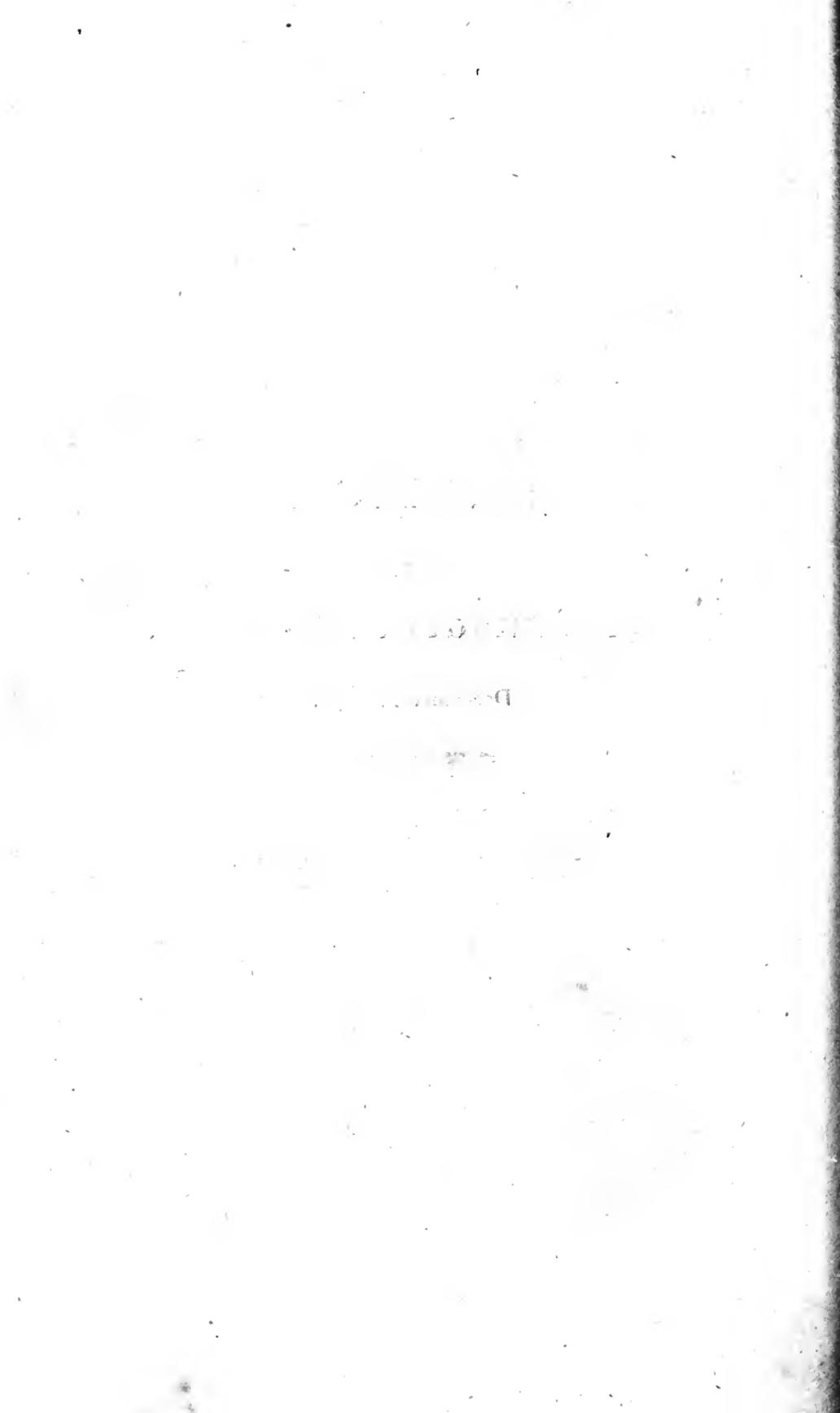


A
SERMON
ON THE
THANKSGIVING DAY,

December 2, 1679.

Psalm. 29. ver. 11.

THE LORD WILL BLESS HIS PEOPLE WITH PEACE.



TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE
LORD HAVERSHAM.

I OFFER this discourse my honoured lord to your perusal, in confidence that the subject and design of it will be so far grateful to your lordship, as in some degree to atone for the imperfections of the management. I believe it will not offend against your lordship's very accurate judgment of things that I have not been so swayed by an authority which hath signified much in our age, as to represent the natural state of man, as a state of war; which either must signify man in his original constitution to have been a very ill natured creature, or must signify his nature to be less ancient than himself. For I cannot doubt, but the author of that maxim, would have disdained their way of speaking, who by nature mean vice; or to have been guilty of so pious a thought, that God at first made man any better thing than we find him. I shall the less passionately lament my infelicity, in losing the good opinion of men of that sentiment, if I stand right in your lordship's; not knowing any of your rank and figure in the world, with whom I count it a greater honour to agree in judgment, or do less fear to disgrace.

In matters of secular concernment, it becomes me not to profess any judgment at all, besides the public; unto which in things of that nature, every private man's ought to be, and is professedly resigned. Yet within that compass, notwithstanding the just esteem your lordship hath of noble endowments, which do then illustriously shine in the military profession, when there is a necessity of their being reduced to practice, I apprehend, that otherwise, your lordship hath no more grateful thoughts of war than I; nor more ungrateful of the necessary means of preserving peace. That which is the reproach of human nature, could never originally belong to it; nor can any thing more expose its ignominious depravation, than it should ever be necessary, the sword should dispute, right, and the longest decide it.

