

SERMON XXIX.*

HUMAN POWER DEFEATED.

The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands.—Psal. lxxvi. 5.

THE common circumstances of this psalm, concerning the penman, title, and the like, I shall not at all inquire after. The time of its being given to the church is alone to us considerable; and yet all the knowledge thereof also is but conjectural. What particular time it was wherein it was given, we know not; but that it was given for the use of all times, that we know. Probable it is, from ver. 3. that it was established as a monument of praise in the days of Hezekiah, when by the immediate hand of God, Jerusalem was delivered from the army of Sennacherib. For a return of which mercy, though good Hezekiah came short of the obligation laid on him, rendering not again according to the benefit done unto him; yet the Lord himself takes care for his own glory, setting forth this psalm as a monument of the praise due to his name unto all generations.

The deliverance of Jerusalem then from so great ruin, as that impending over it from the threatening army of Sennacherib under their walls, being the occasion of penning this psalm, it cannot but yield us a meet foundation of making mention of the name of the Lord in a suitable work this day.

In general, the whole is eucharistical, and hath two parts: First, Narratory, concerning the work of God for his people. Secondly, Laudatory, or the praise of his people for those works.

The first part, hath three particulars:

1. An exordium, by way of exultation and rejoicing, ver. 1, 2.

* Upon the defeat of the Levellers at Burford, May 13, 1642. This sermon was preached before the Parliament, June 7, following, as appears by Whitlock's Memoirs, fol. 321 col. 2.

2. A special narration of the work of God, for which the praise of the whole is intended, ver. 3. 5, 6.

3. An apostrophe to the Lord concerning the one, and the other, ver. 4.

The latter containeth,

1. A doctrinal observation for the use of the church from the whole, ver. 7.

2. The reasons and confirmation of the doctrine so laid down, taken from the power and righteousness of God in the actions recounted, ver. 8, 9.

3. A threefold use of the doctrine so confirmed. Of instruction, ver. 10. Of exhortation, ver. 11. Of establishment and consolation, ver. 12.

The particulars preceding my text I shall a little touch upon, that the mind of the Holy Ghost therein may be the more clear unto you, and the doctrine from thence appear with the greater evidence.

1. In the exordium, ver. 1, 2. you have two things: (1.) The names of the place wherein the work mentioned was wrought, and the praise returned held forth; and these are Judah, Israel, Salem, Zion. (2.) The relation of God unto this place, which lies at the bottom of the work he did for them, and the praise they returned unto him. He was known, his name was great amongst them; there was his tabernacle and his dwelling-place, which may be referred to two heads; the knowledge of his will, ver. 1. and the establishment of his worship, ver. 2.

(1.) For the description of the place, by its several names and titles, I shall not insist upon it; they are all but various expressions of the same thing. It is the church of God that is adorned with all these titles, and names of singular endearment. Judah, that single tribe of which the Messiah was to come; Israel, a prevailing people, the posterity of him that prevailed with God; Salem, the place he chose above all the places of the earth to settle his name therein; and Zion, the choice ornament of that Salem, a model wherein the beauty and excellency of all the other are contracted; whose gates were then so dear unto the Lord. Or perhaps, you have the distribution of the whole into its several parts; Judah, the governing tribe; Israel, the body of the people; Salem, the chief place of their residence and glory; and

Zion, the presence of God in his worship amongst them all. Now the mention of these titles of the church, so dear to the Lord, doth front the following narration, to afford us this observation.

Observation. The care of Salem, of Zion, lies at the bottom of all God's powerful actings and workings among the sons of men. Every mighty work of God throughout the world, may be prefaced with these two verses. The whole course of affairs in the world, is steered by providence in reference to the good of Salem; Zion hath been the rise and downfall of all the powers of the world; it is her deliverance or trial that is intended in their raising, and her recompense and vengeance in their ruin. God works not among the nations for their own sakes. When they are sifted with a sieve, they are but the chaff, Israel is the corn, for whose sake it is done, whereof not the least grain shall fall to the ground; Amos ix. 9. 'She is precious in God's sight and honourable; he loved her; therefore he giveth men for her and people for her life;' Isa. xliii. 4. The men of the world are very apt to pride themselves in their thoughts, as though great were their share and interest in the glorious things that God is accomplishing; like a fly that sat on the chariot wheel, and cried, What a dust have I raised round about? The truth is, their names are written in the dust, and they are of no account in the eyes of the Lord in all he is accomplishing, but only to exalt his name in their miscarriage and destruction. Was it not in the thoughts of some lately amongst us, that their right hand had accomplished the work of the Lord, and that the end of it must be the satisfaction of their lusts? And hath not the Lord declared, that they have neither part nor lot in this matter? It was Salem, not self; Zion, not Babylon, or confusion, that lay at the bottom of the whole.

(2.) There is a relation of God unto this place. His will was known there, ver. 1. and his worship was established, ver. 2. And these also have their particular mention.

Observation. In the deliverance of his people, God hath a special regard to the honour of his ordinances. Why so great things for Salem? Why there his word is preached, whereby his will is known, and his name made great; there

his tabernacle is fixed, and his dwelling-place established; there he gives his presence in his worship and ordinances, wherein he is delighted. 'Because of thy temple at Jerusalem, shall kings bring presents to thee;' Psal. lxxviii. 29. Here is the temple, Christ; and then the worship of Christ; for their sake it shall be done. When vengeance is recompensed upon an opposing people, it is the vengeance of the temple; Jer. l. 28. And it is a voice from thence that rendereth recompense to his enemies; Isa. lxvi. 6. The great work which the Lord at this day is accomplishing in the world, looks fully on this one thing. Wherefore is it that God shaketh the powers of this world, and causeth the towers to totter which they uphold? Is it not that the way of his worship may be vindicated from all their abominations, and vengeance taken upon them for their opposition thereunto? And there is no greater sign of God's care for a people, than when he shews a regard to his ordinances among that people. The defence he gives, is of the glory of the assemblies of mount Zion; Isa. iv. 5. When the ark departs, you may call the children Ichabod. The taking away of his candlestick, the removal of his glory from the temple, is an assured prologue to the utter ruin of a people.

