

ENGLAND'S SPIRITUAL LANGUISHING;

WITH

THE CAUSES AND CURE:

DISCOVERED IN A SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE HONOURABLE
HOUSE OF COMMONS, ON THEIR SOLEMN DAY OF FAST,
AT MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER, JUNE 23, 1648.

THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To the Honourable HOUSE of COMMONS now assembled in Parliament.

You were pleased to require my service on your late day of fast, as you had done on the same occasion just a twelvemonth before. I desired to speak seasonably then, and now too. The Lord directed my thoughts then to a subject of peace,—our distractions were great, and now to treat of zeal,—our destruction, we fear, draweth nigh. These two things may well stand together, love and zeal; and if men were wise, James iii. 18, the fruit of righteousness might be sown in peace, and such concord effected between brethren, wherein religion may not suffer. I know there are two parties that will never be accorded—the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent; there will be enmity. But is not there a wise man among us? not one that shall be able to judge between brethren? 1 Cor. vi. 5. I speak not this to flatter with a general offer; I have always disliked general invectives against error, and general proposals of peace.¹ This were to deal in names rather than things, and to seduce the soul into a hope of that which is far enough from being accomplished. Neither do I speak it to cool any man's zeal; the drift of this sermon is to kindle it. Godliness cannot be without a holy heat. Those that suffer under persecution will contend against delusion, that is but a duty; and it were to be wished it were more done, and more regularly. Certainly some have been too silent whilst the truths of God have been made void;² therefore, we are far from condemning any such vigorous opposition of the present errors. I only mention it as an expression of my desires and hopes.

For the present discourse, the style of it, I confess, is too turbid, and hath too much of inculcation in it to be fit for the press, and therefore I should have adjudged it to keep company with some other neglected papers, but that, in obedience to your order, and condescension to the requests of some friends, I have now made it public; and, my employment being much, am forced to send it forth without refining. I do not know what blessing the Lord, whose power is usually perfected in

¹ 'Qui pacem tractat non repetitis conditionibus dissidii, is magis animos dulcedine pacis fallit quam æquitate componit.'

² 'Μήποτε καταγινώσκω μὲν τῆς θερμότητος,' &c.—*Naz. Orat. de Moderat. in Disput.*

weakness, 2 Cor. xii. 9, may ordain by it. I desire to wait upon him, commending it to his grace.

In many things I have freely expressed myself, and possibly some may think, uncovered our own nakedness. The mouth of iniquity is soon opened; and it is hard to speak against the sins of religious persons without giving some advantage to religious enemies. All that I shall say to this is, that offenders give the scandal, not the reprovcr. I confess, I like rolling in the dust at Aphrah, Micah i. 10, that Gath may not know it; but when offences are public, it were an injury to religion to be silent. We cannot do it a greater right than to declare and witness against such miscarriages; and, therefore, when the house of Jacob offendeth, it must be told its own with a full throat.¹ It will be our honour to shake off the vipers upon a discovery, though they would still stick on. But for the enemies;—

Nullane habent vitia? immo alia haud fortasse minora: 2

are they so innocent as to be able to cast the stone at us? John viii. 7. Shall they that have wounds upbraid us with scars?³ and they that halt downright, charge us with tripping? or the blackamore object spots to a fair woman? Let them first pluck out their own beam, and then possibly they may understand what an injury it is, and a wicked malice, to throw personal guilt in religion's face, and out of a dislike to one Mordecai, to seek the destruction of all the Jews, Esther iii. 6, and to charge that upon the order which is but the just blemish of some persons sheltered under the name and pretence of it. As Nazianzen speaketh of some: *Οί καταιτιῶνται τὸν νόμον αὐτὸν ὡς κακίας διδάσκαλον, καὶ μαλίσθ' ὅταν πολλοῖς ἐντύχωσι πονηροῖς τῶν προστασίας ἡξιομένων*: that for some bishops' sake accuse Christianity itself as an evil law.⁴

For yourselves, right honourable, I beseech you, remember religion flourishing will be your defence; and that it is better to trust God with your protection, than to fly to ill counsels,⁵ or condescensions, whereby you may gain the respects of men. The Lord grant that you may live up to such a principle; and in these times of violence, do nothing unworthy of God, or of his oath that is upon you.

So prayeth your meanest servant in the Lord's work,

THO. MANTON.

¹ Isa. lviii. 1, opened to this purpose by Mr Richard Vines in the morning.

² Horatius.

³ *Τὰ τραύματα ἔχοντες, καὶ τοὺς μύλωνας ὀνειδίζοντες, οἱ τὰ προσκόμματα διασύροντες καὶ τὰ πτώματα αὐτοὶ πασχόντες, οἱ ἐν τῷ βορβόρῳ ἐγκυλινοδρόμενοι, καὶ τοῖς ὁμίλοις ἡμῶν ἐπειφ-
ραίνοντο.*—*Nazianz. de inimicis Ecclesiae, Orat. l. 13.*

⁴ Naz. Orat. 14.

⁵ *Admonendi sunt pacis auctores ne dum pacem nimis diligant, et cum omnibus quarant, consentiendo perversis ab auctoris sui se pace disjungant, ne dum humana foris jurgia metuant, interni foederis discussione feriantur.*—*Ambros.*

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THE CAUSES AND CURE.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.—REV. III. 2.

IN scriptures wherein the expression is anything more difficult, wits are most rank and luxuriant, every one taking a liberty to affix his own sense there, where the true and genuine sense is not so obvious and easily found out; and because two or three false interpretations may be asserted with equal probability, the scriptures have suffered as an uncertain rule, or nose of wax (it is the blasphemy of the Papists), which is ductile and pliable to every fancy and purpose. The truth is, we are more happy in discovering falsehood than in clearing truth, and those which come after can more easily discern wherein others have halted and are defective, than reach the truth themselves. I have always looked upon that as a grave observation,¹ *Facilius est aliorum convellere sententias quam stabilire propriam*—men are always better at confuting than confirming; in which, though I am strengthened by the censure of Jerome on Lactantius,² who observed that his arguments were more valid and strong which he brought against false worships, than those other by which he confirmed the true; and Tully wished he could as easily find out the true God as disprove the false.³ Whether it be through that natural desire that is in us to blemish others, or from the weakness and imperfection of our apprehensions, or from an obstinate prejudice against divine truths, or from God's hiding and reserving many things till the age next their accomplishment, I will not now dispute. I only hint it to show that therefore it is why men have disputed so unhappily, and with such variety, about some difficult places of scripture, always acquitting themselves with more honour, success, and satisfaction in disproving the opinion of others, than in vindicating and clearing their own.

As this hath been the fate of other scriptures, so especially of this book of the Revelation, wherein there are as many mysteries as words;

¹ Observatum sapius a Wendilino in lib. de Cælo.

² 'Lactantius quasi quidam fluvius Tullianæ eloquentiæ, utinam tam nostra potuisset confirmare quam facile aliena destruxit.'—*Hieron.*

³ Tullius lib. de Nat. Deorum.

and all matters, as is usual in prophecies, veiled under expressions which are of a mystic sense and interpretation.¹ Above all other parts of the book, the three first chapters are most plain and easy to be understood, though here also difficulties want not. For my part, I shall not trouble you with the several thoughts of men about these chapters. The noise of axe and hammer should not be heard in the temple; these discussions better become the study than the pulpit.

Let it suffice to note that the main contents of them are several epistles sent from Jesus Christ by John to the seven churches of Asia. But here a doubt ariseth, why a Catholic prophecy, such as is calculated for the church in general, and all ages of it, should begin with epistles to these particular churches. What may be the reason of this? *Ans.* It is so, partly because the gospel did here first eminently flourish, and the Spirit of God foresaw that the malice of Satan would also first powerfully invade and overrun these churches, and so engage them to the wrath of God; ² partly because of John's particular relation and apostolical presidency over these churches, wherein the Spirit of God condescendeth to that natural inquisitiveness and desire that we have to know what shall become of our own; and therefore being about to reveal to him the state of all the churches, he beginneth with those to whom he stood in particular bond and relation.

But why to the seven churches in Asia, since there were more planted in that tract and country? ³ I answer again—It may be partly because of the prophetic perfection of this number, which is everywhere in scripture solemn and sacred, and with which the Spirit of God seemeth most delighted in this prophecy; and, therefore, we hear of seven stars, seven spirits, seven candlesticks, seven lamps, seven seals, seven angels, seven trumpets, seven vials, seven thunders of the dragon with seven heads, the city with seven hills, the beast with seven horns; and, therefore, that the beginning of the prophecy might carry proportion with the rest of it, wherein all things are set forth under the typical figure of this number, he writeth to the seven churches of Asia. And partly because in these seven churches, which were the most eminent, there was found enough to represent the state, graces, evils of all churches in all ages; and indeed the pattern and type is so complete and perfect, that by an easy and fair accommodation it may be applied to all other churches that are not named here, for in them God was pleased to give the world a document and experience of all those judgments and dispensations which he would exercise towards other churches offending and declining in the same manner.

One question more, and we have done with this general view, and that is, Why all these epistles are directed to the several angels, or respective ministries of the churches, since the drift of them concerneth the whole body of the people? I answer—Either because they were notoriously guilty of the offences charged, and so by example propagated their own taint and profaneness among the people; or through oscitancy and carelessness suffered corruptions to creep in upon others; or else because all dispensations from Christ were to pass through

¹ 'Quot verba, tot sacramenta.'—*Hieron. in Præf. ad Bib.*

² Foxius in Rom., pag. xxi. 14.

