with, any difficulties they find in

their way, but that their zeal and resolution may be rather the more animated thereby; that they may not be driven off from it, or made to drive on heavily in it, either by the heat of those who own themselves enemies to it, or by the coldness of those who yet own themselves friends to it; pray for them, that God by his grace would help them over these discouragements, that when upright men cannot but be astonished at this,^d astonished that so good a work should be so much opposed and so little furthered, yet they may not sit down astonished, as Ezra, in a like case, despairing to bring any thing to pass; but that the innocent may stir up himself so much the more against the hypocrite, because, as Ezra was then told, *There is yet hope in Israel concerning this thing;*^e the case is bad, but not desperate.

We ought to pray for magistrates, for the Queen, and all in authority, for the judges, and the justices of peace in the several counties and corporations, that they may be established in a holy zeal against vice and profaneness, and a resolution to do the utmost they can in their places to suppress it; that God would give them his judgment and his righteousness,^f that, according to the trust reposed in them, they may be for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them who do well.^g We are doing our own work when we are praying for kings and all in authority, for if they be established in their duty, we shall live quiet and peaceable lives under them in all godliness and honesty;^h the restraint of the vicious will be the repose of the virtuous, and a defence of their virtues.

We ought to pray for ministers, for all the ministers of the word of God, that they may be full of power, by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, may have both wisdom and courage to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin;ⁱ that they may set their face as a flint, in a holy zeal against profaneness; and that the Spirit of God may work with them, and by them, to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.^j Pray that ministers may be established, and their hands strengthened, in their work, though they are sometimes tempted to say, "We have laboured in vain."

We ought to pray for masters of families, that their endeavours may be blessed in the education of their children and servants, and they may be established in Joshua's resolution, that they and their houses will serve the Lord; pray that they may be reformers in their own families, may prevail to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in the heart of those under their charge, and to principle them with an antipathy to that which is evil, betimes, and then the work of magistrates and ministers would be very easy.

^a Ps. lxxiii. 12, 13. ^b Isa. xlii. 21. ^c 2 Chron. xx. 20.
^d Job xvii. 8. ^e Ezra x. 2.

^f Ps. lxxii. 1. ^g 1 Pet. ii. 14. ^h 1 Tim. ii. 2.
ⁱ Mic. iii. 8. ^j John xvi. 8.

And for all who in their places are striving against sin, let us strive in our prayers, that they may be established in their resolution not to draw back their hand, wherewith they have stretched out the spear against those vices that are the common enemies of our Israel, (as is said of Joshua in his battle with the men of Ai,) till they have utterly destroyed^p and suppressed them, or at least done their utmost toward it; that having an eye to him, who, in striving against sin endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, they may not be weary, nor faint in their minds.^q And, in order to this establishment of the just, and the progress and success of that righteous cause wherein they are engaged, the great thing, and indeed the one thing needful, we have to ask of God, is, that the Spirit may be poured out upon us from on high, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and then the wilderness shall become a fruitful field;^r then the work will go on and prosper, till there shall be no more occasion for it. And there is no petition we can present at the throne of grace with more hope of speeding than this, "for the pouring out of the Spirit;" for if earthly parents, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!^s

II. I come next to show why it is, and ought to be, the desire and prayer of all good people, that the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end, and the just may be established in their opposition to it.

1. All good people have a holy concern for the name and honour of God, and the Lord Jesus, and for the reputation of that holy religion which we make profession of; and therefore they cannot but desire, that that may come to an end, by which God is dishonoured, his name is profaned, the Lord Jesus crucified afresh, and religion wounded in the house of her friends. All the children of God having his glory in their eyes, as their highest end, have it upon their hearts as their chief care, and it is dearer to them than any interests of their own; nothing grieves them so much as the injury done to the honour of God, by the wickedness of the wicked, and the great occasion thereby given his enemies to blaspheme. *Horror takes hold of their hearts, and rivers of tears run down their eyes*, because of this.^t Every good man should be able to say, as David, *The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.*^u I take them as cast upon myself, and therefore *the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*, has made me forget myself, and all interests and concerns of my own, that I might be wholly swallowed up with the resentments of the dishonour to God, and that worthy name by which I am called.

^p Josh. viii. 26.
^r Isa. xxxii. 15.

^q Heb. xii. 3.
^s Luke xi. 13.