And hath not the Lord had a special eye this way in the late deliverance? It is his promise, that he will purge the rebels from amongst his people. And he hath done it. Were there not children of Edom amongst them, who cried, Down with them, down with them even to the ground? Hath not God magnified his despised word above all his name? Was it not as an offscouring to many particular persons amongst them in the late murmuring for pre-eminence, against those whom the Lord hath chosen? Who I suppose have no other joy in their employment, than Moses had in his; who once desired the Lord to slay him, that he might be freed from his burden; only the will of the Lord, and the good of a poor thankless people swayed their hearts unto it. And were there here any more discriminating rods cast in before the Lord, to have that bud and spring which he owned, as Num. xvii. than this one; Scripture, or no Scripture; solemn worship, or none at all? I speak only as to some particulars, and that I can upon my own experience. The Lord

give their hearts a free discovery of his thoughts in this business. Doubtless he hath had respect to his tabernacle and dwelling-place. For my part, they are to me as the Theban-shield; and notwithstanding all my pressures, I would labour to say as Mephibosheth, ‘Let all go, since I see the king in peace.’

I might farther observe from both these things together, that among the people of God alone is the residence of his glorious presence. This song is held out from Zion: ‘In his temple doth every one speak of his glory;’ Psal. xxix. 9. ‘Bless ye God in the congregation, the Lord from the fountain of Israel;’ Psal. lxxviii. 26. ‘Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion;’ Psal. lxxv. 1. ‘As a lame leg, and as a thorn in the hand,’ ungraceful, painful; ‘so is a parable in the mouth of fools;’ Prov. xxvi. 7. 9. It is the saints who are bid to be joyful in the Lord, and ‘the high praise of God must be in their mouths;’ Psal. cxlix. 5, 6. They are high things, that beseem only those whom God doth magnify. If the Lord give us matter of praise, pray know from whom it will be acceptable, whose praises they are he delighteth to inhabit. If you have some defiled lust, the sunshine of mercies will exhale nothing but the offensive steam of carnal affections. The sacrifices of wicked hearts are an abomination to the Lord. If your fleshly affections work this day without the beatings of a pure heart, and the language of a pure lip, the Lord will reject your oblations. Would you have your praise as sweet to the Lord, as a mercy is to you; be assured that in Christ you are the Israel of God, and your prayers shall prevail, your praise shall be accepted.

2. The second particular, as I observed, is a special narration of the works of God, for which the whole is intended, ver. 3—6. And therein you have these two things: (1.) The place where these acts were wrought, and are remembered, ‘there,’ ver. 3. (2.) The acts themselves related, which refer, [1.] To God the worker, ver. 3. ‘He brake;’ [2.] To the persons on whom they were wrought, ver. 5, 6.

(1.) The place where these things were acted, and the monuments of them erected, that is, ‘there;’ there in Salem and Zion, Judah and Israel: there, not so much in those places, as with reference unto them.

Observation. All the mighty actings of God regard his

church, and there are the monuments and trophies of his victories against his enemies erected. To the first part of this, I spake before. A word for the latter. God decketh and maketh Zion glorious with the spoils of his adversaries. There the glory of Pharaoh and all his host, drowned in the Red sea, is dedicated ; *Exod. xv.* There are the shields of all the mighty men in the host of Sennacherib, slain by an angel, hung up ; *Isa. xxxvii. 35, 36.* There is the honour, the robes, the crown, and the reason of Nebuchadnezzar laid up for the glory of Zion, *Dan. iv. 33, 34.* himself being changed into a beast. There is all the pomp and glory of Herod deposited, *Acts xii. 23.* when, as a reward of his pride and persecution, he was devoured of worms. There is the glory of all persecutors, with the blood of Julian in a special manner, who threw it into the air, and cried, ‘*Vicisti Galilæe.*’ There Haman is visibly exalted upon the gallows by himself erected for the ruin of a prince of the people ; *Esth. vii. 10.* There the peace and the joy of the church, their choice frame under the bloody massacres of the inhabitants of Zion, is set to show, for the glory of it. There are all the rochets of popish prelates, the crowns, and glory, and thrones of the kings of the earth, all set apart, as monuments and trophies of God’s victories in Zion. There is a place reserved for the man of sin, and all the kings of the earth who have committed fornication with the mother of harlots, whose destruction sleepeth not. God will at length certainly glorify Salem with the arrow of the bow, the shield, the sword, and all spoils of its oppressors.

(2.) There is what he did describe, both immediately in the actions themselves, *ver. 3.* and with reference to the persons towards whom he so acted, *ver. 5.* Now because the former is fully contained in the latter, I shall not handle it apart, but descend immediately to the consideration of the words of my text, being a declaration of what the Lord hath done for his people in the day of their distress, with particular reference to the cause of that distress.