³ See Aug. de Civit. Dei, lib. xi., cap. 14.

their hands to the church; and so the regular way of transmitting these epistles was by means of the angel or eldership.

Other general observations there are, but I quit them, desiring to fall upon the epistle we have in hand. The text is a part of the epistle to the church of Sardis, which was a flourishing and rich city, the seat of the kings of Lydia. In it you have:—

1. An inscription: 'To the angel of the church of Sardis,' *write*. You see it is inscribed, as all the rest are, 'to the angel of the church;' that is, to the ministry, who, because of their subserviency to the salvation of the elect, and that resemblance that is between their function and the angel's office, are expressed by that term, and though they were many, yet they are expressed in the singular number, *angel*, to note their union and combination in a body and society. To this angel write, in which word he produceth his warrant and authority. We cannot threaten churches in our own name; Christ must first say, *Write*. The priests under the law were to have their ears tipped with blood, Exod. xxix. 20. Christ must command and inspire, as he doth John here, *Write*.¹

2. A description of Christ, the author of this epistle, 'These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.' The seven Spirits, that is, the Holy Ghost, who is called so because of the plenty, perfection, and variety of his gracious operations and influences; and, therefore, in the old hymn of the church, it was said to the Holy Ghost, *Tu septiformis munere*; and it is said Christ hath these seven Spirits, that is, hath power to send the Holy Ghost, who always acteth as Christ's Spirit, with reference to his merit and intercession; therefore it is said, John xiv. 15, 'He shall take of mine and show it you.' Christ taketh this title upon him now to show that he had Spirit enough to quicken dead Sardis, seven Spirits, when he writeth to a languishing church. The next part of the description is 'and the seven stars;' these are expounded Rev. i. 20. 'And the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches;' so that the stars note the subordinate ministries which Christ is said to have, because he appointeth them, giveth them, assists them in their office and functions.

3. The occasion of the epistle, which is taken from the state of the church, which was well enough known to God, and therefore it is prefaced thus, 'I know thy works,' a phrase that is used to all the rest of the churches, but is most proper to Sardis, whose crime objected is, hypocrisy and pretence. Oh! how should it startle hypocrites to hear God say, 'I know thy works.' It implieth Christ's strict and severe observation of what is done among his people; his eyes are everywhere, but he observeth the church: Cant. vi. 11, 'He goeth down into the gardens to see the fruits of the valleys; to see whether the vines flourished, and the pomegranates budded;' phrases which imply a narrow inspection.

The state of the church is described two ways:—

[1.] By its repute and renown among other churches, they did judge and speak well of her: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest'—*i.e.*, thou art reputed to be eminent for faith, piety, and the power of

¹ See Mr Jesop's Sermon on the Angel of the Church of Ephesus, p. 12.

godliness, and goest for an excellent church in thine own conceit and the opinion of others; a church is then said to *live* when it receiveth the grace of life, and expresseth the life of grace, and name is taken for repute and renown.

[2.] By the judgment of Jesus Christ—‘but art dead.’ Thy condition is not correspondent to the report that goeth of thee. The churches that judge well of thee are deceived; for though there be much profession, yet very little of the power of truth and godliness is found in thee, which is here expressed by death.

4. The next things observable is the counsel of Christ, and direction to this languishing church, and that is in the verse read: ‘Be watchful, and strengthen the things that are ready to die,’ &c.

In which counsel of Christ to his church you may observe:—

[1.] An excitation, ‘Be watchful.’

[2.] A direction, ‘Strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die.’

[3.] A conviction to set on both the former parts, ‘For I have not found thy works perfect before God.’

The main duty is in the middle, the first part being laid down by way of preparative to it, and the third by way of reason and enforcement. Therefore, though I shall explain the whole verse, yet I shall single out the middle clause for larger and more special discussion.

[1.] I begin with the excitation, which, as I said, was laid down by way of preparation for the other duty: ‘Be watchful,’—*i.e.*, look to it, see whereunto these things will grow. Such sad beginnings should make you consider and observe your sins, and provide against your judgments. Holy watchfulness and observation is the first step to amendment; and when people begin to understand the approaches of wrath, they are in a fair way to prevent them. There cannot be such a grey hair, or a sadder intimation of swift destruction, than a secure and careless inadvertency. The first thing pressed is, ‘Be watchful.’

[2.] You may look upon the conviction, which is brought as a reason why they should watch, or recover their former height in godliness: ‘For I have not found thy works perfect before God.’ Whatever men think of them, they are not so holy and entire as to be able to endure my trial. Things in a scripture sense are said to be *πεπληρωμένα*, full and perfect, when they are sincere and sound, without hypocrisy and guile; and therefore Caleb’s integrity is expressed by fulfilling after God, or following of God fully, Num. xiv. 24; he understandeth such a perfect and full growth as keepeth things from languishing or dying away.

[3.] The next thing now is the direction or main duty pressed: ‘Strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die.’ There were *τὰ λοιπὰ*, some sorry remains of religion and godliness, to quicken or strengthen which he addeth a reason, *ἃ μέλλει ἀποθανεῖν*, which shall die. The same kind of Greek expression is used concerning the centurion’s servant, when he was at the point of death, which is expressed by *ἡμέλλε τελευτᾶν*, Luke vii. 2. They are even languishing and expiring; unless you strengthen and repair them, they are utterly lost and gone. The word that expresseth their duty is *στήριξον*, settle or establish them, which implieth not only a care to keep them from

expiration, but to recover them to their former height and radiancy ; and, therefore, a like matter is expressed by the apostle Paul in another word, for he biddeth Timothy *ἀναζωπυρεῖν*, stir or blow up the gift of God in him, 2 Tim. i. 6.

There is nothing of difficulty in the clause, only it doth not so easily appear, since they are not specified in the text, what are those *τὰ λοιπὰ*, those remains of religion, which he urgeth them to strengthen.

How shall we know what they are? *Ans.* It cannot be meant of persons, as some would have it, understanding it of the weak of the flock, for it is *τὰ λοιπὰ*, things, not persons ; and truly it must be something concerning the vitals of religion ; such, which, if revived, would make them live and flourish again in the sight of God and of the churches. Now, doctrinals it cannot be, for the reason rendered in the latter part of the text, ‘ For I have not found thy works perfect before God.’ It is some decay in practicals, thy works, *τὰ ἔργα* ; and if they had decayed in doctrinals, they could not have so much as a name that they lived. And then mere discipline it cannot be, for howsoever that be a great preservation to godliness, and a considerable stake in religion’s hedge, yet the corruption or intermission of discipline cannot so properly be termed the death of the church. It is, I remember, if some expound the place right, called the sleep of the church, Cant. vi. 2, ‘ I sleep, but my heart waketh.’ Brightman¹ applieth it to the church about the third century, which was watchful over doctrine ; the heart waked, but carelessly digested the corruption and degeneration of discipline, and therefore she is said to sleep, but it is nowhere called death ; and it cannot be mere discipline, though some regard may be had thereunto. And therefore principally it is meant of some few poor relics of languishing godliness, like sparks under the ashes which needed blowing up.² The sum of all is, I hope you will be stirred up by this admonition to prevent your death, and utter languishing in religion, that decayed godliness may have its former power, efficacy, and glory. I look upon the text as a counsel to a church, not to private Christians. I confess it is applied to them by most, because it yieldeth *conceptus predicabiles*, as they call them, much preaching matter concerning the languishing and decay of grace in Christians.

I cannot say this is excluded, because the part followeth the reason of the whole, but I rather look upon it, and so shall handle it, in a public regard.

The point is :—

Doct. That a special way to save a church and people from imminent and speedy ruin is the repairing of decayed godliness.

It is Christ’s counsel to Sardis, lest he should come upon them as a thief, that is, bring a sudden and unthought-of destruction. Give me leave to parallel it but with one place, and then I shall proceed to the reasons. It is the counsel to Ephesus, Rev. ii. 5, ‘ Do thy first works, or else I will come to thee quickly and remove thy candlestick,’ &c. Recovering religion to its former height is made a means of preventing God’s coming in judgment ; and it is there expressed by ‘ first works,’

¹ Brightman in Cant.

² ‘ Restaurantes zelum ardoremque pietatis, quæ in vobis effrixit, et pæne jam extinctæ est.’—*Jac. Rex in Apoc.*

because religion at the first coming is entertained with more genuine simplicity, and zealous earnestness, as stuffs in their first making are strongly wrought, and is full of life and power; therefore do thy first works.

