

A S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

OPENING OF THE NEW MEETING-HOUSE AT CHESTER,

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JOSHUA xxii. 22, 23.

The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know, if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord,—that we have built us an altar.

THUS the two tribes and a half begin their solemn reply to the remonstrance of the other tribes, who, with sword in hand, ready to make good their challenge, boldly charged them with a crime no less black and dangerous, than apostasy from the truth and worship of the God of Israel. Thus the indictment runs, v. 16. that they had rebelled against the Lord, and turned from following him, v. 18. and these were indeed heinous crimes, and, in the sense of the patriarchal age, *an iniquity to be punished by the judges*, Job xxxi. 28. thus to have denied the God that is above, if they had been really guilty of it.

But never was there any controversy more innocently begun, more prudently and discreetly managed, nor more happily compromised, and taken up, than this was; for whereas in most quarrels there is a fault on both sides, in this there does not appear to be a fault on either side; and whereas the *beginning of strife is as the letting forth of water*, the occasion of much mischief, the beginning of this was an occasion for both sides to give evidences of their zeal for religion and love.

Let us look into the particulars of the story:

1. That which gave rise to the controversy was an altar erected by the two tribes over against the land of Canaan in the borders of Jordan, *a great altar to see to*, v. 10. and this done without any leave asked, or warrant obtained, from Joshua or Eleazar; without any notice given to, or consultation had with, their brethren of the other tribes; yet being done with an honest design to preserve the entail of religion to their posterity, and to be a token

of their communion with the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, was not only warrantable, but commendable. This they solemnly declare to be the true intent and meaning of their building this altar; that they had no idolatrous, superstitious, or schismatical design in it, but that they intended it for a witness (*in perpetuam rei memoriam—in perpetual attestation*) of their alliance to their brethren, from whom they were divided by the waters of Jordan. They did not set it up as a mere stone or rock of division, much less as a *stone of stumbling or a rock of offence*, but as a badge of relation, and consequently a *nexus* or bond of union, wisely foreseeing and providing against so great a mischief, as the alienating of their posterity from the church privileges of the seed of Israel; for fear, say they, lest in time to come *your children might speak to our children, saying, What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel?* v. 24. the consequences of which, in after and more degenerate ages, might be most fatal.

They who have themselves found how good it is to be near to God, and what an unspeakable pleasure and happiness there is in communion with him, cannot but be concerned to take all possible care, and make all probable provision, that their children after them may not be made to cease from following the Lord, or be looked on as having no part in him. With the human nature, which we transmit to posterity depraved and corrupted, it is very desirable to transmit pure and entire those sovereign remedies which religion has provided for the cure of that hereditary disease: not the narrow and private interests of a party, which in kindness to posterity we should study how to bury in oblivion, but the great and noble principles of catholic Christianity; these we should desire to entail the knowledge and faith of upon our *seed's seed, henceforth and for ever*, Isa. lix. 21. They who rejoice in the light of the gospel, will desire that it may not die in their hands; and they who find themselves enriched with

the true treasure, and know how to value it, cannot wish it may not be buried in their graves, Ps. xxii. cii. 28. but well secured to their heirs, that in their be, and the families thereof, the name of Christ *shall endure for ever, and his throne as the days of old.* 2. The godly jealousy of the other tribes, who suspected their altar to be of dangerous tendency, and to be an ill step towards idolatry or schism, was likewise praise-worthy; and their warm resentments, when they had such a colour of cause for them, were a laudable instance of their pious zeal for the honour of the Lord God of Israel. The thing *prima facie* looked bad, and gave ground for suspicion. The law of Moses had expressly required them to offer all their sacrifices in the place which the Lord would choose to put his name there, and not elsewhere, under the severe penalty of excision, Lev. xii. 8, 9. Deut. xii. 5, 6. and it was no strained guessing, or foreign surmise, from the building of an altar in the borders of Jordan, to infer an intention to offer sacrifice there contrary to the law of God. But they take very heinously, and seem to be touched by it in a very tender part; they reckon the affronting of God's altar an intolerable affront to the government, *et altaria contra altaria* no less dangerous than *imperium in imperio*, and to be inadvertently on accordingly.

The God we serve is very jealous in the matters of his worship, (which are to him as the apple of his eye,) and he expects we should be so to, and afraid of all appearances of evil; yea, and dreading the first step towards apostasy from God, and so cordilly espousing his institutions, and the honour and purity of them, as to be jealous of any thing that looks like an encroachment upon them: when the cause is plainly God's, our call to appear in it is clear, and when the thing we do is good, nothing better than to be zealously affected in it, Gal. iv. 8. When our Lord Jesus had commended the angel of the church of Ephesus, particularly for her patience, he adds this further character, (which though it seems contrary to it, yet is very consistent with it,) that she could not bear them that were evil, Rev. ii. 2. It is no part of Christian patience to bear with sin; the meekest man upon earth was more than once angry at sin. The nearer any are to us in relation and neighbourhood, the more jealous we should be of their departure from God, and the more industrious to prevent and reduce them, lest we ourselves or ours should catch the infection. *Jam—tua res igitur paries cum proximus ardet—Thy own goods are endangered when the adjoining house is on fire.*

3. The method they took in prosecution of their resentments was regular and exemplary; their zeal in this matter was for the most part guided and governed by the meekness of wisdom. An assembly of the states was called at Shiloh, and the report concerning this altar was taken into consideration,

the result of which was, that the business should be fairly and impartially examined, and the supposed delinquents heard to speak for themselves; who if they would hear and submit to their reproof, well and good, *they had gained their brethren*, Matt. xviii. 15, 17. but if they refused, then, and not till then, it was time to deal with them as heathen men, and devoted Canaanites. These tribes of Israel, though apt to war, yet would not send forth their armies to give them battle, till they had first sent their ambassadors, (and those men of the first rank,) to treat of peace, and to inquire into the merits of the cause, v. 13, 14. He to whom all things are naked and bare, would not punish the most notorious criminals, the cry of whose wickedness alarmed heaven itself, but he would first go down and see, Gen. xviii. 21. It is the advice of the wise man, and it will be our wisdom in all such cases to take the advice, Prov. xxv. 8, 9. *Go not forth hastily to strive, but debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself.* Many an unhappy strife, and all the mischievous consequences of it, would be prevented by an amicable and candid inquiry into the matter of the offence. The reason why we do not love one another as we ought, is because we do not, and will not, know one another as we might: the rectifying of mistakes and misunderstandings, and the setting of misconstrued words and actions in a true light, that they may appear as they are meant, and not otherwise, would be in many cases an effectual way to accommodate both private and public quarrels, and bring them to a happy period.