And here we shall look a little,

1. To the reading of the words : and
2. To their explication.

1. To the reading. The ‘*stout-hearted ;*’ or, the ‘*strong in heart,*’ the ‘*mighty in heart :*’ so in the original. Men of stout,

stubborn, unpersuadable hearts and courage, whose epithet is, 'That they are far from righteousness;' Isa. xlv. 12. The Septuagint have rendered it, ἀσύνετοι τῇ καρδίᾳ, 'the foolish in heart.' Stubborn-hearted men are foolish-hearted men : not to yield unto, is worse than not to understand, what is good. They 'are spoiled, אֶשְׁתַּלְּלוּ have yielded themselves to the spoil : ' so properly, and so rendered by most interpreters; which sense I shall follow. 'They have slept their sleep,' נָמְנוּ 'dormitarunt,' 'they have slumbered their sleep.' What it is 'to slumber a sleep' we shall see afterward. The residue of the words are literally rendered, save only in the placing of the negation; for whereas we set it on the persons, 'none of the men;' in the original it is upon the act, 'have not found,' affirming concerning the persons, 'all the men of might have not,' that is, 'none of the men of might have;' a very frequent Hebraism, imitated by John; 1 Epist. iii. 15. πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν, 'Every man-slayer hath not life,' i. e. 'none hath.' And so you have the words: 'The stout of heart have yielded themselves to the spoils, they have slumbered their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands.'

2. The words thus read contain three general heads.

(1.) A twofold description of the enemies of Salem.

[1.] In respect of their internal affections: they were 'stout of heart,' men of high spirit, and haughty courage, 'cedere nescientes,' not knowing how to yield to any thing but the dictates of their own proud spirits.

[2.] In respect of their power for outward acting, 'Men of might,' strong of hand, as well as stout of heart. Courage without strength will but betray its possessor, and strength without courage is but 'inutile pondus,' a burdensome nothing; but when both meet, a stout heart and strong hands, who shall stand before them? Thus you have the enemies set out like Goliath with his spear and helmet, defying the host of the living God.

(2.) You have a twofold issue of God's providence, in dealing with them suitably to this their double qualification.

[1.] He opposeth himself to the stoutness of their hearts, and they 'yield themselves to the spoil.' Where observe, first, the act itself: they 'yield themselves.' Nothing in the world so contrary to a stout heart, as to yield itself. To

yield, is a thing of the greatest distance and contrariety to the principle of a stout heart, in the world. It is far more reconcileable to death, than yielding. But this God will effect. Secondly, The extent of this yielding: it was 'to the spoil.' This exceedingly heightens the mighty working of the Lord against them. Should they be brought to yield to reason, persuasion, and union, it were well; but that they should be so prevailed on as to yield to the spoil, that is, to the mercy of those against whom they rose and opposed themselves, this is 'digitus Dei.'

[2.] He opposeth himself to their actual might: they 'found not their hands.' Hands are the instruments of acting the heart's resolution. The strength and power of a man is in his hands; if they be gone, all his hope is gone. If a man's sword be taken from him, he will do what he can with his hands; but if his hands be gone, he may go to sleep for any disturbance he will work. For men not to find their hands, is not to have that power for the execution of their designs which formerly they had. In former days they had hands, power for doing great things; but now, when they should use them against Salem, they could not find them. And why so? God had taken them away; God took away their power, their strength departed from them. Samson found not his strength, when his locks were cut; though he thought to do as at other times, yet he was deceived and taken. When God takes away men's power, they go forth, and think to do as in former days; but when they come to exercise it, all is gone; their hands are laid out of the way, in allusion to one that seeketh.

(3.) There is the total issue of this whole dispensation, placed in the midst of both, as arising from both: 'they have slumbered their sleep.' When their hearts yielded, and their hands were lost, courage and power both taken away, what else should they do? Some take this for an expression of death, as it is sometimes used; Psal. xiii. 3. 'Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.' I rather conceive it to hold out that condition, which God threateneth to bring upon the enemies of his people, when he sends them 'a spirit of slumber;' Rom. xi. 8. Now in such a condition two things are eminent:

[1.] Its weakness. A condition of slumber and sleep is a

weak condition. A sleeping man is able to do nothing. Jael can destroy a drowsy Sisera.

[2.] Its vanity. Men in their sleep are apt to have foolish, vain fancies. This then is that which the Lord holds out concerning the enemies of his church, his people, his ways, when their hearts are gone, and their hands gone. They shall be brought to a condition of weakness in respect of others, they shall not be able to beat them: and of vanity in themselves, they shall feed themselves with vain thoughts, like the dream of a hungry man, Isa. xxix. 8. ‘He dreameth, and behold he eateth; he waketh, and behold he is empty.’ They please themselves for a little season with strong apprehensions of the accomplishment of their heart’s lusts, and cobweb fancies; but the issue is shame and disappointment.

The words being opened, will yield us these three observations :

I. Men of stout hearts and strong hands, of courage and power, are often engaged against the Lord.

II. God suits the workings of providence for deliverance to the qualifications and actings of his opposers; their stout heart shall yield, their strong hands be lost.

III. Though men have courage, might, and success; yet when they engage themselves against the Lord, weakness and vanity shall be the issue thereof.

In the brief handling whereof I hope you shall find the word of God, and the works of God, exceedingly suited.

I. Men of courage, power, and success, of eminent qualifications, are oftentimes engaged against the Lord, and the ways of the Lord.