Reason 1. Because by this means you take away that which will be the cause of ruin. God delighteth to make the outward estate to carry proportion with the inward; as we decay in godliness, so our outward happiness languisheth, and the hand of mercy is slackened. How easily may a wise Christian read his guilt in his condition, and from his outward decays understand his inward! And truly it is so in commonwealths too, their fate followeth the state of religion. God meteth to us in our own measure; instances want not: 'Ye have forsaken me, and therefore I have left you,' 2 Chron. xii. 5. Rulers rebel against God, and their people rebel against them, 'therefore is there a tumult among thy people,' Hosea xiv. 10. Friends are alienated and estranged from them, because their hearts are first estranged from God; there are confusions in the church, and then what followeth? distractions in the state. It was grave advice which the English divines gave the Dutch magistrates in the Synod of Dort,¹ that they should take heed lest, by their connivance at church disorders which they could help, they did not draw on state tumults and factions, which, when they would, they could not help. Truly this is God's course, to retaliate with the creature; and, as I said before, to make their outward condition answer their inward. Religion is, as it were, the soul of the commonwealth. Now, the state of the body dependeth much upon the good temper of the soul, it being linked to it by the affections, as so many pins and nails. A troubled soul discomposeth the body, but a cheerful mind cureth it; so religion and godliness, as it thriveth, maketh us thrive. God challengeth his people to avouch one instance when ever they lost by it, Jer. ii. 5, 'What iniquity have your fathers found in me?' and ver. 13. 'O ye generation! have I been a wilderness or a land of darkness to you?' Did ever godliness do you hurt? If you can, do but produce one experience! If you will believe Polycarp upon his own trial—and let me tell you he was an old Mnason, and had much trial of God—he will inform you, *ὀγδοήκοντα καὶ ἑξ ἔτη δουλεύω αὐτῷ, καὶ οὐδέν με ἡδίκησεν, &c.* For my part, saith he, I can speak of eighty-six years; I have been his servant so long, and he never did me harm. And truly, notwithstanding the prejudices that are abroad, we may come in with the like attestation, godliness never did us harm; when it thrived and was vigorous, we thrived, and sensibly felt the benefits of the power of it. See how God appealeth to men in this matter, Micah ii. 7, 'Are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' See the meaning of that place a little: 'Are these his doings?' Speaking of the troubles, do you think these are the fruits of religion? or of your endeavours for the advancement of it? No; your own souls know that my words have done you good, yielded you much comfort and deliverance; you were happy as long as you kept in that way. And there-

¹ 'Metuendum erit ne qui magistratu connivente res novas in ecclesia moliri cœperint, eodem etiam repugante, cum occasio ferat, idem quoque in republica moliantur,'—*Theol. Mag. Brit. sub fine, Sent. de 5 Art. in Hist. Syn. Dor.*

fore, now, if you would take away the cause of ruin, and redress the disorders of the commonwealth, repair the decays of religion, do what you can to restore that to its former power and efficacy.

Reason 2. Because, by outward success, God will visibly declare his delight in such eminent works as these are, and therefore setteth his heart to bless and prosper such a people, who set their hearts to repair decayed religion. And God doth it the rather, partly because of the prejudice that is upon godliness; as men cast most honour upon the parts most uncomely, so doth God most blessing and comfort upon a despised grace. Men accuse it as the only makebate, and in the world's eye it is the cause of want, and sword, and famine, Jer. xlv. 18; and therefore God attesteth and witnesseth from heaven that it is the only pledge of a blessing; the more we are prejudiced, the more free is God in honouring it; and partly because of his own delight in it; it is a grace that giveth all to God, and therefore God doth all for it. He dealeth with it as Caleb with his dear daughter Achsah; he giveth her the upper and the nether springs, Josh. xv. 19, the blessings of this life and that to come, 1 Tim. iv. 8; for as all the motions and tendencies of godliness are to exalt God, so all God's aims and dispensations are to exalt godliness, and therefore is it that we do so often hear of a blessing upon all endeavours, especially such as are eminent and public, that look that way: see Hag. ii. 19, 'From this day forward will I bless you;' that is, from the day that they took care of the temple, God would have them observe if their hopes and happiness did not thrive from that day forward. So 2 Chron. vii. 11, 'All that came into Solomon's heart to make in his own house, and the house of the Lord, he prosperously effected.' Those two cares thrive the better for one another; the Lord's house made him prosper the better in building his own, for God is resolutely engaged to let the world know what shall be done to the grace which he will honour. So see Isa. iv. 4, 'Upon the glory there shall be a defence.' By the *glory* is meant the church reformed or made more holy, for that is the excellency and glory of it; God and his people being both 'glorious in holiness.' Compare Exod. xv. 9, with Eph. v. 27. Now upon this glory there will be a covering or defensive shelter, as there was of badgers' skins over the glory of the tabernacle.

Reason 3. Because this is the straightest and most direct way to safety. In all other policies there are a great many serpentine windings and intricacies, whereby the event is not half so sure and easy. In desperate cases it is best to take the ready way; and that is, the repairing of religion. It is ill when religion is but policy; but it is as it should be when our policy is religion. Though the troubles are by men, yet our work doth not so much lie with man as with God. We begin at the right end, when we begin with him; for by making God a friend you may the better get in with men. To set on this reason, take a few considerations.

1. Without God men can do you no good; dependence on the Lord is the best security, and the surest policy is trusting God rather than men. They are weak and faithless, and so will fail you when there is most need. The people are unstable as waters, and their respects are dispensed with much uncertainty: to-day they cry up,

and to-morrow they cry down things; to secure themselves they will desert those that have done them most good: as the Keilites were ready to give up David after he had delivered them, as soon as Saul had any force in Israel, 1 Sam. xxiii. 11. If they keep true, their power to help may be gone. God kindleth courage and quencheth it at pleasure: Ezek. vii. 14, 'They have blown the trumpet to make all ready, but none goeth to the battle, for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof.' There were great preparations, but their hearts failed them. Truly there is nothing preserveth states so much as God's power over the spirits of men, and nothing which you ought to regard and heed so much as that. Bodies without hearts are a disadvantage, and their hearts are in God's hands. All outward strength and support lieth in the movable respects of the people; for so they are in themselves, it is God only that can fix and make them sure.

2. With God men can do you no harm; he is with them that are careful to establish and set up his worship, and then they need not care who are against them: see 2 Chron. xxviii. There is a story of Sennacherib's coming up against Jerusalem in the first verse; the time is specially noted: 'After these things and the establishment thereof;' that is, after Hezekiah had established the worship of God, which circumstance is mentioned chiefly to note the occasion of Hezekiah's confidence; for see how he disvalues him upon this: ver. 8, 'With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God.' When ye are thus for God, God will be with you, and then what is dust to the wind, briars and thorns to a devouring burning, an arm of flesh to the Lord our God? All the discouragements of the creature come from these things: want of care to get interest in God, and want of skill to improve it. Your grand design should be to get God with you, and truly then you may slight the most daring attempts: Isa. viii. 9, 10, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces, gird yourselves and ye shall be broken in pieces: take counsel together and it shall come to nought. Speak the word and it shall not stand, for God is with us.' In a triumph of faith the prophet laugheth at their vain attempts. He challengeth not only single adversaries that might sooner be dissipated, but such as were strengthened by a combination of interests, and twisted into a league and association, but all will not do. 'Ye shall be broken in pieces.' Again he speaketh to them, Call in more strength, come with advised care, yet ye shall be broken to pieces. If you will adventure once more, and try the other fifty, as that wretched king did, 2 Kings i., and see if heaven will smile on a third endeavour, yet still the event shall be the same, 'Ye shall be broken in pieces.' He addeth again, 'Take counsel together;' that is, recollect yourselves, summon your best wits, that you may know wherein you have failed, and play your game the more wisely the next time; yet, saith the prophet, it shall come to nought. Your deliberate and mature consultations shall have the same event with your rash and heady enterprises; that is, all shall be disappointed. The prophet goeth on, 'speak the word, and it shall not stand;' that is, when you have prepared the business, so that you

think all the devils in hell cannot disappoint you, yet God can, for he supposeth their presumption grown so confident, as that they speak the word; that is, give out threats and boasts, and yet then it shall not stand. The reason is rendered in the close of all; for *Emmanuel*, for God is with us. Indeed, there is the ground of all. God never made a creature, or any combination of creatures, that should be too hard for him; *God with us*, is enough. You do but spit against the wind when you oppose those with whom he is. The drivel will be returned upon your own face: Isa. liv. 18, 'Surely they shall gather together, but not by me. Whosoever shall gather together against thee, shall fall for thy sake.' There may be tumults and confusions, but being without God there is little hope, and against God there is certain ruin. The heathens were convinced of this; they would not war against a nation till they had called out their gods from them. Macrobius, in his Saturnalia, hath a chapter, *De Ritu Evocandi Deos*. It was upon this errand that Balaam went to Balak, to get away the God of Israel, Num. xxiii. Certainly nothing goes so near to the hearts of God's people as the insultations of their adversaries, when they have lost their shadow and the defensive presence of their God; as when David had fallen scandalously in the matter of Uriah, his adversaries boasted, 'Now there is no help from him in God. Selah,' Ps. iii. 2; and this went to his soul. So still our scandalous miscarriages give the adversaries hope that our shadow is gone, &c.