In the matters of religion, which is every man's business and whose sphere as it is higher must be proportionably wider and more comprehensive ; I hope it is your lordship's constant care to add unto clearness and rectitude of thought, the pleasantness of taste ; and that you apprehend it to consist, not more in a scheme of notions, than of vital principles ; and that your love to it proceeds from hence, that you relish it and feel you live by it. You are hereby fortified against the reproach that attends it from their contempt of it, who are every day assaulting heaven, and would have the war not ended, but only transferred thitherward. That which some vent, and others admire as wit ; even paganism itself has condemned as foolishness. Your lordship is in no more danger to be altered hereby from your chosen course, than a man in his health and senses, by satyrs against eating and drinking. I reckon your lordship is so much taken up with the great things of religion, as to be less taken with the adventitious things, men have thought fit to affix to it. I do not more emulate your lordship in any thing than a disdain of bigotry, nor more honour any thing I discern in you than true catholicism. And recounting what things and persons do truly belong to a church I believe your lordship is not professedly of a larger church, as counting it too large for you, but too narrow ; and that you affect not to be of a self-distinguished party. Nor, besides the opportunity of avowing the just honour and obligations I have to your lordship and your noble consort, with my sincere concern for your hopeful and numerous offspring, did any thing more invite this address to your lordship, than the agreeableness of such your sentiments, to the mind and spirit of

My lord,

Your lordship's most justly devoted, and

most faithful, humble servant,

JOHN HOWE,

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The Lord will bless his people with peace.

YOU so generally know the occasion of this our solemn assembly at this time; that none can be in doubt concerning the suitableness of this portion of Scripture, for our present consideration. Our business is to celebrate the divine goodness, in preserving our king abroad, and restoring him home in safety, after he had been the happy instrument of bringing about that peace, which puts a period to a long continued, wasting, and dubious war; under which we, and all Europe have groaned these divers years. And if we find the favourable workings of providence to concur and fall in with a divine word, pointing them to God's own people; as this for instance, the Lord will bless his people with peace; that is, he will vouchsafe this blessing to his own people in the fittest season, as it must be understood; this adds so much the more grateful and pleasant relish, to the mercy we are this day to acknowledge. It cannot but do so with right minds, unto which nothing is more agreeable than to desire and covet such favour, as God shews to his own people; and to be made glad with his inheritance, (Ps. 106. 4, 5.) from an apprehension that there must be somewhat very peculiar in such mercy, as God vouchsafes to his own, to a people peculiar and select, severed and set apart for himself, from the rest of men. It is true indeed that peace, abstractly considered, is neither the appropriate, nor the constant privilege of such a people; they neither alone enjoy it, nor at all times, when it is brought about, even for them; they have other partakers: but yet, such favours of providence as are of larger extent, and

reach to many besides God's own people, have a more peculiar, benign aspect upon them; and are attended, with reference to them; with such consequences, as wherein others, without being made of this people of his, are not sharers with them. Some intimation there is of this in this psalm, which the title speaks, a psalm of David; and which some think to refer unto the wars managed by him in his time with the Moabites, signified by the wilderness of Kadesh; and the Syrians, signified by the cedars of Lebanon, of whom he speaks in the prophetic stile, as if, by the terrible and amazing appearances of God's power against them, they were thunderstruck, like the trees of a forest, or as the hinds that are wont to inhabit amongst them. And so it is concluded, and shut up with this Epiphonema in the end of the psalm; the Lord will give strength to his people, the Lord will bless his people with peace, that is, he is in war their strength, and their felicity in peace; in war, he is the Author of all that power, wherewith they are enabled to oppose and overcome potent enemies; and in peace, he is their truly felicitating good, and makes them by his own vouchsafed presence, a truly blessed people.

It is the latter of these, peace unto which the present occasion confines us. And concerning that, we might in the first place, note from the text, that wheresoever it is brought about, God is the Author of it, "God will bless his people with peace." That title which the Scripture gives him, the God of peace, with the many expressions of like import, wherewith it abounds, can leave them in no doubt, concerning the divine influence and agency in bringing about the grateful intervals of peace, after desolating, bloody wars, who have any reverence for the Sacred Oracles. And indeed, to insist upon such a subject as this, in a case so plain, so acknowledged amongst men who believe the Bible, were to reproach the auditory, as if it were made up of sceptics and atheists or of them that did not believe this world was made by God, or that it was made by him only by some casual stroke and without design; that he cared not for his reasonable, intelligent creatures when he had made them, what became of them, nor did at all concern himself in their most considerable concernments. I shall not therefore insist upon this, which seems rather slid in, and supposed in the text, or taken for granted; for among a people in visible relation and subjection to God, it had been as great an incongruity industriously to assert and prove such a thing, as it would be, by an elaborate discourse to prove that there is a sun in the firmament unto men that continually partake and enjoy his light and influences; and to whose sense, the vicissitudes

and distinctions of day and night, by his presence and absence, are brought under constant notice every twenty-four hours. I shall therefore I say pass on to what appears more directly to be the design of the text, and that seems to be twofold: first to represent to us in general the great blessing of peace, wherein, when God sees it fit he is pleased to make his own people partakers with others, secondly, because it is not without design that it is said, he will bless his people with peace, unto whom it is plain, this alone is not an appropriate privilege; it seems further designed to intimate, and couch in the concurrence and concomitancy of such things, as, superadded to peace, will make it a complete blessing. "The Lord will bless his people with peace." He will give them peace so and upon such terms, and with such concomitants and consequences, that to them it shall prove a real and a full blessing. These two things, therefore, I intend to insist upon—To shew you how valuable a good and (in the large and common sense) a blessing peace is, as it stands in opposition to bloody and desolating wars. And then—I shall shew you, what additions and concomitants are necessary to make it a complete blessing, such as may be appropriate and peculiar to God's own people, and so make use of the whole.