I shall multiply neither testimonies nor instances of this truth; for that were but to set up a candle in the sun: the experience of all ages has made it good. One or two places may suffice: Psal. lxxviii. 30. ‘Rebuke the company of spear men, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people.’ There are not only ‘calves of the people,’ easily deluded, sottish men, but also multitudes of ‘bulls,’ heady, high-minded, bearing down all before them, throwing up all bounds and fences, laying all common to their lusts, not easily to be resisted; these also are amongst the adversaries of the ways of the Lord. The first open opposers of the

ways of God, were ‘giants,’ ‘mighty men,’ and ‘men of renown;’ Gen. vi. 4. At once ‘two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, and men of renown,’ joined themselves in rebellion against the Lord; Numb. xvi. 2. And that,

1. Because these very qualifications of a stout heart, strong hands, and former success are apt of themselves, if destitute of directing light and humbling grace, to puff up the spirits of men, and to engage them in ways of their own, contrary to the mind of the Lord. When men take advice of their stout hearts, strong hands, and former success, they are very evil counsellors. When Jeremiah advised the Jews from the Lord for their good, the proud men answered, they would not obey; Jer. xliii. 2. When Pharaoh is made stout for his ruin, he cries, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should hear him?’ Exod. v. 2. And for success, God makes the Assyrian the rod of his anger, sends him against the people of his wrath, with charge ‘to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets;’ Isa. x. 6. He goeth accordingly and prospereth; but when he hath so done, see what a conclusion he makes. He goes against Jerusalem, and cries, ‘Let not your God deceive you. Have the gods of the nations delivered them;’ and do you think so to be? Isa. xxxvii. 10. 12. From the success he had from God, he concluded the success he should have against him. Like those of late amongst ourselves, who having been partners with others in former successes, whilst they went upon the command of God, doubtless received in their stout hearts establishment, and strengthening to other undertakings, as if the God of the parliament could not help. Amaziah, king of Judah, wages war with Edom, and they are destroyed before him; 2 Kings xiv. 7. The war was of the Lord. Upon this he is lifted up, and causelessly provoketh Jehoash, king of Israel, ver. 8. against the mind and will of God. Jehoash sends him word, that if the thistle pride itself against the cedar, the wild beast will tread it down, ver. 9. But he had former success, and on he will go to his ruin. The stout-hearted men (for a delivery from whose fury and folly, we desire this day to lift up the name of the Lord) having received help and assistance against Edom, will needs lift up the thistle against the cedar, act

out of their own sphere, turn subjection into dominion, to their shame and sorrow. But it were better, their hearts should be filled with sorrow than the nation, and especially the people of God in the nation, with blood and confusion, ending in bondage and tyranny. And this is the first account of it, why men of such qualifications, are engaged against the Lord. The qualifications themselves do set up for it, if destitute of divine light and humbling grace. Such men will run upon God, and the thick bosses of his buckler.

2. God will have it so, that the greater may be his glory in the powerful protection and defence of his own, with the destruction, disappointment, and ruin, of their enemies. If his enemies were all sottish, weak, foolish, childish, until he makes them so, where would be the praise of his great name? When would there be ‘*Nodus Deo vindice dignus*,’ work worthy of the appearance of the Most High? But when there is a great mountain before Zerubbabel, Zech. iv. 7. a high, haughty, oppressing empire, to level that to a plain is glorious. When God will get himself a name, he raises up, not a poor, effeminate Sardanapalus, a poor sensual, hypocritical wretch, as some have been, the Lord will not make an open contest by such a one (such as some of our sore oppressors have been), but he will raise up a Pharaoh, a crooked Leviathan, a stout-hearted, cunning-headed, strong-handed oppressor; and he tells him, such a one as he, ‘for this very cause have I raised thee up, to shew in thee my power, and that my name may be declared in all the earth;’ Exod. ix. 16. Thou art a fit subject, saith he, for me to exalt my glory in thy ruin. The beast is to make war with the Lamb; and he shall not do it alone, God will give him in assistance. And who shall these be? Women, and children, and weak ones? No; he will put it into the heart of the kings of the earth ‘to give their power and strength to the beast,’ Rev. xvii. 17. to break them in pieces. This will be glory indeed. All the opposers which formerly have risen, or at least most of them, have had the power to that height, as they have been exceedingly above all outwardly appearing means of being resisted. The breaking of the old monarchies, and of papal power, is a work meet for the Lord. And in this shall mainly consist the promised glory of the church of Christ in after

days, whose morning star I doubt not, is now upon us; the Lord will more immediately and visibly break the high, stout, haughty ones of the earth, for the sake of his people, than in former times. Look upon all the glorious things that are spoken concerning Zion in the latter days, and you shall find them all interwoven with this still, ‘the shaking of heaven, the casting down of thrones and dominions, and mighty ones.’ I mention this, because indeed I look upon this late mercy, as the after-drops of a former refreshing shower, as an appendix of good-will, for the confirming the former work which God had wrought. ‘Though,’ saith he, ‘ye have lain among the pots,’ have been in a poor, defiled condition, a condition of bondage; ‘yet ye shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold,’ ye shall be made exceeding glorious. But how, or when shall this be? Why, ‘when the Almighty scattereth kings for her sake, then shall she be as white as snow in Salmon;’ Psal. lxxviii. 13, 14. When God by his almighty power takes away so great opposers, then glory and beauty shall arise upon you. And this in some degree lies also at the bottom of the late dispensation of providence. Men’s hearts were full of fear of a storm; yea, a storm was necessary, that some evidence might be given of the Lord’s continuing his presence amongst you; that if hereafter we be forsaken, it may appear that it was for our own unbelief, unthankfulness, and folly, and not for doing the work of the Lord. Now, how was this expected? Why, this poor people, or that, unacquainted with the things of their peace, will rise and make opposition: no, saith the Lord, you shall not have so easy a trial; you shall have men of stout hearts, and strong hands, with many former successes on their shoulders; that when deliverance is given in, my name may be glorious indeed.