Let that therefore come to an end, let it be wholly extirpated, which is such a daring affront to God's majesty, such an impudent contempt of his sovereignty, such a direct contradiction to his truth, and such an open violation of his law; which grieves the Spirit of his grace, and bids defiance to his strivings; which supports the kingdom of Satan, that kingdom of darkness and malignity, and is in constant opposition to that kingdom of light, holiness, and love, which the Lord Jesus came to set up in the world. Will not all those then who rightly understand the thing, and lay it to heart, earnestly pray that that may come to an end, which has all this mischief in it; and that those may be established, who are doing what they can to bring it to an end. And we may come the more boldly to the throne of grace on this errand, because we can plead God's interest in the case; *Lord, thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory*, and, therefore, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, that thy kingdom may be advanced, thy power submitted to, and that glory given to thee, which thou hast by it been robbed of. How may we wrestle with God, and hope to speed, when our prayer is, *Arise, O God, plead thine own cause,*^v and our plea is, *Lord, what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*^w

2. All good people have a tender love to the souls of men, and a true desire of their welfare here and for ever, and, therefore, they cannot but desire and pray that that may come to an end, which is the only thing that ruins souls. Brethren, I hope you are convinced of the worth of souls; you know what they were made for, and in whose image they were made; what they were bought for, and with what price they were bought; what service for God they are capable of doing, what happiness in God they are capable of enjoying. You have made your conviction of this to appear by the concern you have for your own souls, and will you not make it further to appear by your concern for the souls of others? Shall it not be your desire, and care, and prayer, that none of those may perish for whom Christ died? Did Christ shed his blood for them, and shall we think much to drop a tear over them?

When you see a poor sinner running to an excess of riot, think with yourselves, Here is a precious soul, more worth than all the world, alienated from its rightful Lord, and sold for a mess of pottage, for the gratifications of a base lust, into the hands of its sworn enemy, and made a prey to the roaring lion. Here is one made a cage of unclean and filthy birds, who is capable of being made a temple of the Holy Ghost; a drudge to Satan, who might have been a servant of God; an instrument of unrighteousness, who might have been a vessel of honour: O that the opposing interest may be overturned in

^v Pa. cxix. 53, 136.
^w Pa. lxxiv. 22.

^u Pa. lxxix. 9.
^x 1 Cor. viii. 11.

this soul, and that he may come whose right it is, and it may be given him.⁷ Here is a miserable creature running headlong into everlasting burnings, upon the brink of ruin, and not aware of the danger: O that the grace of God would snatch this brand out of the burning, for it is yet capable of being made use of in the building. Though it is spoken of but with a "peradventure that God will give them repentance," yet that is encouragement to pray for it, and we should be earnest for it, because it is the only way of their being recovered out of the snare of the devil.⁸ If you saw any of those about you that you have the least concern for, thus destroying their own bodies, you would interpose, and do what you could to prevent it; and are not their souls of unspeakably more value than their bodies? Is not eternal death more dreadful than temporal death? If, therefore, you can do nothing else toward their recovery, pray for them; O pray that their sins may come to an end before their lives do.

3. All good people have a great value for the grace of God, and are convinced of the sovereignty and power, the necessity and efficacy, of that grace; and therefore, they pray for that grace, both for the reformation of sinners, and for the establishment of the just. They know how much they are themselves indebted to that grace, what favours, what wonders have been done for them by it; that it is purely by that grace that they are what they are that is good; and it is that grace that made them to differ from the wicked; that begun the good work in them, and carries it on. They know there is a fulness of grace in Christ, enough for all, though ever so many, enough for each, though ever so bad; and, therefore, they are still for having recourse to that grace, and fetching it in for themselves and others. They know that nothing can be done without it, not a good thought started or pursued, not a good word spoken, or a good work done, by themselves, or any other; and therefore whatever good they wish may be effected, either upon sinners or saints, they depend upon that grace for it, and its powerful influences.

They know also that this grace is promised to the church, this clean water to cleanse it from all its filthiness, and from all its idols,⁹ yet God will for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them: we must ask, and then we shall receive. Having therefore such an esteem for God's grace to do the work, and for the duty of prayer to obtain that grace, this is their petition, this is their request, *Lord, bring thou the wickedness of the wicked to an end.* After all the pains we have taken to prophesy upon the dead and dry bones, they are *dead and dry still*, and therefore we look upwards: *Come, O breath,¹⁰ and breathe upon these slain*, and then they shall live. They know that the filth of Zion and

Jerusalem can never be washed away, unless God himself do it by the spirit of judgment, and the spirit of burning;¹¹ and therefore to him they apply themselves: Lord, take the work into thy own hands; be thou exalted in thy own strength, the strength of thy own grace, and thou shalt have the glory.