4. The defence which the two tribes made for themselves, to clear and vindicate what they had done, was very ingenuous and fair. Though there was somewhat more of warmth in the charge exhibited against them than was needful, and the fault was too much taken for granted; yet they patiently heard them out, and then replied with a great deal of calmness, very fairly stating the case, and showing the suspiciousness of their brethren to be (though not without a colourable pretence, yet) without a just ground, not doubting but they would lay aside their jealousies, and let fall their action, when they understood their honest and sincere intention and design in building this altar.

Lastly, The effect of this was very good and happy; the princes were satisfied, and receded from their charge, and thereby showed themselves to be under the government of that great law of charity, which teaches us not to rejoice in iniquity, but to rejoice in the truth; hereby further mischief was prevented, the peace and honour of their infant state preserved, and God had the glory of all, v. 33.

The text begins that defence which had so good and happy a success. It may be of use to us to observe how it was managed, that we may learn in the like cases so to vindicate ourselves, as not to pro-

voke, but pacify, our brethren. Here is not a word of recrimination, no return of suspicion for suspicion; (though nothing is more easy to retort than that;) they do not blame their brethren for their rash, and hasty, and uncharitable censures, nor upbraid them with the good services they had done them in helping to put them in possession of their land, nor defy their threatened arms, and bid them do their worst; here is nothing that savours of pride or passion, but all fair and candid: though the periods of their speech are elaborate enough, and the style proper, yet nothing appears to be so much studied in it, *as the things that make for peace.*—Observe,

I. The manner and form in which the plea is drawn up: it runs both as an appeal to God, and an apology to their brethren.

1. Here is a solemn appeal made to God concerning that which they had done, repeated to make it the more solemn, *The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knows.* That glorious title of God, which speaks him higher than the highest of the angels in heaven, the princes and potentates of the earth, and the imaginary deities of the heathen, (for each of these are called gods,) is here made use of, to express a holy awe and dread of that God to whom they appeal, upon their own spirits, and to beget the like in the minds of those with whom they speak. The sense had been complete if they had only said, God knows; but then they had not taken the occasion given them, to express their high and honourable thoughts of the great Jehovah. Let us learn hence to speak of God with reverence, and mention his glorious name with a solemn pause. Is it a piece of respect due to earthly princes in addresses made to them, to give them their title of honour; and shall we speak as slightly and carelessly of the King of kings, as if he were not only a man like ourselves, but a common man in our own rank? Is this to fear that glorious and fearful name, the Lord our God?

In appeals to heaven, it is especially necessary that there be a very awful decorum and solemnity observed, for God is appealed to, not as a common witness, but as a judge, whose tribunal is in the heavens, and by whose definitive sentence all causes must be finally and irreversibly determined; those therefore that appeal to him upon every trivial occasion, and with a slightly superficial God knows, while they never think of God, nor have any regard to his knowledge, profane his name by taking it in vain, and instead of honouring him, put the greatest affront that can be upon him. Appeals thus put into the court above, will not only be rejected and thrown out (how just soever the matter may be) as not being put in due form, but the appellant prosecuted for a contempt of the court.

's appeal here is a good pattern or precedent in

drawing up appeals. *The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knows:* he that is the God of gods, even Jehovah, (so it is placed in the original,) is both a rightful and competent judge of all appeals made to him: who should judge and pass sentence but he that is Jehovah, the mighty God, even the Lord? for so this same title which is here used is translated, Ps. l. 1. where God is spoken of at large as the sovereign and universal Judge. If he be Jehovah, he is perfect in knowledge, wisdom, and justice, and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth; that it is such as the guilty have reason to dread, and the upright reason to rejoice in. If he be the God of gods, the mighty God, his jurisdiction cannot be demurred unto, nor his authority disputed: no further appeals can be made to any higher court, nor can the executions taken out upon his judgment be opposed or resisted; the God of gods is a Judge that will not be baffled.

To the tribunal of the mighty God the two tribes here refer the decision of this matter in variance. If we have done this in rebellion, and with an ill design the Lord God of gods he knows it, (for he is acquainted with all the transgressions that are committed against him, even those that are gilded over with the most plausible pretences,) and he that look upon it will require it, will revenge it; but we are sure he knows the contrary, and that however it be interpreted, it is honestly intended. From whence we may observe,

(1.) That in every thing we do in religion it concerns us highly to approve ourselves to God in our integrity, so as to be able with a holy, humble, well grounded confidence to appeal to him concerning it: herein we must labour, and this must be the top of our ambition, in every service that we may be accepted of the Lord, 2 Cor. v. 9. doing it as unto the Lord, and not to men, and then it is done heartily Col. iii. 23. It was the total miscarriage of the Pharisees in their devotions, and the dead fly that tainted all their precious ointment, that all their works they did to be seen of men, their approbation and applause they coveted, to them they were industrious to approve themselves, and verily they had their reward, Matt. xxiii. 5. vi. 2, 5. In this therefore our righteousness must exceed theirs, or we shall never get to heaven, Matt. v. 20. All our works we must do to be seen of God, setting ourselves in the doing of them before him, having our eye towards him in every performance, diligently observing his will as our rule, and his glory as our end, and earnestly desiring and courting his favour and acceptance, as our felicity, recompence, and chief good; accounting that if he be well pleased with us, and say, Well done, we have gained our point, we have all we need, all we would have; if we have praise of God, whether we have praise of men or no, we are happy, and ought to be easy. Let us therefore see to it, that

If our exercises of piety and devotion, public and private, our hearts be upright with God, that we be as good as we seem to be, because God knows whether we be so or no, and will accept us no further than we are so; that our eye be single, our intentions sincere, and all we do be done from an unbiased principle of regard to God as our ruler and Lord, and recommends them, through the mediation of Christ, to his acceptance.

2.) That when at any time we fall under the censures of men, and their reproaches, who condemn us because they do not know us, it is very comfortable to be able to appeal to a God that knows us, concerning our integrity. When holy Job was runn by his friends as a hypocrite, this was his comfort, Job xvi. 19, 20. *My witness is in heaven, my record is on high: my friends scorn me; but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.* David oft found relief by taking the same course, and appeals from unjust and uncharitable accusations of his enemies to God's knowledge of his integrity, and is so from dreading and deprecating God's judgment, every wicked man if he knows himself must,) that begs it, and refers himself to it: (Ps. xvii. 2.) *Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let mine eyes behold the things that are equal.* Ps. xxvi. If God say, Well done, good and faithful servant, no matter is not great who says otherwise; for so be all our doom be, as God hath decided it, and not men give their opinion of it. If therefore he that judges us is the Lord, surely it is a very small thing, and not worthy our consideration, or fit to affect us much, especially so as to turn the scale of our selves, how we are judged of man's judgment, 1 Cor.