Use 1. Be not moved at the most formidable enemies that may arise against you in the ways of God. ‘It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind;’ Isa. vii. 2. When strong combinations arise, how apt are we to shake and tremble before them; especially when they have some strangeness, as well as strength? That Syria

should come against Judah is no wonder. But what, I pray, makes Ephraim too, their brother and fellow in former afflictions? Besides, Syria and Ephraim were always at a mortal difference among themselves. But they who agree in nothing else, usually consent in opposition to the ways of God. Then you shall have Edom, Ammon, Amalek, and Ashur altogether of one mind; Psal. lxxxiii. 6—8. And the kings of the west, that perpetually devour one another, yet have one mind in exalting the beast, and opposing the Lamb; Rev. xvii. 14. As in our late troubles, there was a concurrence not only in the main of Syria and Ephraim, the two grand extremes, but also of innumerable particular fancies and designs; that if a man should have met them, like him in the fable, the lion, the ass, and the fox, he could not but wonder, ‘*Quo iter una facerent,*’ whither they were travelling together. But I say, when such combinations are made, how apt are we to shake and tremble? They are stout men, valiant men, and perhaps Ahithophel is with them. Why, if they were not such, I pray, how should the Lord have any praise in the close of the dispensation? We would be delivered, but we care not that God should be glorified. If God’s glory were dear to us, we should not care how high opposition did arise. Precious faith, where art thou fled? Had we but some few grains of it, we might see the rising of the greatest mountains to be but a means to make the name of God glorious, by removing them into the midst of the sea. Hath it not been thus in the days of old? The Lord humble us for our unbelief.

Use 2. Let men to whom the Lord hath given stout hearts, strong hands, and great success, watch carefully over their own spirits, lest they be led aside into any way against the mind of God. Great endowments are oftentimes great temptations. ‘The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the rock, whose habitation is on high, that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?’ Obad. ver. 3. Was it not the ruin of Amaziah, of whom notwithstanding it was said, ‘he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord?’ 2 Chron. xxv. 2. He who is heightened against the king of terrors, if he hath not humility, one of the chief of graces, will quickly choose himself paths of his own. Alas! poor creatures, if hearts and

hands be, and God be not, what will it avail? But of this afterward. I now proceed to the second observation.

II. God suits the workings and actings of providence for deliverance to the qualifications of the opposers.

Are they stout hearts? They shall be made to yield themselves. Are they men of might? They shall lose their power; they shall not find their hands. To this I shall speak very little. This is the cutting off of Adonibezek's toes and thumbs. God countermines them in their actings, and blows them up in their own mine. 'In the thing wherein they deal proudly, he is above them;' Exod. xviii. 11. They shall not soar so high on the wings of their pride, but that still they shall find God uppermost. When they take counsel, and think to carry it by their advices, God saith, 'I am wise also, and will bring evil;' Isa. xxxi. 2. When they think to carry it by a high hand, his strength shall appear against them. When Herod owns the blasphemy of being called a god, he shall rot and be eaten of worms; Acts xii. 23. Pharaoh cries, 'Come on, let us deal wisely against Israel;' Exod. i. 10. He of all men shall play the fool, for his own ruin, and the ruin of his people; Exod. xiv. 27, 28. If Sennacherib boasts of his mighty host, be sure he shall not find his hands. How evidently hath the Lord thus carried on his providence in the late dispensation? Were not many of the headless, heady undertakers, '*robusti animo*,' mighty of heart? And were they not forced to yield themselves? Yea, to 'yield themselves to the spoil?' Were they not deep in their plotting? Doubtless they, or their seducers, had digged deep to lay their design; though of the generality of them, it cannot be said, as was of Cæsar and his companions, '*accessere sobrii ad perdendum rempublicam*.' They were brought to act things in very folly and confusion. They were great men of might; whence is it, they made no more opposition? The Lord laid their hands out of the way. Many reasons might be given of this, but I must pass to the last point.

III. Though men have courage, might, and former successes to accompany them, yet, when they engage themselves against the Lord, or any way of his, vanity, weakness, and disappointment will be the issue thereof.

'Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with you?' saith the Lord: Ezek.

xxii. 14. 'Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth; woe unto him that contendeth with his Maker;' Isa. xlv. 9. 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?' Job ix. 4. 'The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought, but the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; he maketh the devices of the people of none effect;' Psal. xxxiii. 10, 11. Whoever riseth up without him, or against him, shall fall and come to nothing. This is a plain point, that we suppose ourselves exceedingly well versed in. But he who searcheth our spirits, and is acquainted with our inward parts, knows how great is our unbelief in this very thing. And therefore, in tender condescension, he hath carefully provided for our support herein. A man would think one word once spoken were enough to convince and persuade the whole world of this truth; but the Lord knows, there must be line upon line, here a little and there a little, to give his own people any establishment herein. And therefore it is, that in so many places in his word he hath asserted and affirmed this one thing, viz. Let men be never so strong, powerful, and successful, if once they engage against him, they are utterly destroyed, unless he pluck them out of the snare. 'Associate yourselves,' &c. Isa. viii. 9.

But you will say, Engage against the Lord! That is true; whoever engageth against him, shall surely fall. But who is so mad as to do so? Very Rabshakeh himself affirms that he came not up to Jerusalem without the Lord, but that the Lord sent him to go up against the land to destroy it; Isa. xxxvi. 10. It is true he said so: and by this observation you have an answer to the Scripture. For though he said so, he lied before the Lord, and belied the Lord; his undertaking was against the Lord, and against his mind, as the sequel fully manifested. Many suppose they engage for God, when they engage against him. To engage against the Lord, is to engage against his mind and will. To undertake without the will of God, is enough to be the ruin of the best and stoutest, as we see in the case of Josiah. But to engage against him, who can do it, and stand when he is provoked? This then is that which neither stout hearts nor strong hands shall ever be able to go through withal. For instance; to engage against that authority which God will

own and defend, is successlessly to engage against the Lord. Now because these are the days wherein the Lord will shake heaven and earth, beat the nations with a rod of iron, breaking much of the power of the world; it may be asked by some, How it shall be known, that any authority is such as the Lord will not destroy and overturn, but own it as a way of his own? I answer; to omit the rule of reason, law, and common established principles amongst men, all which give a great light unto the rule of walking in this case; I shall give you six scriptural significations 'a posteriori' of such an authority, as the Lord will make as a brazen wall, or a rock in the sea, against which the waves dash with noise and fury, but are themselves broken to pieces.