I. I shall shew you briefly, how valuable a good, peace is in itself, as it stands opposed unto bloody and destructive wars. And this will best be seen, by stating and viewing it in that opposition, and by representing to you somewhat of the horror of war; which we may do, by viewing it in its causes, in itself, and in its dismal consequences, wherewith it is wont to be attended. Consider it in its causes, and they are principally these two, the wickedness of men and the just vengeance of God thereupon. These two concurring, and falling in together, must be understood to be the causes of so great a calamity among men in this world; and I shall only consider these two in their complication, and not speak to them distinctly and separately. Very plain it is, that war is a mark of the apostacy, and stigmatizes man as fallen from God, in a degenerate revolted state; it is the horrid issue of men's having forsaken God, and of their being abandoned by him, to the hurry of their own furious lusts and passions; the natural and the penal effect of their having severed themselves and broke loose from the divine government. From whence are wars? Are they not from your lusts? Jam. 4. 1.—God most justly punishes men's injustice, not by infusing malignity, which he needs not, into their minds and natures; and which it is impossible he can be the Author of, whose very nature itself is goodness, and purity, and love; but having forsaken him, rebelled against him, disclaimed him as their

Ruler, refused any longer to be subject to him, they are forsaken of him, and left to take vengeance for it on one another; of which there cannot be a greater instance, than that when controversies do arise between men and men, between nation and nation, kingdom and kingdom, one people and another, it is presently to be decided by a bloody sword. This speaks a monstrous degeneracy in the intellectual world and from the original rectitude that belongs to the nature of men, which in his primitive state did stand in a temperament of reason and love. That there should be differences about *meum* and *tuum* in a creature of that constitution is itself a horrid thing; but then that such differences are to be determined only by violence, that presently they must hereupon run into war! Good God! What an indication is this, that reason, wisdom, justice, and love, are fled from this earth! And it speaks rebellion against God in the highest kind, it is a subversion of the most fundamental law of his kingdom over the intelligent world; Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself.

It is impossible there should be any such thing as war in the world, but by the violation of this most fundamental divine law, the principal and most important thing that this government does as it were consist in over reasonable creatures, their loving him above all, and one another as themselves. This law observed must make this earth another heaven; this law violated and broken, makes it another hell. Men being fallen from God, and having lost their acquaintance with him, and all relish of divine things, think to repair their loss out of this sensible world, whereof no man thinks he hath enough; desire of more, blinds their eyes, that they cannot judge of right and wrong. Hence every man's cause, is right in his own eyes, appetite is the only measure they judge by; and power (whatsoever of it any one can grasp) the instrument by which they execute their perverse judgment. A dismal spectacle and subject of contemplation to the inhabitants of the purer, and more peaceful regions! To behold a divine offspring, the sons of God, now transformed into sons of the earth, and tearing in pieces one another, for what some possess and others covet! Yea, and to a calm uninterested spectator on our own globe, this can be no grateful prospect, to view the history of all times, and nations, and take notice how full it is of such tragedy: countries from age to age made *Aceldamas*, fields of blood, on this account of extending or confining empire and dominion; of invading another's, or defending one's own: but hereupon it is not strange when a world of intelligent, reasonable creatures are thus gone off from God,

and in rebellion against him in the most fundamental part of his government ; that he suffers them to be the executioners of his just wrath, upon one another. And if we thus look upon war, first, in this its complicated causes, it is the opprobrium, the reproach of human nature, of intelligent reasonable creatures. But next look upon it in itself, and what is it but the destruction of human lives, of creatures, made after the image of God? of whom he has so high a value and whose lives, even for that very reason, he is pleased to fence and secure, by a severe law ; whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed ; for in the image of God made he man. But here is a formed design of destroying human lives by multitudes, lives of creatures, bearing the image of God. And by how much the more necessary this is in many cases, so much the more grievous and calamitous a thing it is that when to cut off and destroy by multitudes, so precious things as human lives, is tragical and horrid not to do it is so much worse ! Yea, that war itself is become an art, and that the valour and skill, which belong to it are laudable excellencies, is all aggravation of the sadness of this case.

And if we do consider the consequences and effects which do ensue upon such war, how full of horror and frightfulness are they and those most of all, that are least of all thought on and that lie most out of view ; for besides that property is gone, and no man knows what to call his own, laws lose their force, magistrates their authority and reverence, civil government is disobeyed and despised, common order is violated and turned into confusion, families torn in pieces, countries laid waste and desolate, towns and cities sacked, ravaged and made ruinous heaps : besides all this (I say) the sacred rites and mysteries of religion are neglected, and profaned, its holy solemnities interrupted worshipping assemblies are broken up. Men have little opportunity left them to mind their great concerns with God, and for another world ; care for immortal souls, when it is most necessary, is thrown out of doors, and reasonable creatures that should be employed adoring and worshipping their great Creator, the God of their lives, are employed in designing the mutual destruction of one another's lives, and it may be that is least considered, which carries the most of horror in it, that multitudes are hurried down to perdition, neither dreaded by themselves, nor apprehended by the destroyer ; souls are passing in shoals, into eternity, they not considering it who are sent, nor they that send them ! And what sport does this make for devils, those envious apostate spirits, that first drew men into a like apostacy ; that when God had given this earth to the children of men assigning to themselves a worse abode amidst infernal darkness, and flames, they should be tearing one another in pieces about this

their portion, under the sun, making God's bounty to them the occasion of their doing all manner of violence to one another! That the prince of the apostacy the usurping god of this world should have the opportunity of beholding man, sometime by divine grant the Lord of it, now its slave and his captive by it! Led by him at his will into whatsoever is most repugnant to the will, and the very nature of his Maker. That whereas he was at first made after God's own image a Godlike creature resembling his Maker especially in spirituality, and love; he now more resembles in sensuality beasts, and in malignity devils, and both by an inordinate love of this world; the friendship whereof, and a mind carnalized by it, is enmity against God, (Jam. 4. 4.—Rom. 8. 7.) and and whereof also, because every man thinks his own share too little, he becomes any one's enemy, that hath more of it than himself.

And thus have devils the pleasure of beholding men, by this very gift and expression of God's love and kindness to them transformed into enmity, and hatred of himself, and one another; forsaken of him, and destroying each other, and hastening once more into their horrid society, that as they were accomplices with them in their first rebellion, they may be partakers and associates with them in woe and torment. The most dismal part of the story, is that which lies most out of sight. Now let all this be considered and put together and surely peace is a valuable thing, it speaks man in some degree returned to himself, and in a right mind, when he can agree and be content to let another live quiet, and unmolested by him one man another man and one nation another nation. Thus far does peace appear a blessing apart and by itself, a valuable good, and according to the common notion and estimate, it may be called a blessing wherewith God blesses his people in common with others. But we are further to consider

II. What things are requisite to make this a real, and a complete blessing, capable of being appropriated unto God's own peculiar people; which seems also to be intended here. The Lord will bless his people with peace. In speaking to this I shall do these two things. Mention the requisites themselves and—Shew their requisiteness, or shew what is requisite to make external peace a real and peculiar blessing. And then shew you upon what account the addition and concomitancy of such things are requisite.