3, 4. If men brand our devotion as counterfeit and hypocritical, and put us under the blackest characters, let it not disquiet nor disturb us, while we have good hopes, through grace, that God accepts us of our services, as sincere; let not them therefore at know righteousness, (that know what will bear them out, and bring them off,) and in whose heart is the law of God, (and not in their mouths only,) let them not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their revilings, so as thereby to be either diverted from, or discouraged in, their duty; *for the righteousness that will justify them shall be for ever, and the salvation following it, from generation to generation.* a. li. 7, 8. This will be our rejoicing in the day of evil, even the testimony of our conscience, which God's deputy in the soul, 2 Cor. i. 12. Let, therefore, the generation of the upright, when most misrepresented, commit their cause to God. He who knows their righteousness will sooner or later bring forth as the morning, and if their integrity be manifest to God, (as undoubtedly it is,) it shall in due time also be *manifested in the consciences of men*, 2 Cor. v. 11.

2. Here is a sober apology presented to their brethren: *Israel he shall know.* We are ready to let Israel know; ready to give such an account of our meaning in this attempt, as we doubt not will give our brethren other thoughts of us, and it, than they now have: which teaches us this, that though the record on high, and the witness in our own bosoms, are principally to be secured for us, yet there is a satisfaction which we owe to our brethren, who doubt concerning the integrity of our actions.

Though our brethren are not our judges, by whose sentence our state is to be determined, yet they are our friends, in whose opinions we should desire to stand right. Though to be accepted of God is without doubt the chief and most desirable good, yet it is also desirable and well worthy our endeavour, like Mordecai, Esth. x. 3. *to be accepted of the multitude of our brethren.* If our sincerity be known to God, we should study how to let others know it, and to give evidences of it to those that have their eyes upon us. It is part of the debt we owe to ourselves, to preserve our own good name, and part of the debt we owe to our brethren, to value and seek their good will, and as far as we can to rectify their mistakes and prejudices.

We should especially study how to give satisfaction to those, who though they misunderstand our words and actions, and judge of us accordingly, yet show a zeal for the glory of God, as these ten tribes here did. The reproaches of the fools in Israel are to be despised; it is no matter what they speak against us who profanely speak against God, nor should it much affect us if we be made the song of the drunkards, but the deliberate censures of wise and sober men cannot be made so light of. It is a desirable thing to be accepted of those, who we have reason to think are accepted of God; therefore David prays, Ps. cxix. 79. *Let those that fear thee turn in unto me.* Though we ought not to be ambitious of the applause of any, yet we should wish and endeavour not to lie under the hard thoughts of good men; and for this reason, we should be always ready to give an answer to those that ask us *a reason of the hope that is in us*, 1 Pet. iii. 15. and not say, What is that to you? Though that which satisfies our own consciences may not always be satisfactory to others, nor convince them that we are in the right; yet if it be produced with meekness and fear, as it ought to be, it may perhaps beget a more favourable opinion, and somewhat abate the edge of censure, when it appears that we are not altogether without excuse. Perhaps after the two tribes had so fully vindicated themselves, and what they had done in building this altar, their brethren of the ten tribes, or some of them at least, were not fully convinced of the expediency of it, but were still of the mind that they had better have let it alone, and that it was altogether needless; but, however, it had this good effect, that

it made the matter abundantly better than at first it seemed, and prevented the unhappy rupture that it threatened; and the ten tribes, though no great admirers of the contrivance of this altar, yet agreed to be neighbourly and friendly with their brethren, and resolved they would not quarrel about it, nor go up in battle against them.—Observe,

II. The matter insisted on in their plea: they plead Not guilty to the charge, and though the fact was plain enough, yet they deny the fault, and aver that it was not in rebellion, nor in transgression against the Lord, that they had built them an altar; they humbly desired, that it might not be misconstrued as done with any design to infringe the honour, or weaken the true interest, of the national establishment, (which they express a very tender concern for,) but only to preserve and promote the common interests of true religion and godliness among themselves on the other side Jordan, in communion with their brethren, and not in any affront or contradiction to them, and therefore not in rebellion or in transgression against the Lord. Learn from this, that it highly concerns those who build an altar, for themselves to see to it, that they do it not in rebellion or in transgression against the Lord. Building of altars was an ancient act of piety and devotion; Noah and Abraham were famous for it; but that, as other outward instances of religion, if not done from a right principle, and for a right end, may and will turn into sin. We read of Ephraim making many altars to sin, Hos. viii. 11. The multiplying of his altars was the multiplying of his transgressions, and the righteous God turned it into his punishment, *therefore altars shall be unto him to sin*, that is, they shall be a continual snare to him; and the connexion of the parts of the charge against Israel, Hos. viii. 14. is very surprising; *Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples*. Those who build altars on which to offer in the Eucharist a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of quick and dead, (as the church of Rome does,) do in effect deny the sufficiency of that one great sacrifice, which Christ offered once for all upon the cross; and by the pretended repetitions of it, insinuate that it is of no more force to take away sin than the legal sacrifices which were heretofore offered year by year continually; because these could not make the comers thereunto perfect, and therefore those altars are certainly built in rebellion and transgression against the Lord, Heb. x. 1. Those that build altars for the maintaining and propagating any heresy, or the promoting and carrying on any design against religion in the power of it, that build altars to support a monopoly of the church, and engross to themselves its privileges, to the exclusion of others, spoil the acceptableness of the altars they build; and it will be construed to be done in transgression against the Lord. If we bestow all our goods in building temples and

altars, and have not charity, the reigning love of God and our neighbour in our hearts, all the cost is thrown away, and spent in vain, and we are but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. and shall be dealt with as rebels against the Lord. Let it therefore be our care, to do not only that which is good for the matter of it, but to do it well, for *then, and then only, we shall be accepted*, Gen. iv. 7.

You see, my brethren, how the further opening of this would lead me to the vindication of what we have done here, in furnishing ourselves with these conveniences for our solemn assemblies; but it was not for that purpose that I chose this text, nor shall I enter upon that subject; partly because, I bless God, I know not of any that exhibit so high a charge against us, as that we have done it in rebellion or in transgression against the Lord, and I am very willing to hope the best concerning our brethren's thoughts of us; and partly because I am resolved industriously to decline every thing that looks like controversy, and I should fear lest our defence be construed our offence, or at least be interpreted an invitation or persuasion of people to our way, and an attempt to make proselytes to a party, which you know I have always been studious to avoid. It is a string that can scarce be touched so tenderly but it will have a jarring sound, than which nothing is more disagreeable to me. I am sure this is not a time of day for us to pick quarrels, while through the clemency of our governors we enjoy great quietness; and we have as little reason to do it in this place as any where: while the prime dignitaries of the established church among us seem to have buried the thoughts of our unhappy differences in such a hearty, pious zeal for the reformation of manners, we are very unjust and unwise if we say or do any thing to revive them. Are these thoughts laid to sleep? may they on both sides sleep perpetually! But that which I further intend in the application of what I have opened to the present occasion, is from this text and story to borrow some light,

1. For the stating of our case as it truly stands, and giving a just account of what we have here done.

2. For the directing us in the duty of this present day, which I principally aim at.

For the first; our building us an altar, besides that which stands upon the foot of the national establishment, (*altare juxta altare*,) is a thing which needs explication, for the preventing and rectifying the mistakes of some unthinking people, who are apt to look upon those who go to church, and those who go to meetings, as of two different religions, and the distance between them is widened to a degree equal to that between papists and protestants; thanks be to God the matter is not so: let us therefore see how it stands between us and our brethren of the ten tribes.