3. In having God, you have men too; he can preserve friends, or awe enemies; and therefore, still I say, to gain the respects of men, the best way is to get in with God: Prov. xvi. 7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, his enemies shall be at peace with him.' Remember God's power over the spirits of men, and then you will see that your main work lieth with him. Jacob's hardest task was with God; he wrestleth with God, and findeth embraces from Esau. Reconcile yourselves to God, and take hold of his strength, and then he can take away the enmity of the creature. God can recover lost hearts, preserve the respects of subjects entire to the supreme powers. It is very notable that in Gen. xxxiv. 30, compared with Gen. xxxv. 1, when the miscarriages of Simeon and Levi had made Jacob stink among the inhabitants of the land, and he was afraid the Canaanites and Perizzites would combine against him to slay him, God biddeth him go to Bethel and pay his vows. Such disasters should put him in mind of his covenant; the performing of which was the best way to support him against his present fears. Oh! consider, if any have made you stink in the land, your business is to go to Bethel and pay your vows. Force will not be so great a security as godliness. Armies make long work, but God can soon still the rage of the people; and when he doth it, it is done in a more kindly way. The door is more easily opened by a key than an iron bar, and men's hearts sooner gained by the power of God than men. God can clear up your renown, recover your glory and esteem again, calm the people, and cause all to be still. There are two things that are of great difficulty, and they are joined in one verse, Ps. lxxv. 7, 'He stilleth the noise of the seas, and the tumult of the people.' In the accomplishing of either of these things, man is at the greatest loss, either in assuaging the natural or the metaphorical waves; and there-

fore it was well done of that king who, to disprove his flatterers that had soothed him with the greatness of his command and empire, both by sea and land, caused his chair to be set near the sea-side, and the waves beating upon it without any reverence, said, Lo ! as great a king as I am, I cannot rebuke one wave. Truly no more can princes of themselves still the tumult of the people, for they are both of an equal difficulty, and must be left to the overruling power of God, the noise of the seas, and the rage of the people.

I come now to apply the point. We have found that getting in with God, by establishing religion, and repairing the decays of godliness, is a special means of preservation.

Oh ! then let us consider this with reflection upon ourselves ; we are concerned in it. England heretofore was compared to Laodicea for its lukewarmness,¹ it may be compared to Sardis for its languishing.

We have a name that we live. Our renown is gone into all lands, for savoury and practical truths ; but, alas ! our crown is like to be taken from us, and our glory laid in the dust. Religion of late seemeth to have lost all life and spirit, and godliness to degenerate into a cold form. The ordinances that erstwhile were wont to open heaven and break hearts, through the abundance of spirit that was in them, seem now to have lost all their converting power. Visions are open and few gained ; Christ is crucified before our eyes, but some fatal enchantment and fascination seemeth to abide upon our congregations, for few hearts are broken, few brought into the obedience of the truth. The English Christians heretofore were famous for their severe innocency, strict walking, constant communion with God, undaunted zeal, sweet experiences, holy conferences and communications, whereas now we meet with few but such as are, like the vain men of Israel, of a light spirit, loose conversation ; given to vain wranglings and disputes more than to practice and holy life, and measuring religion not so much by the power of godliness, as by form and faction, and siding with parties. God knoweth how unwilling I am to lay open our own nakedness, and to declaim against the times to which he hath disposed me. I know the nature of man is querulous and complaining ; the unthankful good one will always be commending the former times, and accusing his own ; it is often the voice of discontent and peevishness, 'The former times were better than these,' Eccles. vii. 10. Besides, every trifling zeal vents itself in loose invectives and flings. It is easy to rake in this puddle, and to reproach our times with such crimes and allegations, *quæ quisque suis temporibus obijcit*, as Tacitus observed, with which every one upbraideth his own age ; therefore I shall endeavour to make out the conviction more particularly for our humiliation and instruction. My method is this :—

First, I will show you wherein godliness is decayed.

Secondly, How it came to pass, what may be the occasions or causes of such a languishing.

Thirdly, What we shall do to repair it ; every one in his place, the people in their way, the ministry in theirs, and you in that orb and sphere that is proper to you.

First, My first work is to show that godliness is decayed, and wherein.

¹ See Brightman in Apoc., cap. iii.

I shall do that the rather, partly that it may help us to put our mouths in the dust, and to lie low in the sense of our shame this day; partly because we are all apt to call our design godliness, every party like the old Rogatians, ingross it to themselves. For my part, I look upon it as the highest sacrilege and peevishness in the world for men to do so, to measure religion by their private interest and opinion, and as they thrive more or less in the world, so to judge or cry out of the rising or fall of religion. Private conceits do not deserve so glorious a name, and the godly party is of a larger extent than to be appropriated or confined within any one sect and faction. Alas! how often do we mistake self-love for zeal, and out of a blind dotage to our own opinions, think Christ standeth or falleth with our private misconceits and interests. It was but a presumptuous arrogance in Nestorius, to promise heaven and victory so lavishly to Theodosius the Emperor, if he would do as he suggested.¹ Therefore to prevent all partial claims, and to waive the suspicion of any such drift, I shall first show wherein the power of godliness is found to decay and languish, even unto death; I mean that godliness which is commended to us in the word, and is the glory of our religion and profession. The gasping of it is many ways discovered, but especially by these things.

1. By the languishing of zeal, and the neglect of public duties. Zeal is a grace so rare, that we scarce know the nature and working of it; for, alas! to what a stupidity and cold indifferency in religion are we come. Though God be dishonoured, truth violated, the Sabbath profaned, yet men are neither hot nor cold, Rev. iii. 15. We content ourselves with a lukewarmness and mumbling of profession, middling it between Christ and the world; neither suffering nor doing any further than will suit with our interests, as if in hazardous cases we should look on rather than interpose. Where are those that do ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι, contend earnestly for the faith of the saints, the glory of God, that mind religion for religion's sake? Jude 3. If we had more love, we would have more zeal;² if the heart were gained to religion, we would have more heat and power, and not give up ourselves to such a secure oscitancy. The iniquity of the times should put us forward, not make us worse. A godly man should be like fountain water, hottest in coldest weather. Dead fishes may swim with the stream, and every carnal heart walk according to the trade of Israel. It deserveth no thanks to be earnest in duties, when there is no opposition against them; but, alas! as soon as danger cometh, how are men discouraged! It should not be so. When the wicked prevail, it is said of the godly man: Job xvii. 9, 'That he shall hold on his way; and he that is righteous grow stronger and stronger.' True grace and true zeal by an antiperistasis is best in the worst times; but it is otherwise with us, for our magistrates, some of them, when the day of God is profaned, his name dishonoured, his truth questioned, are like careless Gallios, troubled with none of these things, do not come forth to the help of Christ. For our ministry, many act no further than they are encouraged, and put on by an outward power, and will not engage till all difficulties be first removed by a secular arm; others leave themselves

¹ 'Disperde mecum hæreticos et ego tecum disperdam Perses,' &c.

² 'Non amat qui non zelat.'—*Aug. contra Adimani*, cap. xiii.

at a loose liberty and indifferency to comply with all parties, and launch forth no further, than they may get to shore again if a storm arise. Our people are in an unsettled hesitation, ready to draw back upon every trouble, pleading for the stumps of Dagon, and revolting in their hearts to the old ways. And truly as yet the evil days are not fully come, so that this grace is not thoroughly exercised. However, a cold indifferency in such times will in very evil times be a flat apostasy. Certainly this is clear already, that we are much gone off from our first love. At the first breaking out of reformation, what heat and violence was there offered to the kingdom of God! what zeal against the little foxes, every modest appearance of error! what a holy forwardness! whereas now we are at a stand; the old world, like old men, every day losing more of its heat and fervour. Melancthon's prophecy is almost verified; for he, though he were a sober and meek man—and indeed his fault was too much connivance, for, by his silence, consubstantiation prevailed—was so sensible of the decay of zeal in his time, that he feared the world would come to account religion a matter of nothing, or a word-strife, not worthy men's regard and engagement; and truly it is even brought to that pass.¹

2. By the insipid formality and dead-heartedness that is found everywhere. We are without life in the ways of God, little beauty of holiness, little circumspection and strictness in life and conversation. Religion is like a river; it loseth in strength what it getteth in breadth. Now many come in to profess, their walkings are not so awful and severe. When it is a shame not to have some form in religion, many have but a form, and so debase the holy profession by mingling it with their pride, lust, and avarice, so that it is not so daunting, and hath no such majesty with it as formerly it had. A truly godly man is to be the world's wonder, the world's reproof, the world's conviction. The world's wonder: 1 Peter iv. 4, 'They think it strange,' &c. You are to hold forth such mortification and self-denial that the world may wonder. You are to wean yourselves, and bind up your affections from such objects as do so pleasantly and powerfully insinuate with them, and ravish their affections. He should be also the world's reproof: Heb. xi. 7, by building an ark Noah condemned the world. You should be mirrors to kill basilisks; and in the innocency of your lives, show them their own filthiness; in short, your lives should be a real reproof and upbraiding to them. And then the world's conviction: 1 Cor. xiv. 25, you should walk so that they may see God in you of a truth. Your conversation should be nothing else but a walking rule, and religion exemplified. But, alas! how vain, carnal, sensual, are most men, discovering nothing of the power of grace, the beauty of holiness, and the efficacy of the new nature; we may see much of man, but nothing of God in them. It is even our description: 2 Tim. iii. 5, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' Denying the power; that is, refusing and resisting that inward virtue and force of godliness, by which the heart should be renewed or the conversation rectified. Possibly there may be more light, but less heat. What Seneca observed of his times is

¹ 'Metuendum est in postrema mundi ætate magis hunc errorem grassaturum esse, quod aut nihil sint religiones aut differant tantum vocabulis.'—*Melancthon. Postil. de Bapt. Christi.*

true of ours, *Boni esse desierunt, sicubi docti evaserint*—they were less good when they were more learned; for now we rather dispute away duties than practise them. Oh! it is sad this, when knowledge shall devour good life, and notion spoil knowledge. That of Hugo is but too just a character of us, *Amant lectionem, non religionem, immo amore lectionis in odium incidunt religionis, multos video studiosos, paucos religiosos*, &c.¹ Many desire to know, few to live; yea, knowledge seemeth to make men less strict and holy, for they dispute away religion the more they understand of it.