1. If it be such as the Lord hath honoured with success and protection in great, hazardous and difficult undertakings for himself. Thus was it with Moses. Never had a leader of a people more murmurings, revilings, and rebellions against him. The story is obvious unto all. He was envied, hated, reproached of all sorts, from the princes of the congregation to the mixed multitude. But Moses had travelled through the sea and the desert with the Lord, and was encompassed with success and protection; and therefore, all attempts against him shall be birthless and fruitless. This is one; but it will never do alone, unless conjoined with those that follow.

2. If the persons enjoying that authority abide to act for God, and not for themselves, after such success and protection. Saul began to act for God, and he vexed all his enemies which way soever he turned himself. But afterward turning to himself, God left him to himself. Cyrus, how honoured, how anointed was he for his great undertaking against Babylon! But afterward pursuing his own ambition, he was requited with blood, for the blood he sought. The Lord is with them that are with him, and whilst they are so. The establishment of the house of Saul is far from the Lord: for 'those that honour him, he will honour; and they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed;' 1 Sam. ii. 30. There is no more certain sign in the world of persons devoted to ruin, or at least to their being divested of their authority, than that having followed God for a season in their enjoyment of success and protection, they turn aside

to pursue their own ends, like Jehu. I could give you an example of this, as yet not much above half a year old. But when men undertake with the Lord, and for him, and having known his assistance therein, shall continue to lay out themselves in his ways; the Lord will then build them a house like David, which shall not be prevailed against.

Here I must give one caution by the way; that I am very far from countenancing any to move against the just and righteous authority, who discern not these things: the Lord forbid. Let men look to the rule of their obedience, which I have nothing to do withal at this time. I only describe such, as unto whom, if any dare to make opposition in an ordinary dispensation of providence, it will prove fruitless and vain.

3. The third thing is, that they subject their power to the power of the Lord Christ, who is Lord of lords, and King of kings. The psalmist tells the rulers of the earth, that the reason of their spoiling is, that they do not 'kiss the Son,' Psal. ii. 12. or yield unfeigned obedience to the mighty King, whom God hath set on his holy hill. God hath promised that he will give in the service of kings and nations to Christ in his kingdom, and therein shall be their security. When God puts it into the hearts of rulers, to rule according to the interest of Christ and his gospel, and to seek the advancement of his sceptre, they shall surely be as a fenced wall. I cannot stay to shew, what this interest of Christ is. In a word, it is the ordering, framing, carrying on of affairs, as is most conducive to the unravelling and destruction of the mystery of iniquity.

4. If they are supported by the prayer of a chosen people who seek their welfare, not for their own interest and advantage, but for the advantage of the gospel, and the ways of Christ by them asserted. If God's own people pray for them in authority, that under them they may enjoy some share of their own, and obtain some ends suited to any carnal interest of theirs, God will reject those prayers. But when they seek their welfare, because it is discovered to them, that in their peace the gospel shall have peace and prosperity; surely the Lord will not cast out their prayers, nor shame the face of his poor supplicants.

5. If in sincerity, and with courage and zeal, they fulfil

the work of their magistracy, in the administration of righteous judgment; especially in those great and unusual acts of justice, in breaking the jaws of the wicked and terrible, and delivering the spoil out of the teeth of the mighty; Job xxix. 17. Innumerable are the demonstrations of God's owning such persons.

6. If they have not the qualifications of that power, which in these latter days God hath promised to destroy. Now these are two; I will but name them unto you. First, Drinking the cup of fornication that is in the hand of the harlot, i. e. practising any false worship and forms invented besides the word. Secondly, Giving their power to the beast, or engaging in any ways of persecution against any of the ways of God, or his saints in those ways. That the Lord is about to shake, break, and destroy all such powers as these, I did not long since, by his assistance, here demonstrate.

And so have I completed my instances that they who engage against such an authority as is attended with these qualifications, engage against the Lord. I could also give other instances in other ways and institutions of God; but I chose these as most accommodated to the season.

If now I should tell you, that notwithstanding all clamours to the contrary, these things for the main are found in your assemblies, thousands in the world would, yet I hope your own consciences would not, return the lie for so saying. But yet, though the Lord seems to bear witness to some integrity in his late dispensations, I shall only pray, that what is wanting may be supplied; that you may never want the like protection, in the like distress.

Come we now briefly to the reasons why those who oppose such authority shall not succeed. And it were an easy labour to multiply reasons hereof. The sovereignty, the power, all the attributes of God would furnish us with arguments: I shall omit them all; only touch upon two, that are couched in the text.

They shall have no better issue, because, (1.) The Lord will take away their stout hearts, whereby they are supported; (2.) He will take away their strong hands, whereby they are confirmed: and when hearts and hands are gone, they also are gone.

(1.) He will take away their stout hearts, that they shall

no more be able to carry them out to any success in their great undertakings. He will break that wheel at the very fountain, that it shall no more be the spring of their proceedings.

Now this the Lord usually doth, one or more of these four ways: [1.] He fills them with fury and madness; so taking away their order. [2.] He fills them with folly and giddiness; so taking away their counsel. [3.] He fills them with terror and amazement; so depriving them of their courage. Or, [4.] with contrition and humility; so changing their spirits.