1. We also are Israelites in common, and there-

fore in communion with those of the national establishment. Are they Christians? so are we; we worship the same God, in the same name, and heartily consent with them in all the articles of the ancient creed, holding just the same form of sound words, and contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. We are baptized, and do baptize, in the same great and sacred name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as three Persons, but one God. We read the same Scriptures, and adhere to them as the standing rule of faith and practice, and make use of them as our oracle and touchstone. We pretend to no inspiration in our praying and preaching, nor do we set up any light within, in competition with, much less in contradiction to, the written word. We build our hopes of salvation upon the covenant of grace, and the promises of it made to us and to our children, and submit to all gospel-ordinances, particularly that of the ministry. Whatever the way in which we worship the God of our fathers is called and counted, we believe all things which are written in the law and the prophets, and the everlasting gospel, and have hope towards God, which they also allow, *that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust*, Acts xxiv. 14, 15.

We are far from engrossing religion and the church to ourselves, and those of our own way, or thinking that we are the only elect people of God; from our hearts we abhor and renounce all such narrow principles as are contrary to catholic Christianity, and undermine and straiten its sure and large foundations. We do hereby solemnly profess, and shall take all occasions to repeat it, that we celebrate our religious assemblies *in communion with all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours*, 1 Cor. i. 2. We neither say nor do any thing here to the reproach or prejudice of the national establishment; we take not upon us to arraign or censure the constitutions of it, or to judge or despise those that adhere to them; but in those few and small things wherein our apprehensions differ, (whilst in the most and greatest things of all we cordially agree,) we desire faithfully and conscientiously to walk according to the light that God has given us, charitably believing that others do so too, whom we hope to meet in the general assembly of the first-born, though now we are divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel. This profession we make in the sincerity of our hearts, with a resolution, by the grace of God, never to act contrary to it.

And now may we not claim it as our right to be owned and looked upon as members of the catholic church, though a weak and small part of it, yet a part of it, and I trust not a corrupt part; and being united with our brethren of the other tribes, under one civil government, and being (abundantly to our

satisfaction) within the same allegiance, and even in our religious interests taken into the same protection, we see not why we should not be looked upon as belonging to that part of the catholic church which God's own right hand hath planted in these kingdoms.

2. Though we also are Israelites, yet our lot, like that of the two tribes, happens to fall on the other side Jordan, a river dividing between us and our brethren, which, without hazarding the peace of our consciences, we cannot wade through or swim over.

Some of the tribes of our English Israel have been so situated ever since the reformation, as early as Edward the Sixth's time, through a dissatisfaction about the injunction of some indifferent things, the more minute parts of the national establishment. The first settlement of the two tribes on the other side Jordan was looked upon by Moses and the rest of the tribes with a jealousy, as tending to weaken the common interests of Israel; and their proposing of it (as here their building of an altar) was severely censured, till they had given their reasons, cleared themselves of any ill design in it, and promised their best assistance to their brethren in the common service; and then Moses allowed and ratified their choice, as we have the story at large, Numb. xxxii. where we find, that two things induced them to desire their lot on that side Jordan, though thereby they put themselves out of the way of the preferments which attended Joshua and the ark into the land of Canaan, and exposed themselves to the contempt and censure of their brethren, as strangers to the commonwealth of Israel.

(1.) That there was good pasture in the land, v. 4. *It is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle: they would sit down by the footsteps of the flock, and feed their kids beside the shepherds' tents.*

(2.) That then they should not have the trouble of passing the river, v. 5. *Bring us not over Jordan.* Whether these inducements were justifiable we will not now dispute, but it appears that the rest of the tribes, who could satisfy themselves to go through Jordan, did not therefore disown them for their brethren.

From the first planting of Christianity, there appears to have been a variety of sentiments among wise and good men, concerning the less weighty and less evident matters of the gospel, as concerning the distinction of meats and the observation of days, Rom. xiv. 2, 5. some regarding all days and all meats alike, others making a religious difference. The apostle Paul, by his unquestionable authority, might have determined the matter in favour of one side, and have obliged the other to a compliance; but he chooses to accommodate the matter, without engaging either to change their opinions or their practice according to them, but prescribes a mutual

charity and forbearance, as a sovereign remedy against all the ill consequences of this variety of sentiments, Phil. iii. 15, 16. *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not*, Rom. xiv. 3. *But let every man be persuaded in his own mind*, v. 5. Which no doubt were intended to be standing rules for the management of the like differences in all the ages of the church; and if these rules were strictly observed by all churches and all Christians, the river of Jordan would be dried up, at least be driven back at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, Ps. civ. 5, 7. the God of peace and love: and a way would be made for those of the ransomed of the Lord to pass over, whose lot is on the other side of it; but alas, who shall live when God does this!

In the mean time, for the divisions of Reuben, (one of the two tribes that was divided from the rest by the waters of Jordan,) there cannot but be great thoughts and searchings of heart, as Judg. v. 15, 16. with all that desire and pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem.