First. I shall shew you the things that are requisite.

1. Such peace, as we have been hitherto speaking of, is then truly a blessing, when there is, in conjunction, with it, a very copious effusion of the Spirit of God; in such a concomitancy, peace will make a people, a blessed people. When, after such a calamitous dispensation was over and at an end, as we read of

Ezek. 39. wherein ver. 23. God is said to hide his face and many of his people were carried into captivity, and many fell by the sword; it comes at length to this, he will no more hide his face, or cover it with so ireful and gloomy aspects, and appearances that it cannot be comfortably beheld. It is for this very reason, because he pours forth his Spirit, upon the whole house of Israel, as it is in ver. 29. of that chapter, pouring forth signifies a copious communication; and if the Spirit of God be copiously communicated, the best of blessings are in great abundance contained in it, which will infer, or countervail whatsoever is valuable or needful besides, to make the state of such a people a blessed state.

2. It will be so, when the gospel of peace has its free course, and a large spread in the world. When, in conjunction with beating of swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks, the law goes forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and nations shall say, come, let us go up to the house of the Lord, and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his statutes; as in that of Micah. 4. 2, 3. And,

3. When, according to the dictate of divine wisdom, kings do reign (as Prov. 8. 15.) and princes decree justice; when God's people have judges, as at the first, counsellors as at the beginning, Isa. 1. 26. able men, men of truth, fearing God, and hating covetousness, Exod. 18. 21. When he is pleased to set kings on the throne, that scatter the wicked with their eyes, and so to establish the throne in righteousness; when there is a design, driven by those that bear the civil sword, the sword of justice, to be a terror to evil doers, but a praise to them that do well; so as it may be said upon this account, they are the ministers of God for good, whom he has been pleased to set in such stations.

4. When God gives pastors after his own heart that are able, and do make it their business to feed his people with knowledge and understanding. When he inspires such to cry mightily, to warn men off from sin, when watchmen, set over his people, are faithful in the business of their station, at once both to save their people and themselves, from having their blood required at the hands of either; this will make a peaceful state, a happy state; it will contribute a great deal towards it. And again when hereupon in the

5. Place, wickedness languishes, the lusts of men droop and wither. There is some visible restraint, if there be not an universal mortification of such fruits of the flesh, as those that are spoken of Gal. 5. 19. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, sedition, heresies, envyings, murders, drunken-

ness, revellings and such like, that are inconsistent with a share in the inheritance of the kingdom of God, as it after follows. This does much to the making a peaceful state of things, a blessed state; it takes away much of the occasion of further controversy between God and such a people. But

6. When there is a very great diffusion of a holy new nature, which carries the matter higher, and is a great addition, though in certain conjunction with the former; as it is when the lusts and works of the flesh do cease to be reigning, and rampant among them who live under the gospel through the victorious and more powerful operation of the Spirit of grace, breathing in it. For then by the influence of the same Spirit, not only such vicious inclinations are plucked up by the roots, as certainly withstand a people's felicity; but such positive principles are implanted, as tend to promote it. Yet since this conjunction is not constant but such insolences of wickedness, as more directly tend to make a people miserable, may be repressed by inferior causes. I therefore more expressly add, that then peace may be reckoned a certain and a full blessing, when with it we behold a divine offspring continually rising up, of men appearing to be born of God, and to have received a Godlike nature, apt to do good, and become blessings to the world. When there is a rising generation of such, not proselyted to this or that party, but to real substantial Godliness and Christianity. When multitudes are thus turned unto the Lord, when there are numerous conversions, a new creation is springing up in visible and multiplied instances, so as that holiness comes to be both an extensive and illustrious thing. When multitude comes to give reputation to serious religion, when it is no longer a reproach to be a visible fearer of God, because generally men are so. When it is looked upon as no fashionable thing to be a despiser of God and heaven, and to breathe out contempt of the divine power, that gave us breath. And

7. When hereupon, the divine government obtains and takes place in the minds and consciences of men, when his authority is owned, with reverential submission; then God does bless a people, when his fear spreads far and near God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him; as in that Ps. 67. the latter end. And again,

8. When there is a manifest power and prevalency of divine love amongst men, that bear the same name of christians, when that peace of God rules in their hearts, unto which they are all called in one body. When they observedly keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, when they have peace one towards another so as that it may be seen that they are all the sons of peace, the children of the same Father who has conveyed

it into them, as part of that divine nature which he communicates to the regenerate seed; when there is a natural propensity to one another, that they can no more violate and tear that vital bond of love and peace that is among them than they can endure to tear their own flesh, or pluck out their own eyes. When peace among christians appears to be a connatural thing, not the product of conveniency and prudential considerations only but a nature which none can more endure to counteract, than to offer violence to themselves, a thing which nature admits not, whose laws never allow it to act against itself. And

9. Whereupon all this, God appears to be reconciled unto such a people; for in his favour is life. When all these things do concur, as so many indications of his being at peace with them, that is, that he has entirely forgiven them all former offences; that their sins and iniquities he remembers no more; and these concur with such things as partly make, and partly argue them, the objects of his delight, that he has written his law in their hearts, he has put his Spirit into them, he has made them a company of Godlike creatures like himself, whose very nature is love; they are his living resemblances in that very respect, expressing herein his virtues, who has called them out of darkness, into his own glorious and marvellous light. Hereupon such a people may reckon themselves secure of God's own presence, he is in the midst of them, and his glory ceases to hover, becomes with them a fixed thing, settles its station, as not about to discontinue or remove, their land may now be called, the land of Immanuel, and bears the inscription, God with us, the tabernacle of God is with them and he is resolved to dwell with them, and be their God, and avow them before all the world, for his peculiar people. After the many things that do concur together, in an inferior kind, as the concomitants of a merely external peace, as that their sons grow up as plants, their daughters are so many polished corner stones, that join together the walls of a palace, that their garners be full, their sheep numerous, their oxen strong, and that there be no complaining in their streets; after all these things, it is subjoined, yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord, all the forementioned things, alone, will never make a blessing, worthy of a people peculiar to God. But when it can be said that the Lord is their God, they are a happy people indeed, Ps. 144. 12, 15. such as these are the things requisite to make peace a complete blessing. But now we are