3. Loathing of heavenly manna. There cannot be a more proper discovery of spiritual languishing. Sick persons loathe their food, and feed upon ashes. Surely godliness is in the wane when a people are Christ-glutted, and gospel-glutted, and are all for ungrounded subtleties, quintessential extracts, and distillations.² Oh! how welcome were the first appearances of light. It is a blessing we know by the want of it. When we came newly out of darkness, whose heart did not say within him, *χαῖρε, φῶς*, welcome, sweet light? When it was a new thing, how strangely did it affect us? But it is the unhappy fate of the word to be despised upon acquaintance: John xv. 35, 'Ye rejoiced in his light,' *πρὸς ὥραν*, 'for a season,' some small time, when he first began to shine in their borders, Cant. i. 26. To a gracious eye truth's bed is always green; as fresh and flourishing at the last as at the beginning; but most look upon it with an adulterous eye and heart; love it whilst it is new, nauseate it after some acquaintance and knowledge of it. With what fastidious disdain do men despise sacred truths, if discovered in their own native beauty and simplicity! 1 Cor. ii. 6, 'We speak wisdom among those that are perfect,' saith the apostle; that is, among grown Christians, who can discern beauty in a plain ordinance. Wisdom in an evangelic simplicity, though there be no enticing words, sublime speculations, and exotic conceits. But now carnal men are all for *τὰ βάθη*, depths, as they say, Rev. ii. 24; that is, they account them great and deep mysteries, whereas the Spirit of God accounteth them illusions of Satan. Surely God will meet with such a wanton people. The continuator of Sleidan showeth, that before the great massacre in France, the Protestants were for a luscious, wanton kind of preaching. Truly we cannot absolutely determine what will become of us, only we have cause to fear that conscientious sermons, as much despised as they are, may be a commodity dear enough in England ere long; and visions may be less open, that they may be the more precious, 1 Sam. iii. 4.

4. Plain apostasy, and turning round to those things which we hated in others before. As for instance, to Arminian, antisabbatarian doctrines, &c., which heretofore were made the characteristic note to distinguish good persons and bad. I would not be understood as if I did think a thing simply evil because held by such men: opposition of image worship was never the worse because the Monothelites first stirred in it;³ nor is the cross the more holy because the Messalians despised it; neither is everything evil because taught by persons whom

¹ Hugo Miscel. lib. ii. cap. 52.

² See Shepherd's Sound Believer, p. 250.

³ See Paulus Diaconus.

religion maketh justly odious. I only speak now, as supposing other grounds by way of aggravation, and to show how inexcusable it is for us to judge others for the same things which we now do ourselves, Rom. ii. 3. And truly it is observable, that many, when these corruptions were set on by violence, did stubbornly enough bear up against the heat of opposition; whereas now, by erroneous insinuations, their revolt is made facile, so as they may come off from truth with the less shame and regret, and therefore do now allow in themselves those errors which formerly, with so much heat and sharpness, they opposed in others, Deut. xii. 29, 30. You shall see there, of all sins the Jews were to beware of the way of the heathens, whom God had cast out before them. Hear the words: 'When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, and thou goest and dwellest in their land, take heed thou be not ensnared by following them, after they be destroyed before thee.' Truly we have the same nature, and having the same possessions, may be easily tempted to the same sins, as pride, looseness, ease, and error, &c. You see that is brought as a great aggravation, 2 Kings xvii. 8, 'They walked in the way of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before them.' These opinions and practices have proved destructive to others, and they will be fatal to us too. Such apostasy is a sin of a double dye, as being against former experience of God's judgments on others, and the former judgment of our own consciences. Why were we so keen against that in them, to which we are now revolted ourselves?

5. By the wounds religion hath received in the house of her friends. Many have acted of late under the name and colour of religion, as if they went on purpose to make godliness odious, and religion stink in the land, engaging themselves in all unwarrantable practices, odious and gross heresies, prostituting the holy profession to all kinds of impurities and injuries, whereby the mouth of iniquity is opened, the hatred of enemies justified, their reproaches made good, and a great occasion and advantage given to wicked men to speak evil of this way. It was the glory of Christianity heretofore to be hated unjustly, and that only of the worst men, which was an argument of the goodness and purity of it. That which Nero hateth must needs be excellent,¹ and the only fault that could be charged upon the primitive Christians was their Christianity, they were just and honest, good subjects, and good neighbours, saith Pliny the younger; only they had their *hymnos antelucanos*, their morning meetings to praise their God; and Tertullian saith, the heathens were wont to say, *Caius Sejus vir bonus nisi quod Christianus*,—Caius Sejus was a good man, all his fault was that he was a Christian. You see still their profession was their only crime; nay, to come nearer home, the Bishop of Aliffe, in the Council of Trent, confessed that we had *orthodoxos mores*, but *hæreticam fidem*, a good life, but a bad belief; and truly this was our glory when no evil could be charged upon us but our private opinion and profession. But alas! now it is otherwise; many of those that profess religion,

¹ Vide Tertull. in Apol.—'Tali dedicatore damnationis nostre gloriamur, qui enim Nerone scit intelligere potest non nisi grande bonum a Nerone damari.' Vide Notas Francis. Zephyri ibidem.—'Divina providentia effectum ut Christiana religio eos haberet hostes, qui aliis virtutibus infensi,' &c.

have done that which a moral heathen would scarce do. Oh! what a dishonour to Christ is this, that those that pretend to him should be less civil, just, discreet, &c. ! Oh! how is the holy profession exposed to the shame and reproach of the adversaries! How is Christ crucified and put to shame again in your scandals! How will the Hams of the world laugh to discover this nakedness! Thus it hath been of old.¹ The apostle Peter speaketh of some impure deceivers by whom the 'way of truth was evil spoken of,' 2 Peter ii. 1. Thus the ancient Christians were loaded with all kinds of scorn and contempt, and hated for the heretics' sake, because of the Gnostics; they were called *luminum extinctores*, putters out of the candles, and doers of obscene things in the dark.² The unclean conversation of the Priscillianists made Pagans detest all Christians, and by the rage of Maximus they fared all alike; malice will know no distinction. Alas! what a sad thing is this, that religion's own friends should betray her; that you that are called Christians should be called so to the disgrace of Jesus Christ,³ that you should give occasion to them that desire occasion, and make good all their reproaches!

6. By religion's being made the stalking-horse to every self-seeking design. Many hold it forth only out of a desire to advance some private ends, to get preferment and honour in the world, or some opportunity to enrich themselves with the public spoils. And truly this is very sad, that every malicious, covetous, or ambitious project should be clothed with this glorious pretence. Thus the apostle Peter speaketh of some in his days that abused their profession by making it a 'cloak of maliciousness,' 1 Peter ii. 6. And Lactantius observeth the same also of many in his time, who wounded the Christian name and honour by using it as a cover to their sinful and corrupt practices.⁴ And others show what prejudice was done to religion by the pride, desire of greatness, and contention, that was between the pastors and professors of it; insomuch that Diocletian thought that Christianity was nothing else but a wretched device of wicked men,⁵ set afoot out of some private aims. Thus, also, Ignatius speaketh of some that were *οὐ χριστιάνοι ἀλλὰ χριστέμποροι*, not Christians so much as Christ-sellers,⁶ like Judas, that followed Christ only to make gain of him. I have brought these instances because they do but give us the description of many in our age, who make God 'to serve with their sins,' Isa. xliii. 24, and godliness to be only the specious outside of every unclean intent and worldly design. Thus poor religion, that delighteth to breathe in the air of self-denial, is made the usual stale to self-seeking; and godliness, that checketh carnal projects, by a vile submission is forced to serve them.

7. By the want of endeavours to propagate religion, and to diffuse it amongst others. True godliness, where it is powerful, is of a dif-

¹ 'Κωμωδία γὰρ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς ἡ ἐμὴ τραγωδία, διὰ τοῦτο τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ὀφειλομένη οὐκ ὀλιγὸν καὶ τῇ σκῆπῳ προσεθήκαμεν.'—Naz. Orat. 14.

² Tertul. in Apol.

³ 'Dicimur Christiani in opprobrium Christi.'

⁴ 'Nunc male audiunt castiganturque philosophi nostræ sectæ quam tuemur, quod aliter quam sapientibus convenit vivant, et vitia sub obtentu nominis celent.' Lact. lib. de Opificio Dei, sub initio.

⁵ Euseb. lib. viii. 1.

⁶ Ignat. Epist. ad Trall.

fusive and spreading nature, like leaven, till it hath pierced the whole lump. Now what have we done in this, either Christians among their neighbours, magistrates in the kingdom, or masters in their families? For private Christians, they spend the heat and strength of their spirits in lesser matters, and let the weightier go; through division and strife, forget edification. Many renounce all care of them without; and whereas they might have strengthened the hands of their brethren that have acted in a public reformation, what have they done? Have they joined as far as their private principles would give leave? endeavoured to bring the kingdom onward to the way and will of Christ? And then for magistrates, have they been so zealous as they should be to propagate a religious ministry throughout the kingdom, to enlighten dark corners? There is not a better work, nor more for your safety. Austin observed¹ that the Christians tasted the violence of the Goths and Vandals, for that they were not careful to bring off the heathens from their idolatry. Such endeavours would be your defence, and in the business of religion nothing concerneth you more than this; but my chief aim under this head is to speak of the neglect of family duties, which is the great reason why religion is decayed abroad. These are the springs and fountains of the country. Churches were first in families, where the master of the house was the priest, and the beauty and power of religion is still preserved there; and therefore, next to churches, they require a chief care. Oh! how excellent is it when churches are like to heaven, the assembly below like the great congregation above, and families like churches for their religion, order, and comeliness! Heb. xii. 29. You read of a church in Philemon's house, Philem. ver. 1. Melancthon said of George, Prince of Anhalt, *Cubiculum ejus templum, academia, curia*,² that his chamber was a university, a court, and a church; the latter because of the instructions, prayer, and worship that were there. Religion first decayeth in families before in churches; therefore when the order of houses is subverted, duties neglected there, how soon doth godliness decay abroad! I do not know any one thing that God expecteth more from a religious householder—I mean in that capacity and relation—than the establishment of religion in his family: Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know Abraham that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord.' Mark, God reckoneth upon it as a duty that the godly will perform, 'I know,' &c.; and remember disappointment is the worst vexation.