3. Being Israelites, (though on the other side Jordan,) it ought to be our care and endeavour, according as our lot is, to promote the common interests of our holy religion, and to do what we can to preserve and advance them. *And the Lord God of gods, he knows* it is with this design that we have built us an altar; not for the support of a sect or party, or the carrying on of any private interests, but for the service of catholic Christianity according to the Scriptures. We know very well that *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink*, Rom. xiv. 17. that it is not maintained either by the imposition or opposition of indifferent things, but that it consists in *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*; these are the things in which lie the being and power of the divine life, and not in a zeal either for or against ceremonies: we know very well, that *neither circumcision is any thing, nor uncircumcision any thing*, to our acceptance with God, *but the new creature, and faith which works by love*, Gal. v. 6. vi. 15. That therefore which is of uncontroverted necessity, and which is the very life and soul of religion, we would do our endeavour, and make it our business, at this altar, to maintain and carry on, so that we and our children after us may have a part in the Lord, and may never cease from following him. We would endeavour to glorify the great name of God in Christ in our prayers and praises, and, in concurrence with the universal church, to pay due homage to the universal Lord. We desire and design in the preaching of the word, to propagate the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, which is life eternal; to push on the holy war against sin and Satan, the world and the flesh, under the banner of the exalted Redeemer. Our intention in all our ministrations shall be the same with the in-

tentions of the ministry in general, Acts xxvi. 18. *First to open men's eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*; to recover people from under the dominion of a worldly, carnal, sensual mind, to the faith and obedience of the everlasting gospel; and then, *for the building up of the saints in holiness and comfort, and the edifying of the body of Christ, till they all come to the perfect man*, Eph. iv. 12, 13. And herein we are still determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And this we do not in opposition to, but a hearty concurrence with, the national establishment, as far as it aims at these ends. *God forbid that we should preach Christ, who is our peace, out of envy or contention*; no, we desire to have all our different apprehensions and sentiments swallowed up in a pious zeal for the common faith of the precious Jesus, and the common salvation of precious souls; and in token of this communion with our brethren of the other tribes, we have built us this altar, that we may say as they, v. 28. *Behold the pattern of the altar which we have built!* not to entail a schism, and to perpetuate a causeless separation, but for the solemnity and decorum of our religious assemblies, (until God shall open a door into the national establishment, and the rolling away of their reproach, that it may not be said to us, as it was to the Gileadites, (the half tribe whose lot was on the other side Jordan,) *Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim*, Judg. xii. 4.

We need not, we cannot, put it into our apology, that we have not built our altar for burnt-offerings and sacrifices; for, blessed be God, we are not under the gospel tied up to worship in one place, John iv. 21. as the Jews were under the law. *The hour now is, when, neither to this mountain, nor yet to Jerusalem shall religious worship be confined; but in every place incense shall be offered and prayers made*, Mal. i. 11. *every where*, without respect of places, 1 Tim. ii. 8. We know no temples, no altar, that sanctifies the gift, or the service, but Christ only, Heb. xiii. 20. But this we can say, that we have not built our altar in rebellion, or in transgression against the Lord, or to make a breach upon catholic unity. Thus I have endeavoured, with the words of truth and soberness, to state our case; and I know I speak the sentiments of many.

What remains is, Secondly, to direct you in the duty of the present day and occasion. And now, my brethren, *What doth the Lord our God require of us?* I take it for granted you are willing to know, and therefore, I beseech you, suffer the word of exhortation.

1. Let us give God the glory of our peaceable settlement in the land of our possession. We have reason to acknowledge it to a kind providence, that cast our lot in such a land as this, an exceeding good land, like that of Canaan, a pleasant land,

Dan. viii. 9. a glorious land, or land of delights or ornaments, wherein there is no want of any good thing, nor any reason to envy (all things considered) either the soil or climate of any other land. The constitution of our civil government, and the defences and securities of our liberty and property, are such as make our nation easy, safe, and happy. Our lot is also cast in a good day, wherein we have not for many years felt the strokes of any desolating judgments, either war, famine, or pestilence. While thus we dwell peaceably under fruitful vines and fig-trees, we are much to blame if we praise not the name of the Lord.

The two tribes built this altar here to the glory of God, when they were returning triumphantly to settle in their inheritance, as David fetched the ark to the place he had prepared for it, when God *had given him rest from all his enemies round about*, 2 Sam. vii. 1. The Israelites, every time they offered their first-fruits, were appointed to make a thankful mention of the mercy of God to them, in giving them that good land, Deut. xxvi. 3, 9, 10. And we have a great deal of reason to do the same, now we are offering the first-fruits of our altar. If we consider how melancholy the reverse of our present circumstances would be, we should see what great cause we have to be thankful to God, for our share in the public peace and plenty. National plenty in the success of trade, and the increase of the earth, contributes to the support and comfort of our religious assemblies; for thus we have wherewithal to honour our God. When famine reigned, *the meat-offering and the drink-offering failed from the house of God*, Joel i. 13. compare ch. ii. 14. National peace does no less contribute to the comfort of our assemblies, *for in the peace of the nation we have peace*. We have great reason to bless God that our land is not the seat of war, and that *the sword of the Lord is not drawn among us*, (as sometimes it has been,) and *commissioned to lay heaps upon heaps: that the city, the place of our solemnities, is a quiet habitation*, Isa. xxxiii. 20. It is easy to imagine what desolations war, especially civil war, would make, not only with our cities and houses, but with our temples and altars. (*Inter arma silent leges et evangelium—in the din of arms neither the voice of human law nor of the gospel is heard.*) What a mercy is it that we are delivered from the noise of archers, and all other the alarms of war, at the places of drawing waters! and therefore, there ought we to rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, Judg. v. 11. We have reason to call the altar we have built, as Moses called his, Exod. xvii. 15. (in thankfulness after the discomfiture of Amalek,) *Jehovah Nissi—The Lord my banner*, in whom we triumph; and as Gideon called his in faith, before the defeat of Midian, *Jehovah Shalom—The Lord our peace*, in whom we trust.

2. Let us much more give God praise, for the national establishment of our religion, with that of our peace and civil liberty. That our Canaan is not only a land flowing with milk and honey, but (which is a much greater advantage) that it is *Immanuel's land*, Isa. viii. 8. that the Christian religion, that choice and noble vine, which was so early planted in our land, is still growing and flourishing in it, in despite of all the attempts of the powers of darkness to root it out; that it is refined from the errors and corruptions which the church of Rome had (with the help of ignorance and tyranny) introduced, and that the Reformation was in our land a national act: that Christianity thus purified, is supported and defended by good and wholesome laws, and is twisted in with the very constitution of our government. It is a maxim in our law books, that the law of God is the law of the land; that the Holy Scripture is of sovereign authority; and that if any statute be made directly against the law of God, it is void; and that every thing that is for the support of religion shall be favoured. *Summa ratio est quæ pro religione facit—that construction is to be preferred which supports religion*, and (which I would observe as a justification of the civil punishment of sabbath profanation) it is a constant rule of our law, *Dies Dominicus est dies non juridicus—Sunday is not a day in law*, that the law is so far from countenancing, that it nullifies and invalidates, all writs, processes, and judicial acts upon the Lord's day: and if the administration of right and justice consents to give way to the solemnity of the Lord's day, shall a common petty trade, or a vain idle sport, intrude or intrench upon these sacred hours, and not be animadverted upon?