4. All good people are hearty well-wishers to the land of their nativity, and are in care for the prosperity of it, because it is a Christian nation, it is their own, and in the peace thereof they shall have peace, and in the setting up and keeping up of religion among them they have joy and satisfaction, and, therefore, they seek the good of Jerusalem for their brethren and companions' sake,¹² as well as because of the house of the Lord their God, and the interests of it.

It cannot but grieve them to see this pleasant land polluted, and all its beauty sullied and stained by the filthiness of its inhabitants, so that it is become odious in the eyes of him who cannot endure to look upon iniquity; to see a land, that God has dealt favourably with, exposed to his judgments, and ready to be made as like to Sodom and Gomorrah in ruin, as it has been in sin; *Shall not God visit for these things*, which are to be found among us? *Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* Do we not see how fast the measure of the nation's sin fills? how near full it is, and how ready to overflow in a deluge of wrath? Do we not see our plenty forfeited by the abuse of it? Nay, the word of God, and the means of grace, which are more than our necessary food, forfeited by the contempt cast on them; the blessings of the government forfeited by the inefficacy of the endeavours used by it to suppress profaneness; and the honours and advantages of our religion ready to be taken from us by the sworn enemies of it abroad, because they have been so tamely yielded to the destroyers of its powers and vitals at home?

And is it not the concern of all good people then to stand in the gap, to turn away the wrath of God, and by their prayers to empty the measure, which so many are filling by their sins? to be earnest with God to bring that to an end, which, otherwise, will bring our nation to an end, and deprive it of all its glory, and to establish and strengthen those whose piety and zeal is the strength and stability of our times? When there was a general corruption of manners, transgressions were multiplied, truth failed, and there was no judgment; it was such a presage of destruction coming, that God *wondered there was no intercessor*;¹³ but I trust there are and will be many intercessors that cry day and night to God, not only against the threatened calamities, but against the threatening iniquities, the provoking cause of

⁷ Ezek. xxi. 37. ⁸ 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. ⁹ Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 37.

¹⁰ Ezek. xxxvii. 9. ¹¹ Isa. iv. 4. ¹² Ps. cxxii. 8, 9. ¹³ Isa. lix. 16.

them, that those may be brought to an end ; for as queen Esther pleaded with herself, *How can we endure to see the evil that shall come upon our people, and the destruction of our kindred?*

III. And now that which remains is, to make application of what has been said ; it is what we are all concerned in, and therefore should each of us apply to ourselves.

1. Let us address ourselves by earnest prayer and supplication to God, for his grace, to promote and advance the reformation of manners in our land, and particularly in this city, the reformation of which would have a good influence upon the nation. You will all say, it is a desirable thing that the manners of the nation should be reformed, now that which I am pressing you to contribute towards it, is, that which I am sure no one can except against in others, no, nor plead that they are excused and exempted from themselves. It will be no expense to you, the poorest of the flock of Christ may do as much in this part of the service as the rich. It will not expose you to any hazard—to weep in secret for the wickedness of the wicked, and to pray against it ; and I hope we shall not again see the day when it will be penal to pray publicly against it : nor will it expose you to any blame or censure, as some of your endeavours for reformation perhaps may : in this I am sure you can never be charged with going out of your sphere, or meddling with that which does not belong to you. So that the most timorous, the most cautious, may thus help forward this good work ; all who have any interest at the throne of grace, (and miserable is the case of those who have not,) all who know how to pray, (and those who do not are concerned to learn,) are this day in God's name summoned to this part of the service. The daughters of my people, though we cannot expect they should—do Deborah's part against this Sisera, this common enemy—lead the forces into the field against him ; (yet, blessed be God, we have a Deborah, that by her pious proclamation does that ;) though we cannot expect they should do Jael's part, who laid her hand to the workman's hammer, to nail this Sisera to the earth ; yet we expect and require that they do the part of Anna the prophetess, who served God with fastings and prayers night and day,^f and let them make this the matter of their daily prayers ; that in such a day of distress, such an hour of temptation as this, they do the part of Esther and her maids.^g And when there are daughters of Belial, daughters of Moab, who contribute to the debauching of the nation, let the daughters of Israel, the daughters of Sarah, be glad that they can any way contribute to the reforming of it. Let masters of families take this matter into their family prayers, that they may bring down a blessing not

only on their own houses, but on the houses of their neighbours, and thus may be themselves blessings to the places where they live.