8. By opposition and snarling at piety and purity, as the purity of reformation. Men are afraid to be too heavenly, and reject government because it would cross their licentiousness; and so the purity that shineth forth in the lives of God's servants. You heard in the morning³ how apt an English spirit is to hate godliness under some other name, and how men that have but a form are wont to snarl at the power; and indeed the apostle Paul observeth the same thing, 2 Tim. iii. 3, with ver. 5, 'Having a form of godliness, despisers of those that are good.' These two descriptions are usually coupled. Cain and

¹ Aug. lib. ix. de Civitate Dei.

² Melanct. in Præfat. 5 tom. Oper. Lutheri.

³ From Mr Richard Vines of the Assembly.

Abel both sacrificed, only Abel's offering was the better, and therefore Cain maliced him, 1 John iii. 12. Men do not love to be upbraided by others' righteousness; they would fain have their laziness justified by the common defects, *ὅσα ἐν τῷ κοίνῳ τὸ κατ' αὐτοὺς κρυπτήται*, as Nazianzen speaketh,¹ they would have none zealous and excelling; therefore those that are contented with a form will hate those that have the power. We can look for no other: Gal. iv. 27, 'He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit; even so it is now.' We may also add, And so it is now, and so it will be. Carnal Christians will have some pretence or other to persecute those that are more godly. One great design is, as you heard in the morning, to cry up a name under which this hatred may be carried on the more covertly and secretly; and usually it is taken from the party most discountenanced, or which is most publicly odious, or which hath most dishonoured their profession. Thus when the Priscillianists were generally hated, and indeed they deserved it, other Christians shared in their miseries. Sulpicius Severus speaketh of one Ithacius, a bishop whose hatred against the Priscillianists did so far transport him, that if any were of good life, studious of the scriptures, he would suspect and blast him as a Priscillianist. I have read of one Sampaullinus, a French martyr, who, when he reprov'd one for swearing, was presently suspected of Lutheranism; and Bonner, if any did but mention the name of God with reverence, took it for ground enough to call him Lollard. And truly it is even thus among us. The world hath gotten some names and pretences under which they carry on their hatred against the power of godliness the more securely and with the less dread, so that it is to be feared that if any be of godly conversation, it will be enough to make him a sectary, and an enemy of the kingdom's peace and quiet. When the name is once gotten up, mischief and malice, as I said, will make no distinction.

9. The late great increase of scandalous sins. Times of trouble are usually licentious, and when penal laws are suspended by force, wickedness groweth impudent; and truly it is even so among us, to the confronting of authority; whoring, and swearing, and drunkenness and Sabbath profanations abounding everywhere; yea, more than formerly. We looked for purging the land, and it is more defiled. When the pot boileth, the scum is discovered. Baths bring forth corruption, if it be in the body, into the skin. God hath been reforming the land, and our wickedness appeareth the more: Hosea vii. 1, 'When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria.' God hath been correcting and amending us, and we have been the more vile and sinful. Oh! then how may the kingdom sit down like the church in Micah, and mourn: Micah vii. 1, 2, 'I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage. The good man is perished out of the earth. There is none upright upon the earth. They all lie in wait for blood, and hunt every man his brother by a net.' Zeal is decayed, the power of godliness gone, the word despised, and we are even grown as the people whom God hath cast out before us. Religion hath received wounds in the house of her friends, and is made a pre-

¹ Nazian. Orat. in Med.

tence to every base design. Few seek to propagate it, and it meets with much snarling and opposition everywhere, and iniquity is now grown impudent.

And thus I have done with my first work, which was to show wherein religion is decayed.

Secondly, My next business is to show you the occasions and causes, how we came thus to languish and decrease, that so the guilt may lie at the right door. And truly we need not contend about that, but may every one of us smite upon the thigh, and bear the shame of our own iniquity.

Briefly then—

1. For the occasions; the knowledge of them may serve to shame us with our unthankfulness. They are two:—

[1.] One is the late prosperity which God of his mercy had given to his people. The church, which is the heir of the cross,¹ is seldom able to manage and wield an outward happy condition. I remember, Nazianzen observeth,² that it hath ever with more honour endured misery than with safety improved happiness and success; that maketh us always degenerate or divide: sometimes degenerate. When Constantine favoured religion, poison was sown in the church; Christians began to lose their ancient severity, and to look after ease and honours and pleasures in the world. When we have anything in the world, we neglect our high hopes; and so by little and little holiness decayeth and degenerateth into a mere pretence, which is only retained the better to colour over some carnal pursuits and projects; whereas those Christians that meet with nothing but hard things in the world and from the world are more heavenly and holy; for the inward exercises of mortification are much advantaged by their outward condition, and the world being crucified to them, they are the better crucified to the world, as Paul speaketh, Gal. vi. 14, *i.e.*, it neither smileth upon them nor they upon it. And as success maketh us to degenerate, so to divide, *ῥωσθέντες διελύσαμεν*,³ as he said, as soon as the church grew prosperous it grew factious; like timber in the sunshine, we are apt to warp and divide from one another, or like elephants returning from the heat of the battle, we tread down our own troops.⁴ Prosperity begets wantonness, and wantonness novelties, and so the people of God come to be scattered, and to go into distinct herds and divisions, an evil ever fatal to religion, and yet it seemeth connatural. The apostles themselves, though oracles infallible, could not wholly prevent it in their days; outward prosperity then was a great occasion.

[2.] Another may be openness of vision. Carnal hearts are soon cloyed. I cannot tell how it cometh to pass, but so it is; the word hath less power when openly preached. A gospel-glutted stomach doth often force God to provide sharp remedies, either some great outward misery, accompanied with the want and famine of the word, and then any little thing is precious, as see two places: one is Zech.

¹ 'Ecclesia hæres crucis.'

² 'Ρᾶν ἔστι δυσπραγίαν ἐνεγκεῖν ἢ εὐπραγίαν διασώσασθαι.'—Nazian. Orat. 3 de Pace.

³ Naz. ibidem.

⁴ 'Quam reportassent tandem coronam si perstitissent in eadem militia, nec ut efferati elephantibus ab hostibus conversi contrivissent suos.'—Brightman. de Luthero et Melancthone.

vii. 7, 'Ye should have hearkened to the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, and men inhabited the south of the plain.' Mark, there is their full condition described; the temple stood, the city flourished, the suburbs were great; but then they hearkened not, but despised the former prophets, that is, the prophets that prophesied before the captivity. But now look upon them in their emptiness: the other place for that is Ezra ix. 8, 'And now that the Lord hath showed us such grace, to give us a nail in the holy place,' &c. Mark how welcome every little thing is to them then; a nail in the holy place is such a mercy; that is, to see one pin or nail driven into the rafters of the temple; whereas before they would not know their own mercies, while that stately edifice stood in all its glory and beauty. Times may come when these dews will be precious, and sermon showers sweet to thirsty souls; or if this be not, God may send a dark Ezekiel, when a plain Jeremiah is despised. Ordinances may be carried in such an obscure, notional, airy way as to yield no efficacy and comfort. These are the occasions, but—

2. What are the causes of the languishing and decay of godliness? I answer:—

[1.] That great division and dissentiency that is among God's own people. When the language was divided, the building ceased; when religion is controverted, it loseth its awe and force. It is observable that, Acts iv. 32, 33, when the people were of one heart and of one mind, 'then with great power gave the apostles witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' Mark that, *with power*; the word came with command and authority upon the hearts of men. The world easily stumbleth at this rock of offence; the assent is more loose and doubtful when things are committed to the uncertainty of disputes, and so doth not commandingly check vicious inclinations. When the ways of flesh and blood are backed with wit and parts, and made to seem a valuable opinion, men are hardly gained.

Besides, godly men themselves, while they engage with too much heat and zeal in their particular opinions, grow cool in piety and practical duties, the strength of their spirits being diverted and carried out so disproportionably to the lesser matters. God placed the flaming sword about paradise, and the gospel calleth for violence in the matters of the kingdom, Mat. xi. 12. But we usually mistake our object, and misplace our zeal upon such matters as have more of interest in them: than godliness, and are rather busied in disputing much, than doing much.