The banks and bulwarks which the civil government hath raised, against the threatening force of atheism, deism, profaneness, and irreligion, on the one hand, and of popery and idolatry on the other hand, though they should not make us secure, and, as it were, in no danger from them; yet they should make us thankful, that God has not only set up his tabernacle among us, but hath set such a guard upon it, as we hope will preserve it to the generations to come, that the English nation may never be otherwise than a Christian protestant nation. The encouragement which the government gives to religion, is also a great support to it, and ought to be matter of rejoicing to all good men: that the civil powers speak comfortably to them that teach the good knowledge of the Lord, 2 Chron. xxx. 22. and take the ministry and the administration of ordinances under their protection and patronage. *God has not dealt so with other nations*, with other churches. True Christianity, we may safely say it, has not such a nursing father of any crowned head in the world, as it has in our land. The mercy is more sensibly great, because it is not long since our religion, and all the defences of it, with all its supports, were at

the brink of ruin; and, like Isaac upon the altar, lay ready to be sacrificed to the malice of our popish enemies; and had the ship then sunk, our cabin could not have been preserved. Deut. xxxii. 27. *But fearing the wrath of the enemy, lest they should behave themselves proudly*; Ezek. xxxvi. 32. *And not for our sakes be it known unto us, God sent from heaven to save us, and raise up a deliverer for us, to whose seasonable and successful application we owe, under God, our present tranquillity. A mercy never to be forgotten, and to which every year's revolution makes a fresh addition; that notwithstanding our manifold provocations, by which we have forfeited our peace under the present government, and the restless and unwearied attempts of our enemies, who have been industrious to overturn it, we are yet in the enjoyment of its benign influences. This ought to be the matter of our wonder and praise. Surely because the Lord loved us, he hath set a king over us, and continued him so long, that answers Mordecai's character, Esth x. 3. Seeking the welfare of his people, and speaking peace to all their seed.*

3. Let us acknowledge, with thankfulness to God, the favour which we on this side Jordan have found with the princes of our Israel; that they are so far satisfied that the altars we build are not in rebellion or in transgression against the Lord, that they do not go up to war against us, as these princes here resolved, v. 33. We have great reason to bless God for our present liberty, and that we have it confirmed to us by a law, and the wide door of opportunity continues open; God grant it may be effectual. Now, for a little space, (nay, for a long space, much longer than we would have flattered ourselves with the expectation of,) *grace has been showed us from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape those many dark and cloudy days which passed over the heads of our predecessors, and some of ours; and to give us a nail (a fixing and settlement, and constant abode) in his holy place: that our God may lighten our eyes, instruct and comfort us, and give us some reviving, Ezra ix. 8. While we enjoy the comfort of our liberty, we ought to repeat our thanksgivings for the mercy of it; and an invaluable mercy it is, that there is a defence upon our glory, Isa. xlv. 6. and that our religious assemblies are taken under the kind protection and shelter of the government. Would we have this liberty continued? let us be thankful for it, and give diligence to make a good use of it while the gleam lasts. In the receiving of it we were like them that dream, Ps. cxxvi. 1. such was the surprise of it: let it not be said of us, that such is our slothfulness and carelessness, we are like them that dream, in the improvement of it; as the hungry man that dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty.*

We have reason to be thankful, that the reproach of sedition, and disloyalty, and disaffection to the

government, is quite done away from our assemblies, and that there is now no colour for the imputation of that, (which from our hearts we always abhorred, the disturbance of the public peace; but that while we live in godliness and honesty, we may live quiet and peaceable lives, and there is none to make us afraid. If Ezra were so thankful to God for the countenance of a heathen king, and that God had put such a thing into the king's heart, Ezra vii. 27, 28. much more reason have we to be thankful for the countenance of a Christian and protestant government; the good of which we are obliged to seek, because of the house of the Lord our God, Ps. cxviii. It adds much to the comfort of our present liberty, that in the ratification of it by a law, it was not intended (as we have reason to fear it was on the first precarious grant of it) for a trap and a snare, and the serving of a design against our common interests; but for our ease, comfort, and benefit: and that in the preamble of the statute, it is declared to be for no less a public good, than the uniting of his majesty's protestant subjects in interest and affection. *This is the Lord's doing*; and as at first the surprise of it made it marvellous in our eyes, so the continuance of it makes it no less so. The altar we have built, we may call our *Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto the Lord has helped us.*

4. While we enjoy the liberty of our altars, let us remember and sympathize with our brethren, with whom it is a day of treading down, and of perplexity: I mean the poor persecuted protestants in France, who are killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter, and whose blood is barbarously mingled with their sacrifices. They are our bone and our flesh, fellow-members of the same body, concurring with us in the same testimony against the antichristian generation; but how is a flourishing church made a wilderness, the gold become dim, the most fine gold changed. While we meet together in full assemblies, they are scattered. We have decent and convenient places to meet in; but they are driven into woods and wildernesses, and are counted as the off-scouring of all things. We are safe in our assemblies, and there is none to make us afraid; but they are exposed to the cruelty of bloody men, and cannot come together to worship God according to their consciences, but in peril of death, or a slavery much worse, and more terrible. When we consider this, and the sad desolations of the sanctuary in other places, our joy in the altar we have built admits as great a mixture and alloy, as theirs did who laid the foundation of the temple, Ezra iii. 13. *When the noise of the shouts of joy could not be discerned from the noise of the weeping of the people.* What a damp does this cast upon our comforts, and what a sadness does it put upon our countenances! as it did on Nehemiah's, to hear that the remnant that were left of the captivity were in such great affliction and reproach, Neh. i. 3, 4.

Let us therefore, with the greatest tenderness, remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; let us feel their burthens, and let not all the trouble they are in seem little to us; let us pity them, and pray for them daily, and by a Christian sympathy suffer with them, as all the members of the body do with a pained one. Let the truths they suffer for be precious to us, and the liberty they long for be valued by us. When we begin to despise the manna, and to call it light bread, and when our full souls sate the honey-comb, think what they would give for one of those peaceable opportunities, which we so easily neglect; and how they would welcome those days of the Son of man, which we think return too fast. Let their calamities also be warnings to us, to take heed of settling upon our lees, because we have been at ease from our youth, Jer. xlviii. 11. *Time was when they were as sure of their peace and liberty, as we can be of ours, and thought their mountain stood strong, and should not be moved: but God, by his dealings with them, will make all his churches to know, that they have no lease of their privileges, but are tenants at will; that they may give diligence while they have the light, to believe and walk in it, lest darkness come upon them.* When we begin to grow secure and careless, and to leave our first love, let us go and see what God did to Shiloh, Jer. vii. 12. and dread the removing of our candlestick also, Rev. ii. 5.