[1.] He fills them with fury and madness, taking away their order, which is the tie and cement of all societies in all undertakings. 'Though all the people of the earth,' saith the Lord, 'be gathered together against Jerusalem,' they shall not prosper. And why so? 'I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness;' Zech. xii. 4. Madmen have often great strength, and with it great fury: but know not how to use it, except to their own ruin. When they think to do the greatest mischief, they cut and gash themselves. Thus the Lord threateneth those, who in outward profession are his own people, when they walk contrary to him. 'The Lord shall smite thee with madness of heart, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways;' Deut. xxviii. 28, 29. Because smitten with madness, therefore they shall not prosper. This is that untameable fury, whereby men are carried out to sinful, destructive enterprises, as the horse rushes into the battle. A judgment which some men vocally, as well as actually, at this day proclaim to be upon their spirits. They cry their blood boils, and their hearts rage for revenge; reviling those in authority whereby to foment; Acts xix. Hence they stir up men for the engaging in such designs, as if accomplished, in the judgment of all men not mad like themselves, would certainly prove ruinous to themselves and others. And in this frame they delight, of it they boast, not once considering that it is a badge and character of men, whom God will disappoint and destroy in their proceedings; it being nothing but the working of that evil spirit, which came upon Saul, stirring him up to rage and fury, when once the meek, calming Spirit of the Lord, departed from him.

[2.] He will fill them with folly and giddiness; so taking

away their counsel. Foolish and giddy undertakers do but conceive chaff, and bring forth stubble. 'The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit;' Isa. xix. 13, 14. This he calls taking away the spirit of Egypt, and destroying the counsel thereof, ver. 3. There is no means of ruin, destruction, and disappointment, that God doth more frequently threaten than this: he will take wisdom from the wise, and then pour contempt upon the spirit of princes: when to their madness he adds blindness; to their fury, folly; to their rage, giddiness; what can be the issue but such as is expressed: 'They shall stagger like a drunken man in his vomit?' Stand before him, and he'll pour his filth upon you; let him alone, and he and it will quickly tumble to the ground. What, I pray, can be expected from mad, blind, furious, foolish, raging, giddy men? Should a man use these expressions of any, it would be said he railed; yet God hath spoken it that all undertakers against him shall be so and no otherwise. Now hence ariseth upon the spirits of such men a twofold effect: First, They shall not be able to advise rationally against others. Nor, secondly, shall they be able to receive suitable advice from others: they shall be able neither to make out counsel to support them in the way wherein they are, nor to take in counsel for their reducing to better paths. If this were not evident in the late dispensation of the Lord towards poor creatures, setting up themselves against the Lord, then never did any providence speak plain in any latter age.

[3.] He will fill them with fear and amazement; so taking away their courage. This God caused to fall upon a whole host at one time; that without seeing an enemy, they ran and fled, and lost all they had, and the spoil; 2 Kings vii. 6, 7. And he threatens that in such a condition, he will make men like women, they shall be afraid and fear; Isa. xix. 16. Yea, this is the way of God's usual dealing; first, he overcomes the spirit of his enemies, and then their armies or force; and the Lord is magnified therein, as is fully set out, Exod. xv. 14—16. The hearts and spirits of men are all in the hand of God; he can pluck them in, or let them

out, as seems good unto him; make him that was mighty one day, the next day to be of no power; what is left of fury, folly shall devour; and what is left of folly, fear shall consume; and the purpose of the Lord shall be established.

[4.] If he have any favour for them, and so will not proceed in these ways of revenge against them, which would end in their speedy ruin; he will give them contrition and humility, so changing them. What a clear testimony of this did he give in the business of Jacob and Esau: Esau resolves and threatens his death upon the first opportunity, Gen. xxvii. 41. an opportunity is put into his hands by Jacob's return into Canaan, chap. xxxii. means of revenge he is ready furnished withal, and comes out accordingly with a band of cut-throats for the purpose, in the same chapter. What should any man now rationally expect, but that poor Jacob must certainly be ruined, and the mother slain with the children? In an instant the Lord toucheth the heart of Esau, and all his menaces of revenge issued in tears and expressions of love and joy; chap. xxxiii. 4. It is to be rejoiced in that the stout hearts of some men are changed upon their disappointment, and the issue of the mercy is no loss to you, to the nation, and themselves therein: though truly to them it had been an argument of greater love, had the Lord graciously bent their spirits unto it before. But by his infinite wisdom he hath accomplished his holy will.

Now in one, more, or all of these ways, will the Lord proceed with the mighty of heart, that set up themselves against him, until he take away their hearts, and make them useless; that either willingly, or unwillingly, 'they shall yield themselves' even 'to the spoil.'

(2.) He will not only take away their hearts, but also their hands; he will not only dispirit them, but he will also disarm them; he will take not only wisdom from their hearts, but the wheels from their chariots. He is the God of the power of men, as well as of the spirits of men. Will he continue power and strength unto men to use it against him that gives it?

Use 1. To discover the ground of God's late dispensation, in taking away the hearts from the stout, and hands from the mighty, bringing them into a condition of weakness and vanity. Their undertakings were against the Lord, and their

hearts could not endure, neither could their hands be strong.

I shall give some instances in their undertaking against the Lord.