Let me recommend it especially to my brethren in the ministry, whose business it is to give themselves to prayer ; let them lead those they pray with to the throne of grace on this errand : *O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just.* We are as Moses upon the mount, it is our work to lift up our prayers against Amalek with the rod of God in our hand, whilst others in the valley are doing Joshua's work. Ours is the safer and easier province ; it is a shame for us then if we be wanting in our work, and it may be of ill consequence, for when Moses lifted up his hands, and kept them steady, Israel prevailed. If we continue instant and constant in prayer, the attempts for reformation, it may be hoped, will be the more successful ; but when Moses let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.^h If we grow cold and remiss in prayer, the work is in danger of going back and losing ground. We pray for the success of our own endeavours, for the conversion of sinners, and the confirmation of saints ; I hope we dare not omit it ; and should we not pray also for their success, who, in a different way, are pursuing the same design ?

Let those who are engaged in the societies for reformation, look upon themselves as bound to further their own undertaking by their prayers, for others must strive, together with you, in their prayers to God for you.ⁱ Your associating in this good work obliges you in this way, as well as in other instances, to give mutual assistance, and to strengthen the hands one of another. You cannot but find what need you have of the continual supply of the grace of God, to furnish you for this good work, and to fortify you against the temptations and difficulties you meet with in it ; let that therefore drive you to the throne of grace, for grace sufficient. You lack wisdom for it, that wisdom which in the critical cases that often occur is *profitable to direct* ; you must therefore ask it of God in Christ's name, and you may expect, that if you sincerely aim at his glory in it, he will give it you, will give liberally, and will not upbraid ;^k will give a mouth and wisdom, such as all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist. Let your prayers go before all your undertakings in this work, and accompany your consultations about it ; and let your prayers follow what you do, that it may answer the end, the reformation of the offenders themselves you convict, and the deterring of others from doing the like. You would prosper the better in this good work, if you had it more upon your hearts in prayer ; and it would be a token for good that you shall carry your point ; for when God *seeks to destroy all*

^f Luke ii. 37. ^g Est. iv. 16. ^h Exod. xvii. 11. -

ⁱ Rom. xv. 30.

^k Jam. i. 5.

*the nations that come against Jerusalem, as a preface and introduction to it, he pours out a spirit of prayer and supplication.*¹

To stir you up all to be earnest with God in prayer for the success of all pious designs, to suppress profaneness and debauchery, consider,

(1.) How much depends upon the carrying on of this good work. If there were a general reformation of manners in our land, what a happy turn would it give to all our affairs! what a blessed change would it produce! what a beauty would it put upon the nation, upon this city, and render them amiable in the eyes of God and all good men! What a security would it be against the judgments that threaten us, and what a preparative for the blessings we wait for! How would the Lord then delight to do us good, and to dwell among us!

Nay, though the desired reformation should not be effected, yet while it is endeavoured, it turns to us for a testimony, and helps to save the guilt of the sin of sinners from being national. The reigns of the reforming kings of Judah were blessed of God though none of them made a complete reformation.

But if the work should now be let fall, if the forces that have for many years past been drawn into the field, and have acted successfully against vice and profaneness, should now be withdrawn, you not only lose all the points you have gained, but, it is to be feared, all iniquity will take encouragement to be so much the more daring; as when the dam which stopped the current for a while is broken through, the stream runs so much more violently. We are therefore concerned to pray the more earnestly, that the wheels of this good work may be kept a-going, and that though it should not get ground, it may not lose ground. A good man said long since, "He feared the sins of the land more than the French." If iniquity were subdued, how soon would all our other enemies be subdued! Would you therefore help to save a sinful nation from ruin, be intercessors for it now, that the unclean spirit that has met with a rebuke for some time may not recover possession; for if he do, it is to be feared it will be with seven other *more wicked than himself*, then will our *last state be worse than the first*.