[2.] The embasing and emasculating the ordinance of preaching. Hunger seeketh food, but lust dainties and quails. When preachers provide for men's lusts rather than their consciences, religion is embased and loseth power. A ministry that stayeth in the paint of words will beget but painted grace. When we come in the demonstration of the Spirit, we come in power, 1 Cor. ii. 6, *ἐν ἀποδείξει*, with plain and solid conviction; this is the sin, this the curse and misery. When the thread of the gospel is so fine spun, it will not clothe a naked soul; notion eateth out all saving knowledge. The apostle speaks of a *ψευδώνυμος γνώσις*, 1 Tim. vi. 20, 'Oppositions of science falsely so called,' by which they thought to better the gospel, but did indeed debase it.

Such niceties enervate godliness, make it weak and less in power. We must take heed then of debasing this ordinance to an effeminate delicacy. It should still be masculine and generous, full of spirit and power from on high. I would not be mistaken, as if I did plead for a lazy carelessness in managing the word. I know that God concurreth with man's diligence; and if we would not have the people loathe the word, we should painfully provide it for them. Every scribe that is instructed for the kingdom of God, that is, that would do service in the church of God, must 'bring forth out of his treasures things both new and old,' Mat. xiii. 52, that is, although not new truths, yet *κοινὰ καίως*, old truths in a new way, otherwise represented to the imagination or fancy, to take off that tedium or natural satiety that is in us, that we may not loathe them as coleworts twice sod, but that truths may still have a fresh look upon the conscience and affections. This may be done, but we must take heed of ungrounded niceties, subtle notions, that beget only speculation, and do not stir up to practice.

[3.] An undue preaching of the gospel. Poison conveyed in so sweet a wine maketh the cup the more deadly. By this means religion itself is made to be of sin's side, and the grace of God pliable to carnal conclusions; and indeed, when the truths of God, that should convince of sin, are debauched to so vile a purpose as to countenance sin, men can the better overcome remorse of conscience, and do sin with the less regret, out of a presumption that the gospel is of their side, Jude, ver. 3, 'They turn the grace of our God into wantonness;' they debauch the grace of God, that is, the doctrine of grace, make that yield countenance to their lusts; and so men father their bastards upon the Spirit, and sin *cum privilegio*, by a license from heaven. When those that should have been prophets cried, Peace, peace! see what Jeremiah saith, chap. iv. 10, 'Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people,' in saying they shall have peace. It was done in God's name by the false prophets, and they were as secure as if God himself had said so. We would willingly have the gospel over-gospelled, and hear in the ear of liberty; therefore I am persuaded there is no one thing hath hindered the power of godliness, care of duty, humbling of souls, so much as this undue preaching of the gospel.

[4.] Public liberty and connivance, that maketh sin more common, and so less odious. Outward restraints keep men that are evil from discovering of it: and though it be the privilege of divine precepts to convert the soul, Ps. xix. 7, yet the commands and authority of men may much hinder the diffusion and dissemination of sin and error. It is good to observe the several guards that God hath put upon a man to keep him from sin, so prone are we to it. There are inward guards—Spirit, word, and conscience; there are outward guards—the ministry, the church, and the magistrate—all which are as in his stead to be an awe to sinners; more especially it is said of the magistrate that he is 'the minister of God, to be a terror to evil-doers,' Rom. xiii. 3, 4. Now, when their sword is sheathed up, and nothing is settled, wicked men lose all awe and restraint, and do what is 'right in their own eyes,' Judges xxi. 25, as it is said there they did when there was no king of Israel; that is, no exercise of government to restrain public disorders, for as yet their government was not monarchical; then all goeth

to wreck, iniquity groweth impudent, and religion is borne down. Solomon saith, Prov. xx. 8, 'A king that sitteth upon the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes;' that is, when magistrates employ and draw out their power, they scatter evil as the sun scattereth mists.

[5.] Another cause may be want of catechising, by which means truths would be more revived, and kept fresh and savoury in the thoughts, and so have the more awe upon us. Martyrology and catechising were two of the most successful engines against Popery. Truths work most when we discern that cognation and kin, by which they touch and respect one another; indistinct knowledge doth but dispose to error or looseness. Sermon hints, a hint here, and a hint there, doth not so much good, for men of weaker conceits cannot so easily discern how one truth is inferred from another, and what analogy and proportion there is between them, and so are easily overcome by more subtle and stronger wits; or else, not discerning that fair compliance that is between practical and comfortable truths, grow loose. Certainly religion would be more propagated if this exercise were revived. We are debtors to wise and unwise, Rom. i. 14; and Christ, that bade Peter feed *πρόβατα*, his sheep, bade him also feed *ἀρνία*, his lambs, John xxi. 15, 16. For want of this pattern of sound words, and these condescensions to weak ones by this exercise, many mischiefs have abounded amongst us, to the great damage of religion and godliness.

These are part of the causes; others might be mentioned, but I shall forbear. You will say then, What remedy? Therefore I shall proceed to the next thing, which is to show you:—

Thirdly, What we should do to 'strengthen the things that are ready to die,' or to repair decayed godliness. Give me leave to speak a word:—

First, To all in general, as we are Christians. Several things are necessary. Let me point at a few.

1. Oh! that we would all join together, *quasi manu factâ*—it is Tertullian's word—in a holy conspiracy to besiege heaven by prayers, until more spirit and life be poured out, and in greater abundance. God hath said that he 'will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh,' Acts ii. 15. Oh! beg it for England; go to him that hath the seven Spirits, to look upon another dead Sardis. God must offer violence to us ere we can offer violence to the kingdom. It is the mighty quickening Spirit, that must revive us in our languishings. That which carrieth the soul to God, must come from God. Waters can arise no higher than their spring. Religion is like the pure vestal flame, which, if it went out, was to be kindled only by a sunbeam. Oh! then let us go and wait before God for those seven Spirits, those mighty and quickening operations. The Spirit came upon Christ in the appearance of a dove, to show his meekness; but upon the apostles in cloven tongues of fire, to show the might and force that is in his operations.

2. Let us study how we may more honour and adorn religion by a godly and peaceable walking before God and men. Every Christian should be the gospel's ornament, as a hypocrite is the gospel's disgrace: Titus ii. 10, 'Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.' Let the world know there is more in religion than pretence and policy.

While hypocrites and such as seek themselves betray the honour of religion, do you advance it; let them see there are true stars as well glaring meteors. Your lives should make God glorious: 1 Peter ii. 9, hold forth the praises, τὰς ἀρετὰς, of him that hath called you; let them read God in you of a truth, and be not distinguished so much by a party and profession as by holiness. Tertullian saith of the ancient Christians, *Non aliunde noscibiles quam de emendatione vitiorum*—their distinction was their innocency. When divers libertines had dishonoured religion, and walked unworthily in their relations, Peter pressed the true Christians to good conscience and more honest walking, 1 Peter ii. 12, and iii. 16; indeed, both those chapters are to this purpose. This will be a real confutation, and then God will give you praise in the land of your shame, Zeph. iii. 19. Hair cut will grow again if the roots remain; and though the razor of censure hath brought baldness and reproach upon the head of religion, yet its good name will grow and flourish again, and they will be ashamed that falsely accuse your godly conversation. O brethren! at such times we should walk with more care. It is a smart question that, Neh. v. 9, ‘Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our adversaries?’ When your lives are thus sleek and innocent, this dirt will not stick.

3. Stir up yourselves, and provoke one another to more forwardness in dead times. We should strive who should be first, and exceed in godliness. You know that noted place, Heb. x. 24, ‘Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works.’ This is ἀγαθὴ ἔρις, an holy contention, when we contend who shall be most forward in the matters of God. We often provoke one another to carnal strife, to excess in vanity. Oh! when do we sharpen and whet each other’s graces? The sons of the coal, how do they enkindle one another, and strengthen each other’s hands in wickedness. See how the idolaters are described: Isa. xli. 6, 7, ‘They helped every one his neighbour; every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer, him that smiteth on the anvil,’ &c. The prophet speaketh of the time when the gospel was sent to the isles, ver. 1; that is, to the European countries, which are usually expressed by *isles* in Isaiah. Now, as soon as they listened to this doctrine, down went the pictures and images, but there being some hope offered of their re-erection, they came and strengthened one another’s hands: ‘Be of good courage.’ They hoped to bring up their craft and way again with pomp and triumph. Oh! when they strengthen one another, will not you? Nazianzen was wont to call the enemies of the church κοινούς διαλλακτὰς,¹ the common reconcilers, because when they unite and support one another against the church, it doth but invite the people of God to a more close union, and free communion with one another. This would be an excellent way to prevent the decays of love and piety.

4. Delight in and wait upon the powerful ministry of the word: ‘The prophets prophesy lies, and the people love to have it so,’ Jer. v. 31. A vain people do but encourage a vain ministry. Do not

¹ Τῶν δὲ τι τοῦτο τοῖς κοινούς ἡμῶν διαλλακταῖς, διαλλακταὶ γὰρ ἐστε, καὶ ἀκουσίως τοῦτο χαρίζεσθε.—*Naz. Orat.* 13.

delight, then, in a glozing dispensation, it will be successful. Frothy speculations, moral strains, do no good; the people begin to grow weary of savoury and sound knowledge: the testimony of the witnesses was a torment to the dwellers on the earth, Rev. xi. 10; powerful preaching is their burden. The lazy world would fain lie upon the bed of ease, draw the curtains and rest, and therefore light is troublesome; men begin to thirst and pant for the old unsavoury moral strains, which remain in wary generals, and do not irritate. The Lord may give you your desire; but remember that is a carnal itch that must be clawed, and the times will be sad when men cannot endure sound doctrine, 2 Tim. iv. 3.

I have done with my address to the people.