But is their wound incurable? Has God cast them off for ever? We trust not. *The rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the lot of the righteous,* Ps. cxxv. 3. *There is a time, a set time, to favour Zion,* Ps. cii. 13, 14. which undoubtedly will come. Let us therefore believe and hope, and pray and wait: *the vision is yet for an appointed time; and at the end of it shall speak and not lie. Did God bring back our captivity, and do such great things for us, whereof we are glad? let us be earnest with God to complete the mercy of our peace, by working deliverance for them, and turning their captivity as streams in the south, being assured that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy,* Ps. cxxvi. 1, 3—5. Rev. xi. 8, 9. *The witnesses, though they were slain, yet are not buried; and the bones, though they are dead and dried, yet they are above ground in the open valley,* Ezek. xxxvii. 1, 2. which ministers some assistances to our hope that they shall rise again, and even these dry bones live.

5. Let us cordially concur with the other tribes of our English Israel, in driving the Canaanites out of our land; this was that which Moses indented with the two tribes for, when he settled them on that side Jordan, Numb. xxxii. 20. that they should give the best help they could to their brethren, in their war against the common enemy: and still there are Canaanites in our land; vice, and profaneness, and debauchery, are the enemies I mean, which war

against both our civil and sacred interests; and, as it is said of the remainder of the Canaanites, Josh. xxiii. 13. *They are thorns in the eyes of all good men, and a snare to us.* It is too plain to be denied, that iniquity abounds among us, and goes barefaced; our air is infected with the poisonous and malignant breath of blasphemous oaths and curses, which are grown so common, that they seem to be idioms of our language. Our land is defiled with drunkenness and uncleanness, which some make a trade of, and others a sport of; the beauty and honour of our religion is stained by the profanation of the Lord's day, and an atheistical contempt of holy things. *How can we say we are not thus polluted,* Jer. ii. 23. *and shall not God visit for these things; shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* Have we not reason to expect that a deluge of judgments should follow such a deluge of impieties? And is any thing more the interest of the nation, than to endeavour the rooting out of these Canaanites, that if possible they might not be among us; or at least the putting them under tribute, that they may not rule, or bear sway among us; which surely is not a thing impracticable.

Against these Canaanites, the government hath by repeated proclamations waged war; and therein God hath given a banner to them that fear him, to be displayed, because of the truth and holiness, Ps. lx. 4. And now the inquiry is, like that of Moses in the gate of the camp, Exod. xxxii. 26. *Who is on the Lord's side?* or that, Ps. xciv. 16. *Who will rise up for me against the evil doers, or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?* Who will put a hand to so good a work, as the reformation of the morals of our nation? Who will help to bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end, and to drive the unclean spirit out of the land? Let us, in our places, be volunteers in this service, and cheerfully put our necks to this work of the Lord's, that we come not under the brand put upon the nobles of Tekoa, Neh. iii. 5. When the remains of the Canaanites made head so far, as mightily to oppress Israel, under Jabin and Sisera, Judg. iv. 23. it was the reproach of the two tribes on the other side Jordan, that they came not to the help of their brethren, but basely and ingloriously sneaked, when there was service to be done to the common interest. Gilead abode beyond Jordan, and Reuben among his sheepfolds, Judg. v. 16, 17. which made their division by the river greatly lamented by all thinking men, and occasioned many searchings of heart. Let us be industrious to prevent so ill an effect of our divisions, otherwise unhappy enough. Let us be willing to appear, willing to act, willing to venture, for the promoting of a reformation, which all good men agree to be necessary. Now is a time (when that blessed cause hath life in it, and we have so many good leaders to follow) to show ourselves for God,

and valiant for the truth in the earth, Jer. ix. 3. Are not evil doers afraid, nor ashamed to appear in opposition to religion and virtue? and shall we be either afraid or ashamed to appear for the defence of them? If we now sit still, and say, Let our brethren of the ten tribes drive out the Canaanites that are among themselves, and we will only look to our own border; surely (as Moses told the two tribes, Numb. xxxii. 22, 23.) *we have sinned against the Lord, and be sure our sin will find us out.* Nothing will contribute more to the healing of our breaches, and the uniting of us one to another in communion, than a hearty concurrence in this, wherein confessedly we are agreed. When God turns to *our people a pure language*, then, and not till then, *we shall serve him with one consent*; for betwixt them there is a manifest connexion, Zeph. iii. 9. Holiness and love, purity and unity, mutually befriend and advance each other.

6. Let us be able, with humble confidence, to appeal to God, that our acting separately in building us an altar, is not done in rebellion, or in transgression against the Lord. That we may then approve ourselves to him in the integrity of our hearts, we must take heed to *our spirits: the Lord God of gods, he knows*, and he only knows, the thoughts and intents of the heart, and by them he judges of us, and of our actions; that we may approve ourselves to him, it therefore concerns us to do all according to the manner, the appointed manner, Neh. viii. 18. and in due order, 1 Chron. xv. 15. Let us see to it, that our eye be single, and our intentions sincere, and our ends right; for it is a pity a good work should be spoiled, and rendered unacceptable, by an ill principle; that what for the matter of it is good, should become otherwise by a mismanagement.

If it be in pride and vain-glory that we have built us an altar, only that we may make a fair show in the flesh, and be like the nations, then it is done in rebellion and in transgression. To be proud of any ornaments, but especially of those that belong to the solemn assemblies, very ill becomes those who are but dust and ashes, and ought especially to remember that they are so when they draw near to the Lord of glory, Ps. xxix. 2. *The beauty of holiness, in which we are to worship the Lord, is not that outward adorning of magnificent and curious structures, but the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible*, 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4. To hide pride from his worshippers, God appointed that they should make him an altar of earth, Exod. xx. 24. or if of stone, not of hewn stone, v. 25. The garnishing and enriching of temples, by which a gay humour was indulged, and primitive plainness and simplicity lost, never did any real kindness to the church, but by degrees turned to its prejudice. *Hodie venenum funditur in ecclesiam—to-day is a poisonous mixture*

introduced into the church. If it be in opposition to our brethren, or from a principle of envy or ill-will to them, it is in rebellion and in transgression; but I hope you have not so learned Christ. Our Master will never be pleased with that which is done from a spirit of contradiction to, or contentions with, our brethren and fellow-servants: the hands lifted up in prayer, will never reach heaven, unless they be *lifted up without wrath and contention*; so it might be rendered, 1 Tim. ii. 8. *without disputation.* Jam. i. 20. *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, i. e. it neither gains acceptance with him, nor does any real service to him. But if in building this altar, and in all our attendances upon it, we sincerely design the honour and glory of God in Christ, and the spiritual and eternal welfare of our own souls, and the souls of others; if we make every particular opportunity serviceable to the general interests of our Christianity, to further us in our way to God, and fit us for our rest in him; we may then rejoice in the testimony of our consciences, that it is not in rebellion or transgression against the Lord, but in simplicity and godly sincerity, that we have built us an altar.