(2.) Consider, what difficulties yet lie in the way of this good work, which nothing less than the power of almighty grace can help us over, and that grace must be obtained by prayer. I doubt you find the work goes on heavily, and meets with many rubs, many things retard it, and clog its wheels; and perhaps the reason is, because it wants praying hands to help it forward. Our complaint is the same with Hezekiah's, *This day is a day of rebuke*

and blasphemy, for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth; we must therefore take the course he then took, lift up our prayers for the remnant that is left, the little remnant.^m We may plead, as Jehoshaphat did, *Lord, we have no might against this great company that fights against us*, these troops, these legions of iniquities that invade our land, *neither know we what to do, but our eyes are up unto thee,*ⁿ and on thee do we depend.

When you meet with any difficulties in this work, follow the example of Nehemiah, that great reformer, who did such eminent service to the church of God in his day, and was famous for this, that upon every occasion he had recourse to God by prayer, made himself easy, and carried his point by lifting up an ejaculation to heaven. When he was waiting at table, afraid to ask what he hoped to have, and the king bid him speak his mind, he prayed to the God of heaven,^o spoke to God in the silent language of the heart before he ventured to speak to the king. When the enemies of the work he was about, ridiculed it, as a foolish attempt, and made a jest of these feeble Jews, he appealed to God, went and told him of the contempt put upon them: *Hear, O our God, for we are despised.* When he set a watch against them, he first made his prayer to God, and then set a watch.^p When, to drive him off from his undertaking, it was suggested to him, that the government would take umbrage at it, and he would be taken up as a disaffected person, that thereby his hands might be weakened, he addressed himself to prayer immediately, *Now therefore O God, strengthen my hands.*^q And if we thus, like Nehemiah, look up to God by prayer for strength and grace to do our work, we may, in faith, like him, look up to God for his gracious acceptance of us in it; *Remember me, O my God, for good:*^r for what is done by divine assistance, will be owned and favoured; what comes from God will come to him.

Let me now briefly tell you what further we must do in our prayers for reformation.

[1.] We must sadly lament the wickedness of the wicked, which we pray for the removal of; we must complain of it to God, as those who do indeed lay it to heart, and look upon it with inward trouble. Can we each of us say, as David, *I beheld the transgressors and was grieved?* Do as Joseph did then, concerning his brethren, bring to your father, your heavenly Father, their evil report.^s It will better become us to weep in secret for the sins of sinners, than openly to exclaim against them. The character of those who are marked for preservation, and whom the destroying angel must not touch, is, that they *sigh and cry for the abominations* that are found among us,^t that is the spirit of a Christian; not

¹ Zech. xii. 9, 10. ^m Isa. xxxvii. 3, 4. ⁿ 2 Chron. xx. 12.
^o Neh. ii. 4. ^p Neh. iv. 8, 9.
 2 n 2

^q Neh. vi. 9. ^r Neh. xiii. 14, 22, 29, 31.
^s Gen. xxxvii. 2. ^t Ezek. ix. 4.

that they are satirical in their invectives against them, so far a Pharisee may go. We are then fit to pray against sin when we truly bewail it.

[2.] We must bless God for what is done towards the bringing of the wickedness of the wicked to an end in our land. We have reason to be thankful to God for the national testimonies that are borne against vice and profaneness, that it does not go without a check; that good and wholesome laws are made against drunkenness, swearing, and sabbath-breaking; that the Queen's proclamation against immorality is read in all our courts of justice; that here, in this great city, and in some other places, societies are formed, and yet kept up, for the assistance of the magistrates in turning the edge of the sword of justice against the most notorious delinquents. This standard the spirit of the Lord has lifted up against the enemy who was coming in upon us like a flood,^a this banner God has given to them that fear him, to be displayed because of the truth;^b a banner for them to triumph in, and list themselves under.

[3.] We must in these prayers for grace to reform our land, act faith upon the mediation of Christ, and the promise of God, and make them our plea. Let us take our encouragement in these prayers from this, that Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for the same thing; that he came into the world to destroy the works 'of the devil;^c was manifested to take away sin: and we are sure that he will gain his point, and that *him the Father heareth always*. And through him we have precious promises to plead, on which we are caused to hope, that God will *remove the iniquity of the land in one day;*^d that the *Redeemer shall come to Zion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob;*^e and *shall sit as a refiner*. So that we shall not pray in vain, for faithful is he that has promised, who also will do it.