Secondly, I shall speak a word to the ministry. I am the worst of a thousand to direct others, only I shall take the liberty, in all humility, to suggest my thoughts. Much may be done by you to the repairing of decayed godliness.

1. Christ must still be preached. That is the main truth that keepeth in the life of Christianity. The more evangelical dispensations are, the more powerful; our beloved must still be kept as a bundle of myrrh next our hearts, Cant. i. 13, still fresh and fragrant in the thoughts; all the comfort and support of a Christian dependeth upon that; this is the very spirit and flower of any ministry; and therefore it is said, Rev. xix. 10, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' It is not only the beauty, but the life of any dispensation. I know many think this needless, for, as I said before, the indistinct and undue preaching of Christ is the cause of all the looseness and vanity into which religion is degenerated. Ay! but I add here, that this dispensation is still needful. The foolish world is apt to fly into extremes; some are all for doctrines of Christ, others will hear nothing of him, because these sweet truths have been so much misapplied. Popery got up by this pretence; they would not open that gap of free grace to the people. Paul would preach the righteousness of Christ though many did abuse it: Rom. iii. 8, 'Some slanderously report that we say, Let us do evil that good may come thereof; whose damnation is just.' The meaning is, some gave out that Paul taught that they might sin freely, that God might have the more glory in pardoning; which is expressed there by doing evil that good may come of it. Now, saith the apostle, their damnation is just, that is, if they undo themselves with such a vile conceit, they may thank themselves; they never learned it from me. If poison be sucked out of the flower, thank the spider; and if precious liquor be soured, it is because of the uncleanness of the vessel. Musculus in one of his books had said, that no places were so profane and irreligious as those where the gospel had been preached, or words to that effect. And Contzen, a Jesuit, crieth out upon this, *hi sunt evangelici doctores*—see the fruit of Protestantism and gospel-preaching.¹ Many are of his spirit, malign and slander a gospel dispensation. Alas! we are not in the place of God, to prevent misapprehensions; it is our duty to keep this truth fresh in the thoughts, to offer it as a bundle of myrrh to the spouse's bosom.

2. Humbling doctrines must be duly pressed. John the Baptist

¹ Adam Contzen in Mat. xxiv. 5.

levelled mountains, and in his days much violence was offered to the kingdom, Mat. xi. 12; and indeed, still John must go before Jesus, like the day-star before the sun. Moses led the people in the wilderness, before Joshua led them into the land of Canaan. We must awaken first by a sense of wrath, or else they will not care for a sight of mercy. The people did not desire a mediator till they heard the thundering, Exod. xx. 18, 19; and it is God's usual method to suffer us to be dead to one law, ere we are alive to another, Gal. ii. 19; first to make us understand the severe obligation that is upon us by the covenant of works, ere we are brought into a better hope by Jesus Christ. God is never truly exalted in the soul till man be humbled; Dagon must fall and be broken if the ark be set up. The Lord diggeth deep when he meaneth to raise the building high, and when he will bring off the soul to Christ powerfully, he bringeth them out of themselves by godly sorrow. This is the drift and scope of the whole scriptures, and therefore I use the less of argument in this matter.

3. Among other parts of godliness, it seemeth to be most necessary now to press the duties of relations. I say, to press Christians to carry themselves holily in their civil relations. No way provideth for the discharge of the duties of relations so much as Christianity or religion; and none have failed in them so much as religious persons of late, so that a great deal of dishonour hath come to God, and a great deal of prejudice to religion, by our unworthy walking in our civil relations. The gospel or law of Christ requireth that these civil respects which we owe to men should be discharged as in and to the Lord, and that we should turn duties of the second table into duties of the first; that is, perform civil respects upon a religious ground, so that it hath been the glory and honour of religion heretofore to yield the best children, the best subjects, the best kings, the best husbands and wives in the world. Therefore Augustine maketh a challenge to all the world, *dent exercitum talem qualem doctrina Christi milites esse jussit*,¹—let all the world, saith he, yield such children, such subjects, such soldiers, such servants, such an army, such provincials, judges, kings; such faithful ones, when they have been intrusted with the public monies. But alas! the case is quite otherwise. Of late, none worse than they, none more apt to dishonour God in relations, to disturb civil peace, to resist magistracy upon every dissatisfaction, and to make every discontent the ground of commotion and disobedience. Therefore to teach men to improve their relations for the glory of God and good of religion must needs be seasonable, that, if it be possible, we may repair that incomparable loss which religion hath sustained this way.

4. Learn that holy art of compounding peace with purity, that neither may lose its due respect, that we may neither hazard religion by silence nor eager contention. Holiness and peace are daughters of the same Spirit, and may be reconciled. You find them often coupled in scripture: James iii. 17, 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure, and then peaceable.' Purity must have the precedence in your endeavours, but peaceableness must not altogether be shut out. So

¹ 'Dent exercitum talem qualem doctrina Christi milites esse jussit, tales provinciales, tales parentes, tales dominos, tales filios, tales servos, tales reges, tales judices, tales denique debitorum redditores, et exactores ipsius fisci,' &c.—*Aug. ad Marc. cp. 5.*

Mark ix. 30. 'Have salt in yourselves and peace one with another.' Salt and peace; be savoury, but not too tart and austere. I will not direct my brethren, I do only suggest it.

Thirdly, One word now to the magistrate, and I have done. Oh! consider, this matter appertaineth to you, 'to strengthen things that are ready to die,' to repair decayed godliness; this challengeth a chief care; yea, the first place in your debates, as in the commandments spiritual duties have the precedency of moral. In the name of Christ, then, let me beseech you:—

1. To be holy and godly in your own persons. Oh! how sad will it be for your souls in the day of the Lord, if you should be employed in the reformation of others, and not be reformed yourselves; that you should be like Noah's shipwrights, that frame an ark for others, and perish in the waters yourselves; or like the Jews, that directed the wise men to Bethlehem, but went not themselves thither to worship Christ. Oh! consider, you are the first sheets of the kingdom; others are printed after your copy. If the first sheet be well set, a thousand more are stamped with ease. See then that the power of religion prevail over your own souls, that, after you have done good to others, you may not be cast away. How can men think that you are sincere in establishing of religion, if it hath made no impression on your own hearts? Scandalous ministers and wicked magistrates do but pull down with one hand what they set up with the other.

2. If you would repair religion, and promote godliness, give encouragement to a godly ministry. You see, when Christ writeth to the church to repair godliness, he directeth it to the angel. Oh! let there be an angel in every church. Christ's strength lieth in his mouth, Isa. xlix. 2; that is the sword by which he overcometh the world. It is the weapon he useth against Antichrist, the spirit of his mouth, 2 Thes. ii. 11. As Gideon overcame the Midianites by lamps and pitchers, so doth Christ by lamps and pitchers; and therefore the apostle calleth it light, or treasure, in an earthen vessel. Oh! then maintain the lamps, that they may be a means in the hand of God of maintaining godliness in the kingdom. Let there be, as I said, an angel in every church, a light in every socket, a star in every orb. If you look abroad you will find many continued through favour and mediation of friends, *qui nihil habent in vita angelicum, aut in doctrina evangelicum*,¹ that have nothing angelical in their life, or evangelical in their doctrine.

3. Heartily establish a holy government in the church. Order and discipline is the fence of religion, and a church well-governed is 'terrible as an army with banners,' Cant. vi. 4; that is, full of beauty and strength. Armies ordered are comely and in a capacity to fight. The present decays are by confusion. It is said, Ps. lxxviii. 35, 'Thou art terrible out of thy holy places.' In the order and beauty of the church, God is most terrible. When worship is pure and regular, it impresseth a dread and a reverence upon men.

4. Countenance godly persons. They are a kingdom's best security, Zech. xii. 5; 'And the governors of Judah shall say in their hearts, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the Lord of hosts,

¹ Brightman *in loc.*

their God.' Mark, you should call them your strength; they engage a blessing. When Lot was in Sodom, Sodom was in lot. This is one of your chief duties, to see that godliness live peaceably. We are bound to pray for you upon this ground: 'Pray for them that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,' 1 Tim. ii. 4. Oh! look to it, then, that religion may have a quiet abode, or else you will not.

5. Honour and sweeten religion by some release of the people's burdens. Belly arguments do work much upon them: Jer. xlv. 17, 'We will burn incense to the queen of heaven, for then we had plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.' They measure religion by their outward concernments, and judge of ways by their burdens and troubles. The oppression of some Protestant princes in Germany was a scandal to the Reformation. Nothing stirreth up vulgar hatred and introduceth violent changes so much as this. The people are like the reed of Egypt; if we lean too hard, they do not support, but pierce; and oppression is like an iron in the fire, it will burn their fingers that hold it. I confess this is somewhat out of my way, therefore I was the more loath to speak in it; but it being for religion's sake, I hope you will pardon a humble motion.

I shall but hint two motives to set on all, and conclude.

1. Is that in the 3d verse of this chapter: 'Lest I come as a thief.' Oh! consider Christ may steal upon you. When he taketh off his restraint from a people, and they break out into tumults, it is a shrewd sign. You know what faction was ruined by tumults; it is an unhappy presage.

2. The next is taken from the 4th verse: 'Thou hast a few names that have not defiled their garments.' God taketh notice of those few names that are zealous for him in dead times, that mind the advancement of piety whilst others debase it; they 'shall walk with me in white.' Either God will provide an ark of safety for you for the present, or give you heaven, which shall make amends for all.