Secondly. To shew you the requisiteness of the concurrence and concomitancy of such things, to the mentioned purpose; or how it may appear, that such things as these are necessary to complete this blessing, or to make it a truly valuable, or a special blessing, in order here to note,

1. That there is such a thing as a special blessing, very distinguishable from such blessings as are merely common. We read of one Jabez, 1 Chron. 4. 9, 10. said to be more honourable than his brethren; and somewhat very remarkable (as we are to reckon, when to the divine wisdom it was thought fit to be inserted amidst a genealogical discourse) is further said of him, namely, that he called to the God of Israel, saying, O that thou wouldst bless me indeed, &c. and it is added: God granted what he requested. It seems, besides what goes under the common notion of blessing, he reckoned there was somewhat more peculiar, which he calls blessing indeed. There is a known Hebraism in that expression, what we read bless me indeed, is bless me in blessing me; as if he had said, let me have a blessing within a blessing; let me have that blessing whereof the other is but a cortex, the outside; let me have that blessing, that is wrapt up and enclosed in the external blessing. And because it is said, and God granted his request, we have reason to understand it was somewhat very peculiar that God vouchsafed unto him; and that account which some give us, has a look that way, that God vouchsafed him somewhat more extraordinary in the kind of mental and intellectual endowments: for we are otherwise informed, that this Jabez became a noted doctor among the Jews, and that the city, called after his name, was thereupon afterwards the residence of such as were most learned in their laws, Vatabl. apud Critic. That is to be blessed indeed, to have these things conferred, that do reach the mind and affect the inner man; to be blessed with spiritual blessings from the heavenly places, as in that Eph. 1. 3. There is a spiritual sort of blessing, that may be enclosed in the external blessing; and particularly in this of peace, which while it is common to the people of God with other men, is itself not common.

2. I further note, that the things I have mentioned to you, they are of that special kind, they are either immediate spiritual blessings, or subservient to such; whereupon now we may, from several considerations, evince to you, that without them such an external good, as this of peace, is not a complete blessing.

(1.) It is no argument of God's special favour. The best and most valuable blessings are from the *Ευδοκία θελήματος*, the good pleasure of his will, Eph. 1. 3, 4, 5. Other men may enjoy external benefits, may both prosper in war, and flourish in peace, as well, and often more than God's own people. You read of time, wherein the whole earth is said to be at rest and quiet, Isa. 14. 7. Therefore mere peace is no mark of special divine favour, and so is not, abstractly considered, a complete blessing, not a self-desirable thing.

(2.) Men are not made by it the better men. They may en-

joy peace, and being carnal-minded men before, may still continue so, as great strangers to God as they were, as vain and sensual, as profligate and licentious, as useless in the world, as mischievous, every way as ill men as ever. And

(3.) They may, by mere external peace, become so much the worse men, that may be an occasion to them of their growing worse and worse, the prosperity of fools (that is of wicked men) slays and destroys them, Prov. 1. 32. It is an observation that runs through the course of time, that as wars at length beget an enforced peace, so peace infers free trade and commerce, and that plenty, and that pride and wantonness; so these run us back in an easy, but unhappy circle, to be as we were, in war again. And if that prove not the present, or the speedy consequence that ensues which is worse than war; unless God vouchsafe that other sort of blessing, which will influence and better men's minds. Vice springs up in the more fattened soil, men's lusts will soon prove more oppressive tyrants, than they can have freed themselves from, by the most just and most prosperous war; and will subdue them to a far viler and more ignoble servitude. An ingenious writer of those affairs observes that the former Scipio opened the way to the Roman power, the latter to their luxury; their virtue languished, and they were conquered by their own vices, who before could conquer the world. That noted moralist says, *Infirmi est animi non posse pati divitias*, it is a *weak mind that cannot bear a prosperous condition*; but where are there minds strong enough to bear it, if they be not blessed from above, with somewhat better than that prosperity itself?

(4.) Men may, notwithstanding mere external peace be as miserable in this and in the other world, as if they had never known it; and much more, if by it they have been the more wicked. I beseech you consider, are they a blessed people? or is that a blessed man, between whom and eternal misery there is but a breath; He may but breathe another breath, and be in the midst of flames; is he happy this moment, that may be as miserable as any devil the next? Those things can only be complete blessings to any, that are inseparable ones, and that will make them for ever blessed. For me to have but such a blessing as does not make me blessed; what an unblest blessing is this! A philosopher can tell you, blessedness cannot be a thing separable from myself; not a *χωριστον τι*, *Arist.* it can much less be such a thing as may leave me miserable to all eternity, least of all what may make me so, by degenerating into a curse as Malachi. 2. therefore these are demonstrations, that mere external peace, without such additions as you have heard of, can never be a complete blessing, nor such as can be understood vouchsafed to the people of God as their ul-

timate and consummative felicity. It must in the mean time be acknowledged, that as a people may belong to God externally, more than another people; and may sometime be externally more reformed, than at other times, so peace, with other external good things, may thereupon be afforded them, as less expressive marks of God's favour, and approbation of their more regular course. And by the tenour of God's particular covenant with the people of Israel, might more certainly be expected so to be. Yet this is a state wherein it is not reasonable—or safe for any finally to acquiesce.

III. I therefore now come to the promised use, which will correspond to the two general heads, I have been discoursing of: to let you see—what cause of thanksgiving we have in reference to the former, the blessing of peace abstractly considered, and—what cause of supplication we have in reference to the latter, the additions that are requisite to make it a complete blessing.