2. Let us follow our prayers with our serious and sincere endeavours; and let us act as those who are in good earnest, when we pray that God would bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end, and establish the just. When I press you thus to pray for it, it is not as if I thought there were nothing else to be done, and that prayers and tears were all the weapons that the cause of reformation would admit of,—as if no means were to be used, but we must sit down, and leave it to God to do all; or as if I thought the case so deplorable, that it were to no purpose to attempt any thing for the relief of it; I do not come upon this errand to you to-day, as Luther's friend did to him, with his *Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei Domine—Away to thy closet, and say, Lord, have mercy on me*; bidding him content himself with praying for reformation, for it

would be in vain for him to think of doing any thing toward it. No, my brethren, both God's promises and our prayers are intended to quicken and encourage, not to supersede or slacken, our endeavours. When in answer to prayer you do, like David, hear the sound of a going upon the tops of the mulberry trees, and you perceive that God goes before you, that God is with you of a truth, then you must bestir yourselves; then up and be doing.^f

(1.) You, especially, who are engaged in these societies for reformation, now you have this day set me upon your watch-tower, you must give me leave to be your monitor in God's name, as one who desires to be found faithful, and that you be found so too. Be mindful of the obligations you laid upon yourselves when you entered into these societies, in a sense of your duty to God, as well as in love to your country, to do all you could in your places for the suppression of vice and profaneness. You have not discharged yourselves from these obligations, make conscience, therefore, of fulfilling them; you have opened your mouth unto the Lord, and you cannot go back; go forward, then; go on, and prosper. Though the endeavours of your societies should prove unsuccessful, yet let not the title of them be insignificant, and an empty name. You are called "Societies for Reformation of Manners," and therefore are concerned to inquire, what you are doing towards it? Your warfare, I am sure, is not accomplished, for the Canaanites are yet in our land, and are as snares to us, and as thorns in our eyes.^g The exorbitant power of vice and profaneness is not reduced. The house of Saul, though we hope it grows weaker and weaker, yet is still in being, and its forces threatening; and therefore you must resolve, with meekness and fear, vigorously to carry on this holy war, and to act offensively, not for the destruction, but for the salvation, and spiritual benefit, of those you appear against.

I understand you have societies of two sorts, that have different provinces assigned them. Some made up of persons of a lower rank, who are as the hands and feet of this body; others of a higher rank, who are to them (as Moses said to Jethro) instead of eyes; and both these have need of, and are serviceable to one another. Shall I speak particularly to each?

[1.] You who have engaged yourselves in the more active part of this undertaking, be active in it; not as lords over your brethren, but as servants to God and the government, in a good work. Let those of you who grow remiss, and indifferent, be excited by the good example of those who yet retain their zeal; and let their care and courage in this matter flourish again; and return with a double vigour to the relief of those who have long borne

^a Isa. lix. 19. ^b Ps. lx. 4. ^c 1 John iii. 8. ^d Zech. iii. 9.

^e Rom. xi. 26.

^f 2 Sam. v. 24.

^g Josh. xii. 12.

the burthen and heat of the day, that you may strengthen the hands which you have weakened. Complain not that the drudgery lies upon you, for in such good work as this, nothing is to be called drudgery; but rather say, *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile.*^b Be not frightened with winds and clouds from sowing and reaping; nor excuse yourselves with a sluggard's fancy of *A lion in the way, A lion in the streets.* The God whom you serve is able to protect you, and to bear you out, however you may be threatened, and abundantly to recompense you, whatever charge you are at, and whatever damage you may sustain. You know whom you have trusted, even one who will be faithful to you while you are so to him; and though you may be losers for him, you shall not be losers by him, in the end.