(1.) In their declared enmity to the ministry of the gospel: not to the persons of ministers, because engaged in some faction in the state; wherein perhaps many may be opposed, and that from the Lord: nor yet because of their persuasion for the administration of ordinances, after this or that form; which often ariseth to very great animosities: the Lord pardon them unto his people: but because in general they do administer ordinances. Now certainly there is so much of God in that administration, that if they be opposed, not for other causes, or upon other pretences, but ‘*eo nomine*,’ as administrators of ordinances, that opposition is made to God himself. It was part of the end of Christ’s ascension, that he might bestow those gifts upon them, which they do enjoy; Eph. iv. 8. And shall the fury of men, make the work of God, the purchase of Christ, of none effect? Doubtless in this respect, God will make as many as are sincere, ‘*a fenced brazen wall* ;’ Jer. xv. 20. Men may batter their hands, and beat out their brains against them; but they shall not prevail. It is true, as many of them are pleased in these days to engage themselves in several parties; so, if they do close and act with them that are pernicious to the commonwealth, all inconvenience that lighteth upon them, is from themselves; their profession gives them no sanctuary from opposition: but when they are envied, ‘*eo nomine*,’ as administrators of ordinances, not in such or such a way, but as ordinances; shall not the Lord plead for this thing? Now that this was aimed at by some, I suppose none can doubt. The Lord open the eyes of them who in this deliverance have received deliverance, but will not see it. I fear some men had almost rather perish, than be delivered not in their own way. Envy in some men will outbalance safety. Alas! we are proud beggars, when we will refuse the mercy of God, if we may not appoint the hand whereby it shall be bestowed.

(2.) Against the spiritual ordinances of God themselves. These are the carved work, which they aimed to break down with their axes and hammers. Christ hath said, ‘*I will build*

my church.' Their voice was, Down with it, down with it even to the ground. Poor creatures ! they dashed themselves against the rock. Is this a time, think you, to engage against all ordinances, when the Lord Jesus is joining battle with all the world for their abuse of them ? and is vindicating them in order to more purity, beauty, lustre, power, efficacy, and peace, than ever yet he adorned them withal ? You were not wise, poor souls, to discern the seasons. What ! no time to pluck down, but when Christ himself is building ? Ah ! turn your weapons against Babylon ; it will prove far the more thriving warfare. Let Zion alone, if but for your own sakes. Jerusalem will prove a burdensome stone to all that take her up. You have received more loss in a week of days from Christ in this nation, than you would have done in a week of years from antichrist in another. God will make them that shall go for Ireland, sensible of this truth. See Psal. xlviii. 12—14.

(3.) Principally and immediately against magistracy ; if not in the abstract, yet openly as established in the hands of those, whom the Lord hath owned in the darkest day that ever this nation saw. It is the hope of my soul, that the Lord hath borne witness, that they have the sixfold qualification before mentioned. And why would they have at once destroyed the parliament, and their own commander ? Look upon the end of their common workmen : was it not that every one might have enjoyed their lust for a season ? Of the more crafty : was it not to get themselves power, to attempt their folly, and execute their fury ? Look upon the end of the work : was it not to have wrapt us in confusion for a few months, and then to have given us up to the revengeful will of enraged enemies ? So that truly there is but one thing wonderful to me in all this business, that God should take away the hearts and hands of these men in this enterprise, and that is, that he should do it in mercy for such an unthankful, unworthy, unbelieving people as we are. In this is he for ever to be admired and blessed. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horses have failed.

Use 2. If this be the cause why 'they have slumbered their sleep ;' be instructed, ye that are rulers of this nation, in the ways of peace, protection, and safety : be in the ways of God, and do the things of God, and no weapon that is

formed against you shall ever prosper. Many protections and deliverances you have had in your actings for him. Hath he not deserved at your hands to be trusted and feared all your days, with all your power? As my heart hath always been towards the governors in Israel, who willingly offered themselves among the people; so truly my heart never more trembled over them, than now. Oh! where shall we find hearts fit to receive so many mercies, as have been given into our bosoms? Oh! where shall we have hearts large enough to receive all these mercies? The oil ceased when the vessel would hold no more. All my hope and confidence is, that God will work for his name's sake. I could exhort you to sundry particulars, and lay down several paths of God, walking wherein you shall be sure to find peace and safety; as especially that you would regard that which God hath honoured, whereunto the opposition which he had resolved to make void, was made.

Use 3. You that are men of courage, and might, and success, stout of heart, and strong of hand, be watchful over yourselves, lest you should in any thing be engaged against the Lord. The ways of the Lord are your locks, step but out of them, they will be cut, and you will become like other men, and be made a prey and a mocking to the uncircumcised that are round about. These eminencies you have from God, are eminent temptations to undertakings against God, if not seasoned with grace and watchfulness. Ah! how many baits have Satan and the world suited to these qualifications. Samson shook himself, and went out, saying, 'I will do as at other times; but he knew not that the Lord was departed from him.' You may think when you are walking in paths of your own, that you will do as at other times; but if your strength be departed away, what will be the end?

Use 4. Our last use should be of instruction in respect of God, that you may see, both what he can do, and trust him; and consider what he hath done, and bless him. For the first; weapons of all sorts, men of all sorts, judgments of all sorts, are at his command and disposal: see it in this psalm. And for what he hath done; if there be any virtue in the presence of Christ in his ordinances; if any worth in the gospel; if any sweetness in carrying on the work of Christ's revenge against Babylon; if any happiness in the establish-

ment of the peace and liberty of a poor nation, purchased with so much blood, and so long a contest; if any content in the disappointment of the predations and threats of God's enemies, and his people's; if any refreshment to our bowels, that our necks are yet kept from the yoke of lawless lust, fury, and tyranny; if any sweetness in a hope that a poor, distressed handful in Ireland may yet be relieved; if any joy that God hath given yet another testimony of his presence amongst us; if it be any way valuable, that the instruments of our deliverance be not made the scorned object of men's revengeful violence; if any happiness, that the authority under which we enjoy all these mercies, is not swallowed up: is it not all in the womb of this deliverance? And who is he that hath given it into our bosom?