First. As to the former. Since peace is so valuable a thing considered apart, as you have heard it is; this points out to us the matter of thanksgiving, for which this day is appointed that God has preserved our king, amidst so innumerable dangers abroad; that he has brought him home to us in safety; that he has made him the instrument of that peace that we find is at length brought about, wherein he is returned to us a greater conqueror than if he had routed and destroyed never so potent armies of our enemies in the field. We have reason to understand the matter so. By prevailing in war, he had only conquered by force; by prevailing for peace, he has conquered by wisdom and goodness. By prevailing in war he had only conquered the bodily power of our enemies, or their baser part; by prevailing for peace he has conquered their minds. By prevailing in war he had brought about the good only of one side; by prevailing for peace, he has brought about the real benefit of both sides, a far more diffusive blessing. By prevailing in war he had conquered enemies; by prevailing for peace he has conquered enmity itself. By prevailing in war, he had overcome other men; but in prevailing for peace considering his martial spirit, and his high provocations he has done a far greater thing, he has conquered himself, whom none ever conquered before. Besides what this great blessing of peace generally considered, contains in itself, we ought to amplify it to ourselves; being brought about by such means, wherein we have so particular a concern. This ought to add with us a very grateful relish to it, for it is a glory to our nation that God has set a prince on the English throne that could signify so much to the world: the beams of that glory God hath cast on him, reflect and shine upon his people; to be made the head among

other nations, and not the tail, God hath in his word taught us not to count it an inconsiderable thing. And it is our more peculiar glory that our king is renowned not by throwing death, and destruction every where round about him; but by spreading the benefits included in peace, through the neighbouring nations; and his return to us, leaving the rest of Europe only to lament that they all live not under his government. I pray God he may meet with no ungrateful returns, and that none may be so ill minded as to grudge at power so lodged as to save us, who were less concerned at its being lodged where it could only be designed to destroy us. In the mean time, it might excite us to the higher pitches of thankfulness, to Almighty God, for this blessing of the present peace, if we did consider—both what it hath cost, and—whereto it is improveable. But the former consideration I shall not insist upon lest any should make an undue use of it; and the latter I leave to the following particular which we are next to proceed to,

Secondly. To shew what matter of supplication remains to us, upon the latter account. That is with reference to such things as are yet wanting to make this blessing of peace a complete blessing, and without which it cannot be understood to be such; but we may be left at last a most miserable people and so much the more miserable, by how much the higher favours we have to account for, that not being improved must have been thrown away upon us. The mercies included in the peace, will be unimproved and lost, without the mentioned additions. Whereof all the several heads that were recited belong to one, namely, that of spiritual blessing. That therefore, in the general, we have to pray for, that God may be said to bless us indeed to bless us in blessing us; namely, that he would bless us with spiritual blessings, in the heavenlies (that is, in heavenly things or from the heavenly places) in Christ Jesus, as Eph. 1. 3. Let us I pray you, learn to distinguish between a self desirable good, that in its own nature is such, so immutably and invariably, that it can never degenerate, or cease to be such; and what is only such by accident, and in some circumstances may be much otherwise, spiritual good, that of the mind and spirit and which makes that better, especially that which accompanies salvation, (Heb. 6. 9.) That runs into eternity, and goes with us into the other world, is of the former sort. External good, is but *res media* capable of being to us sometimes good, and sometimes evil as the case may alter. Blessings of this kind may become curses Mal. 2. 2. I will curse your blessings, yea I have cursed them already. A man's table may become his snare, and that which was for his welfare, a trap, Ps. 69. 22. Merely external blessings, are curses, when they become the fuel of

lusts, when they animate men unto contests against heaven, rebellious against the divine government; when like Jeshurun, men wax fat by them, and kick against heaven, Deut. 32. this we are always liable to till spiritual blessings intermingle with our other blessings; and nothing should more convince the world, that the kindest and most benign part of the divine government lies in immediate influences on the minds of men; and that consequently their own felicity depends thereon. Let all things that can be imagined concur in the kind of external good, and they can never make him a happy man, that has an ill mind; he will always be his own hell and carry that about with him wheresoever he goes; he will be a constant spring and fountain of misery to himself, misery and he cannot be separated from one another: there is no peace to the wicked, saith my God; but he will be always a troubled sea, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt, Isa. 57. 20, 21. The philosophy of pagans would have made them ashamed to place their felicity in any thing without, or foreign to themselves.

But we are christians and shall we not much more be ashamed to take other, or even opposite measures of blessedness, to those which are given us by our divine Master! To be poor in spirit, upon just accounts mourners, meek, hungry and thirsty after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peace-makers, to submit to be persecuted for righteousness sake, these are his characters of a blessed man; and he places that blessedness itself in congenerous things, Matt. 5. 3, 4, 5. &c. Let us learn from him, and collect that nothing but wickedness can make us miserable. What an overflowing deluge have we in view? tending to subvert our religion and our civil state together! nor have we another effectual remedy in view, but the Spirit of God if he will vouchsafe to pour it forth. The great enemy of mankind, is come in upon us like a flood, and only the Spirit of the Lord can lift up a standard against him, Isa. 59. 19. The Spirit of the Lord would be to us as a purifying flame, to burn up our filthiness, and enkindle in us that divine love, that would make us zealous of good works. And this should be with us the matter of earnest and incessant supplication not with diffidence, for he will give his Spirit, to them that ask him. Luke 11. 13. Not with diminishing thoughts of the necessity, and value of the gift; take heed of that, for that were to be miserable, and undone by a principle; to be misled, by a profane false judgment, into the contempt of the most highly valuable things, that are most necessary to our true welfare; and which are all contained in the gift of the Spirit, as you may see by comparing, Mat. 7. and Luke 11. with one another. In the one place it is said: he will give good things to them that ask him, in the other place it is said

his Spirit; implying, that the gift of the Spirit involves in it all good things. And certainly nothing can be good to any man, till he hath that Spirit, that makes him good; and we are greatly concerned to supplicate mightily for the effusion of that blessed Spirit, for these two purposes especially. First, that there may be a larger diffusion amongst us of vital religion, whereby we shall be at peace with God. Secondly, that christian love may more abound, whereby christians may be composed to mutual peace, and more disposed to mutual communion with one another.