[2.] You who have undertaken the directive part, I beseech you do your part. What you also contribute toward the necessary charges of this work, continue to do it, increase it if there be occasion, do it liberally, do it cheerfully and without grudging; how can you bestow what you have better, than in thus honouring God with it? And what a pity it is that such a good cause as this should be starved! And there is another thing which may be justly expected from you, gentlemen, and that is, that you be forward to appear in person, when there is occasion, for the keeping up of the reputation of this pious undertaking. The figure you make in the world, gives you an opportunity to do it, your education and conversation enable you to do it with a good grace; and these are talents which put you into a capacity of serving God and your generation, and which must be accounted for. A frown from you may daunt a daring transgressor, and put him out of countenance, more than a reproof or an information from an inferior person. A smile from you may hearten an honest reprover, and keep him in countenance when he is insulted, as Lot was, with *Who made thee a judge?* It will be your honour, gentlemen, to patronize those who are busy in this service, and to stand by them, while there are those who censure them, and run them down as over-busy. Be ready to give your advice before-hand to the most regular, prudent, and inoffensive methods for carrying on this work; and what is done conscientiously and zealously, appear in the defence of it, and think not to excuse yourselves, by saying it might have been done with more caution and discretion in some little circumstance or other, which it is an easy thing for those who seek an excuse, and have a mind to be critical, to spy out; but that will no more justify you in an inglorious retreat from them, than it would justify David in the orders he gave to desert Uriah the Hittite, to say, *Why went*

^b Eccl. xi. 4.^c Neh. iii. 5.

he so near the wall? I know nothing can excuse your drawing back, unless you be conscious to yourselves of the beam in your own eye; and if that be the reason that you are ashamed to appear, it is your own fault, and you cannot but be ashamed of your reason. But I hope better things of you, gentlemen, that your hearts condemn you not, and then you may have confidence in this cause of God, and shall have confidence in the day of God. Be bold, therefore, and act like yourselves, like men of honour: let it not be said of you, as it was of the nobles of Tekoa,^c that they *put not their necks to the work of the Lord*; nay, we ask you not to put your necks to it, only to show your faces in it. Honour God thus with your honour, and you shall find him true to his word, that those who honour him he will honour, while those that despise and desert him shall be lightly esteemed.

(2.) We are all obliged in our places to do our utmost for the carrying on of this work, something more than by our prayers.

[1.] Let us do what we can to bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end. Let our conversation in every thing be such as becomes the gospel of Christ, strict, and universally conscientious, that they who will not be won either by the word of the ministers, or the rod of the magistrates, may be won by that.^d We must study to be not only blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, but exemplary in every thing that is virtuous and praise-worthy. Let our light shine before men, that they may be brought to glorify that name of God, which they have reproached and dishonoured. Let those who are masters of families keep up religion there, and put away iniquity far from their tabernacles. In all our conversation, let us witness against sin, and drive it away (if we cannot use any other means) by an angry countenance. It is our duty to tell our neighbours of their faults, between us and them alone, in any wise to rebuke them, and not to suffer sin upon them, lest we bear sin for them, and make ourselves sharers in their guilt. Let us do what we can to make sinners ashamed of their sin; were they brought to that, it would be an ingenuous and prevailing principle of their reformation. Let us have no fellowship with the works of darkness, but reprove them. Let us have as little fellowship as possible with the workers of those works, and so reprove them.

[2.] Let us do what we can to establish the just, to confirm those who are good in their goodness. Let those who fear the Lord speak often one to another for their mutual instruction, quickening, and encouragement; for the sharpening of one another's countenance, and the strengthening of one another's hands. Those who are not themselves engaged with

^d 1 Pet. iii. 1

the societies for reformation, yet should do what they can to establish them ; if they have not your hand, let them have your good word ; speak well of them as it comes in your way : the city ought to be made sensible of its obligation to them ; were it so, what an establishment would it be to them ! As occasion offers, let them have your help, and be ready to say, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*

To conclude, it will, I hope, be some encouragement to you—to be on the Lord's side, and to assist, by your prayers and endeavours, for the bringing of the wickedness of the wicked to an end, and the establishing of the just—if I tell you from the word of God, what will be, at least, the issue of this struggle between Jacob and Esau, between the pious and the profane. You may assure yourselves, brethren, the cause of religion and serious piety is the cause of God, and it will, in the end, be a victorious cause : it will be so in the day of decision ; when

the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.* The Lord Jesus will then, and not till then, gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity. Then will the wickedness of the wicked come to a perpetual end, when into the New Jerusalem there shall not enter any unclean thing ; and then shall the just be for ever established, when they shall shine as the sun in the firmament of our Father ; when he who is holy shall be holy still, shall be for ever holy. Then shall the great Redeemer have put down all the opposing rule, principality, and power of sin and Satan, which are now so daring, so threatening, which we are sometimes ready to fear will bear down all before them, and carry the day. It shall all be crushed and sunk ; and the kingdom shall be delivered up to God, even the Father, that that God whom sinners now despise and make light of, may be " all in all " to eternity.