7. If the Lord knows our integrity, let us study how to let Israel know it also. Let us demonstrate our good principles, by our agreeable practices, and that will be the best and most effectual way to convince the world that we have not built this in rebellion, or in transgression against the Lord: our protestations of our integrity and good intentions will be of no avail, if our actions give our words the lie. When our lights are thus put on a candlestick, and not under a bushel, so that many eyes are upon us, we ought to take care that our light so shine before men, as that they may not only hear our good words, but see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven, Matt. v. 16. This is the method the apostle prescribes for silencing gainsayers, *We must effect it by well doing, for so is the will of God*, 1 Pet. ii. 15. Having a good conscience, let us evidence it by a good conversation, v. 16.

There are three ways by which, if our hearts be upright with God, Israel also he shall know it.

(1.) By our serious piety in all the instances of religious worship and devotion. Have we built this for religious worship, and under the umbrage of a zeal for its purity? Let us then approve ourselves religious worshippers; let your piety towards God appear in the constancy of your family devotions, which I think no good Christian, that has the charge of a family, dares live in the neglect of. Think not that a church here will excuse for the want of a church in your houses, Rom. xvi. 5. Though public worship have the preference, yet it must not supersede family worship: this ought you to have done, but not to leave the other undone. All the faithful seed of Abraham must herein be followers

of him; that wherever Abraham had a tent, God had an altar, at which he called upon the name of the Lord. See Gen. xii. 8; xiii. 18. Let our houses be Bethels, houses of God, that he dwelling in them, we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever, even all the days of our lives. Let Joshua's resolution be yours, *that whatever others do, you and our houses will serve the Lord*, Ps. xxiii. 6. Josh. xiv. 15. Carry away the impressions made on our souls by public worship, and bring them with you into your families, and there go over them again, that they may be as a nail fastened in a sure place. It is supposed that the silver shrines for Diana, which we read of, Acts xix. 24. were copies of Diana's temple in miniature, which her worshippers had in their houses, for the use of their families. Had they such respect to a dunghill god, and shall ours be less to the Lord of the whole earth? Religion is then, and not till then, likely to flourish in our land, when all our families are praying families, and nurseries of piety. *Though the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*, yet in them also he ought to be praised and served as the God of all the families of Israel, Ps. lxxxvii. 2. Jer. xxxi. 1.

Let your piety appear, also, by your decent and reverent deportment in our public assemblies. It is true God looks chiefly at the heart, and *bodily exercise profits little*, 1 Tim. iv. 8. if alone, it profits nothing; but it is as true, that in concurrence with our spirits, we are to *glorify God with our bodies, and to present them to him a living sacrifice*, 1 Cor. vi. 20. Rom. xii. 1. Though the outward expressions of reverence and affection be not an infallible sign of a serious spirit, (a vain and trifling heart may be covered over with a grave and demure appearance,) yet the outward expressions of a carelessness and unconcernedness, I think, are a certain indication of an evil heart of unbelief: if the special presence and inspection of the angels, in our solemn assemblies, should forbid that which is unhandsome, as the apostle intimates, 1 Cor. xi. 10. much more should the eye of God upon us oblige us to observe a decorum. Does not even nature teach us, that when we are engaged in serious work, we ought to show ourselves serious in it? When we are worshipping the great God, we ought to express such an awe of him, as may strike an awe upon others; so that if an unbeliever should come into our assembly, as the apostle argues, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. he may acknowledge that God is among us, and the fear of God is in us of a truth. The Jews, since their worship came to be a rebellion and transgression against the Lord Christ, have been notoriously irreverent in it; as well did Isaiah prophesy of them, Matt. xv. 7.

It hath been turned to the reproach of the assemblies of dissenters, that in shunning superstition

they have run into rudeness and irreverence. If any have given occasion for such a reflection, let them bear their own burthen; but I desire that we, in our assembly, may give no offence of that kind. Standing in prayer is spoken of as a gesture proper enough, Mark xi. 25. *When ye stand praying*, but kneeling is certainly the most fit and proper posture in adoration, and should be chosen rather where the convenience of the place (as I hope ours will) and the ability of the person will allow it. Paul, when a Pharisee, *stood and prayed*; but afterwards he learnt to bow his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. iii. 14.

(2.) By our strict purity in our whole conversation: hereby we must let all that know us know that in the integrity of our hearts we have done this. Let it be our daily care and exercise to *keep consciences void of offence towards man as well as towards God*: to pretend to purity in our worship, and yet to allow impurity in our lives, is to contradict ourselves. Let all the days of our lives be of a piece with our sabbath days, and let a thread of holiness run through the web of all our actions. The best consecration of our place will be to *consecrate ourselves this day unto the Lord*, Exod. xxxii. 29. Let your sobriety and temperance in all your enjoyments, your justice and honesty in all your dealings, beautify that profession, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, Tit. ii. 1. and let not the glory of our assembly be stained by any practices unbecoming Christians: *Let your merchandise and your hire be holiness to the Lord*, as is prophesied of Tyre, Isa. xxiii. 18. and *let every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah, even the common utensils of your houses, be like the bowls before the altar*, Zech. xiv. 20, 21. of which it was said, *Be ye clean that bear them*, Isa. lii. 11. You that in building yourselves an altar, have done more than others, cannot evidence the sincerity of your hearts therein, if in the common instances of justice, and friendship, and charity, you do less than others. Remember the hint you just now had out of the psalm that was read in course, Ps. xciii. 5. *Holiness becomes thy house, O Lord, for ever*, and therefore unholiness very ill becomes any that belong to it. Remember also the good hint you had lately from another hand; that whatever disputes there are about holiness of places, there is none about the holiness of persons; the necessity of that, we are all agreed in, Heb. xii. 14. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*.

(3.) By our peaceableness and charity towards our brethren, Jam. iii. 17, 18. The wisdom that is from above is not indeed pure, if it be not peaceable. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, and then it is likely to come up and flourish; they were the sons of peace that bid the gospel welcome, Luke x. 5, 6. Be at peace with those from whom you differ in opinion, and *receive them not with doubt-*

ful disputation, Rom. xiv. 1. Carefully watch that a diversity of communion cause not an alienation of affection, but be as ready to do any office of love and kindness and respect to those from whom you dissent, as to those with whom you consent; resolve, though you differ from them, you will not differ with them. If our separation be not schismatical in its own nature, (as for my own part I am well satisfied it is not,) let us not at any time make it so by our uncharitable censures, or our unchristian heats and passions.

Be at peace also among yourselves. Let your meeting to worship God in one place, prevent and put an end to all the little piques and quarrels which may happen at any time, and never let us be there against two, and two against three, in this house. Our peaceableness will be both our strength and beauty.

Let me therefore welcome you into this place, with the same exhortation with which St. Paul takes leave of his friends at Corinth, *Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in love and peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*