1. That there may be a larger diffusion of vital religion. Wherein stands indeed their being at peace with God, when there is a mutual amplexus between him and them, mind touching mind, and spirit spirit; when he does, by his Spirit embrace the spirits of men and infuse light and life into them, and adapt and suit them for his communion. To this purpose, we have great cause to beg and supplicate earnestly, for a greater pouring forth of his Spirit, that this living religion may spread amongst us; for we appear to be under a doom, while it does not so, that seeing we should see, and not perceive, &c. Isa. 6. O the fearful guilt incurred, one Lord's-day after another! When great assemblies meet together, multitudes are besought and supplicated that they would be reconciled to God, but too few listen; peace with God seems not a valuable thing with us, his favour in which is life, is little set by. When with many a one a treaty is continued, in order to peace through many years, seven, ten, twenty, thirty, nay forty years, and yet this treaty brings not about a peace at last; but they stand out still hardened in their impenitency, infidelity, obstinacy, enmity against God and his Christ, through the power and dominion, that an earthly, vain, carnal mind has in them, and over them: what can our peace with men signify in this case? What, do we not know, that the friendship of this world is enmity against God? Jam. 4. 4. 1 Joh. 2. 15. And that it is as impossible, for a man to be a sincere lover of God, and an over intense lover of this world, as to have two Gods; that is, two supreme powers to govern him, two supreme goods to satisfy him. This must breed a perpetual war, till the case alters between thee, and him that made thee; and woe to him that strives with his Maker. To have the wrath of God, armed with omnipotency engaged against thee; and yet that thou shouldst not covet peace that yet thou shouldst not cry for peace! To have the peace-making blood of thy Redeemer crying to thee, O be at peace with God! to have him that shed it thus bespeaking thee, I am ready to do the part of a days-man, I have died upon the cross, that I might do so, that I might effect, and bring about a peace be-

tween God and thee ; I am ready to mediate, make use of me, I will undertake on God's part, that he shall pardon thee, that he shall forgive thee, and let the controversy fall, if yet thy heart on thy part will yield, melt and relent, and thou cry for mercy. He came with this design into this world, the proclamation of angels at his coming spake his design ; Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, and good-will towards men. Shall not all this be believed ? or shall men pretend to believe it, and not consider it, or not look upon it as a considerable thing ?

2. And there is as much need too, that we supplicate for this spirit, as a spirit of mutual love among christians, to reconcile them to one another. Which indeed is also but to christianize them, to make vital religion take place with them ; for that same Spirit of Christ, which animates his body, and makes them his living members, makes them such to one another. And the matter speaks itself, that opposite spirit unto truly christian peace and love, which appears amongst us, nothing but the Spirit of Christ can overcome ; we are not to expect a cure of our distempers in this kind, but by the pouring forth of this Blessed Spirit. And if there be not a cure, we are certainly to expect the pouring forth of his wrath ; and things look with a threatening aspect upon us to this purpose. Now that opportunity is so inviting, God's call so loud and the way so plain ; that yet an indisposition to peace should be so obstinate, that breaches should be kept open by trifles, and unaccountable things of which no man of sense can pretend to give an account, that there is strife too manifestly not from the love of truth, whereof not one hair needs be lost, (nor of any other valuable thing) but merely from the love of strife ; when as to the most material and important truths, men are agreed, but would seem to disagree, they mean the same things, but impute to one another a different meaning ; and pretend to know the others mind better than themselves, that on this pretence they may quarrel with them : all this looks fatally. And our unjust angers at one another are too expressive of God's just anger with us all ; that his good Spirit, that spirit of love, peace, kindness, benignity is so notoriously resisted, vexed, grieved, and despited by us. And the consequences are likely for some time to be very dismal ; though when God hath proceeded in a way of punitive animadversion, so far as he shall judge necessary for the vindication of his own name, and the honour of our religion so scandalously misrepresented to the world, it will be easy to him by one victorious effort of that spirit to reduce the Christian church to its original genuine temper and make it shine again, in its own native, light and lustre. But in the mean time, I cannot see that there

is greater need of an overpowering influence of the Holy Ghost to draw men into union with Christ, and thereby to bring back apostate souls to God, or to work in them faith, and repentance; than to bring them into union upon christian terms with one another. Or that the love of this world, or any of the most ignominious sensual lust, or vice (drunkenness, gluttony, or any other,) are more hardly, or more rarely overcome, than the envy, wrath, malice which Christians ordinarily are not at all shy of expressing toward one another.

I speak upon some experience lamenting that having this occasion (which sense of duty will not let me balk) I have also so much cause to mention that foregoing observation. For I cannot forget, that sometime discoursing with some very noted persons, about the business of union among christians it hath been freely granted me, that there was not so much as a principle left (among those the discourse had reference to) upon which to disagree; and yet the same fixed aversion to union, continued as before, as a plain proof they were not principles but ends we were still to differ for. In this case what but the power of an Almighty Spirit, can overcome? To quote texts of Scripture upon such occasions signifies nothing even to those who profess a veneration for those holy oracles of God. Let such places be mentioned as are expressly directed against division, wrath, strife, slandering or backbiting one another and they avail no more, than if the vice were the virtue, or the virtue the vice; no more than if it were a command to christians to malign, to traduce, to backbite one another. To urge so plain and numerous Scriptures in these cases, it is to as little purpose, as to oppose one's breath to a storm; it is the same thing, as if all Scriptures, that had any aspect or look this way, were quite put out of the canon; and all this, with men zealous for the divine authority of the Scripture, and indeed it is come to that pass, as to look like a jest to expect that any man should be swayed by Scripture, or the most convincing reason agreeable thereto, against his own passions, or humour; or against the (supposed, though never so grossly mistaken) interest of his party.

Nor is it mere peace that is to be aimed at, but free, mutual Christian communion with such, as do all hold the head, Christ. As peace between nations, infers commerce; so among Christian churches, it ought to infer, a fellowship in acts of worship, I wish there were no cause to say this is declined, when no pretence is left against it, but false accusation; none but what must be supported by lying, and calumny. Too many are busy at inventing of that which is no where to be found, that exists not in the nature of things, that they may have a colour for continued distance. And is not this to fly in the face of the autho-

rity, under which we live, that is the ruling power of the kingdom of Christ, the Prince of peace? It is strange they are not ashamed to be called Christians, that they do not discard and abandon the name that can allow themselves in such things! and it is here to be noted, that it is quite another thing, what is in itself true or false, right or wrong; and what is to be a measure or boundary of Christian communion. Are we yet to learn that Christian communion is not amongst men that are perfect; but that are labouring under manifold imperfections, both in knowledge and holiness! and whatsoever mistake in judgment, or obliquity in practice can consist with holding the head ought to consist also with being of the same Christian communion; not the same locally which is impossible but the same occasionally, as any providence invites at this or that time, and mentally in heart and spirit at all times. And to such peace (and consequently communion) we are all called in one body, Col. 3. 15. We are expressly required to receive one another (which cannot but mean into each other's communion) and not to doubtful disputations, Rom. 14. 1. If any be thought to be weak and thereupon to differ from us in some or other sentiments, if the difference consist with holding the head, they are not, because they are weak to be refused communion, but received; and received because the Lord has received them ver. 3. All that we should think Christ has received into his communion, we ought to receive into ours. Rom. 15. 7. Scriptures are so express to this purpose that nothing can be more. And indeed to make new boundaries of Christian communion is to make a new christianity, and a new gospel, and new rules of Christ's kingdom; and by which to distinguish subjects and rebels, and in effect to dethrone him to rival him in his highest prerogative; namely, the establishing the terms of life and death, for men living under his gospel. It is to confine salvation, in the means of it, to such or such a party, such a church, arbitrarily distinguished from the rest of christians; as if the privileges of his kingdom belonged to a part only; and that for instance, the Lord's table were to lose its name, and be no longer so called, but the table of this or that church, constituted by rules of their own devising. For if it be the Lord's table, they are to keep it free, to be approached upon the Lord's terms, and not their own. In the mean time, what higher invasion, can there be of Christ's rights? and since the Christian church became so over wise above what is written, in framing new doctrines, and rules of worship; how miserably it hath languished, and been torn in pieces, they cannot be ignorant, who have read any thing of the history of it.

And indeed there is not a difference to be found, amongst them that hold the head, but must be so minute, that it cannot be a pretence for refusing communion: for true Christian cha-

rity will, at least, resolve it into weakness. And men are generally so kind to themselves, that he from whom another differs, will be very apt to think himself the stronger, then does the rule conclude him, you that are strong bear the infirmities of the weak, and do not dispute with them, but receive them. This obligation immediately lies on the strong, and therefore must take hold of them that think themselves so, not to dispute with the others, but receive them; because the Lord has received them. Does he take them into his communion, and will not you take them into yours? To profess want of charity in excuse is to excuse a fault by a wickedness; it is to usurp Christ's judgment seat, and invade his office, Rom. 14. 4, 10. Therefore wheresoever there is any such case to be found, that let a man be never so sound in the faith, never so orthodox, let him be in all things else never so regular through his whole conversation, if he do not submit to some doubtful thing, thought perhaps a matter of indifferency on the one side and unlawful on the other; this person must be excluded Christian communion for no other known pretence, but only that he presumed to doubt somewhat in the imposed terms; for this very doubt he is to be treated as a heathen or publican or indeed no more to be received into our communion, than a dog, or a swine. How will this be justified at Christ's tribunal? but how much less justifiable is it, if not only communion be refused, but ruin designed to such as differ from us, about those our arbitrary additions to Christ's rules, and boundaries of Christian communion? and scarce can very serious persons (even in so serious a matter) forbear to smile, when they see them that have done so much harm to their fellow christians attempt to justify it, only in effect from their having power to do it; which would as well justify any thing, since no man does what he could not do.

Nor yet do I look upon this proneness to innovate, and devise other terms of Christian communion than Christ hath himself appointed, at the peculiar character of a party: but as a system of the diseased state of the Christian church, too plainly appearing in all parties: as I also reckon it too low and narrow a design, to aim at a oneness of communion among christians of this, and that single party and persuasion; which would but make so much the larger Ulcus and Tumor, a greater unnatural opostem and scession, in the sacred body of our blessed Lord. Nothing in this kind can be a design worthy of a christian, or suitable to the Spirit of Christ; but to have Christian communion extended, and limited, according to the extent and limits of visibly serious, and vital christianity. And hereof, that distinguishing judgment, which is necessary, is as little difficult, as in private conversation between a valuable friend, and a visible enemy; or in public and political, between a visible sub-

ject and a visible rebel. So far as a discrimination can, and according to Christ's rules (not our own unbounded fancies) ought to be made any serious living christian of whatsoever party or denomination I ought to communicate as such and with only such. For living christians to sever from one another, for to mingle with the dead, is an equal transgression; nor must our judgment of any such case, be guided by mere charity; but must guide it being itself guided by the known laws of Christ.

To sum up all; then shall we be in happy circumstances, when once we shall have learned to distinguish between the essentials of christianity, and accidental appendages; and between accidents of Christ's appointing, and of our devising; and to dread affixing of our own devices to so sacred institution. Much more, when every truth or duty, contained in the Bible, cannot be essential or necessary when we shall have learnt not only not to add inventions of our own, to that sacred frame, but much more not to presume to insert them into the order of essentials or necessities, and treat men as no christians, for wanting them. When the gospel shall have its liberty to the utmost ends of the earth. When the regenerating Spirit shall go forth with it, and propogate a divine and Godlike nature, every-where among men. When regeneration shall be understood to signify their communicating of such a nature: and such dispositions to men. When the weight of such words comes to be apprehended (he that hateth his brother, abideth in death, 1 Joh. 2.

When to be born of God, ceases to signify with us, being proselyted to this or that church, formed and distinguished by human device. When religious pretences cease to serve political purposes, when the interest of a party ceases to weigh more with us, than the whole Christian interest. When sincerity shall be thought the noblest embellishment of a christian. When the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow, and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together. And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, Isa. 4. 6, 7, 8, 9. Then will our peace be as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea, Isa. 48. 18. And the glorious Lord will himself be to us a place of broad waters, ch. 33. 21. Where straits, and rocks, and shelves, shall no more affright, or endanger us. But if these things take no place with us, then have we cause to apprehend, that the things of our peace are yet hid from our eyes.