

SERMON XIII.*

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH A PEOPLE,

THE

SPRING OF THEIR PROSPERITY;

WITH THEIR

SPECIAL INTEREST IN ABIDING WITH HIM.

* This sermon was preached to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, at Westminster, Oct. 30, 1656, being a day of solemn humiliation.

TO THE
PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH
OF
ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND,
WITH
THE DOMINIONS THEREUNTO BELONGING.

SIRS,

MY hope that some impression may possibly remain upon your hearts and spirits, of and from the things delivered unto you in the ensuing sermon, make me willing unto the obedience of presenting it unto you, upon your command, in this manner. Were I not persuaded, that your peace, interest, and concernment is expressed therein, and knew not with what simplicity of heart you were minded thereof, I should have chosen on many accounts to have waved this duty. But having now performed what is incumbent on me, to render this service useful, recommending it yet farther to the grace of God, I humbly beg that it may not in this return unto you, be looked on as a thing of course and so laid aside, but be reviewed with that intension of spirit, which is necessary in duties of this importance; whereby you may manifest that your command unto this service, was grounded on a sense of some advantage to be made by that performance of it. Sundry things I confess, that were spoken unto you, are gone beyond my recovery, having had their rise from the present assistance which God was pleased to

afford in the management of the work itself. The sum of what was provided beforehand, and no otherwise, without the least addition, is here presented unto you, with hearty desires, that the vision of the truth herein considered may be to them that love you, and the accomplishment thereof be found in the midst of you. So prays

Your humblest servant

In our dear Lord Jesus,

JOHN OWEN.

Nov. 17.

SERMON XIII.

And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him: and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.—2 CHRON. XV. 2.

It will not, I am sure, seem strange to any, that I have taken a text to preach on in a day of humiliation, out of a thanksgiving sermon, such as this discourse of Azariah seems to be; if they shall but consider the suitableness of the instruction given therein, to any great and solemn occasion, whether of humiliation or rejoicing. The words indeed are the sum of all directions that in such cases can be given; the standard of all rules, and exhortations, wherein any nation or people, in any condition, are or may be concerned; so plainly measuring out our fate and lot, the event and issue of our affairs, with all the great undertaking of the people of God in this nation, that of themselves I hope they will make some passage to the hearts of them, to whom the inferences from them shall this day be applied.

In the foregoing chapter we have an account of a great victory, that Asa and the people of Judah, fighting in faith, and with prayer, obtained against the huge host of the Ethiopians, with the abundant spoils which they took, and carried away thereupon. In their triumphant return to Jerusalem the Spirit of God stirs up a prophet to go out and meet them, to give them an account of the rise and cause of their success, and direction for their future deportment, under the enjoyment of such mercies and deliverances. The Lord knows how apt even the best of men are to forget the spring of their mercies; how negligent in making suitable returns, by a due improvement of the advantages put into their hands, unto the Lord of all mercies; therefore are they in all seasons to be minded of their proper interest and duty.

This is done in my text to Asa and Judah by Oded; and I desire in my sermon that it may with the same spirit, and the same success, be done by me unto you. The words I intend principally to insist on, having the same thing for substance three times repeated in them, the opening of the

first clause, with the general tendency of the whole, will suffice as to their exposition, and the grounding of that general proposition which I shall improve. Two things are then principally to be inquired into :

First. What it is for God to be with any people.

Secondly. What it is for a people to be, or abide with, God.

And according to the analogy of these two, the following assertions of seeking the Lord, and forsaking him, will be easily understood. For though the words differ in expression, yet they are all of the same way of assertion. They are three hypothetical propositions, or promissory assertions on supposition: 'if you abide with the Lord, he will be with you;' 'if you seek the Lord, he will be found of you;' 'if you forsake the Lord, he will forsake you:' the same matter is trebled, for the fuller and surer confirmation of the thing asserted. Only whereas the last proposition supposeth a thing possible, namely, that they might forsake the Lord; the first supposes a thing present, and therefore it is so expressed, 'whilst you are with him,' because they had abode with God in their late war and trial.

Before I enter upon the opening of the words themselves, I cannot pass by the earnest preface of the prophet; 'Hear ye me, O Asa.' He saw the people upon their success taken up with many thoughts, thinking of many businesses, full of many contrivances; one imagining one thing, another another; all of them, it may be, how they should use and improve their peace and success to their advantage, interest, profit, or security. Or the princes and rulers, as it is probable and usual in such cases, might be considering how to carry on their victory, how to make the best advantage of it, in their dealing with neighbouring princes and nations, in making peace, or war. In the midst of these thoughts, the prophet meets them, and diverts them with all earnestness to things quite of another nature, and of unspeakable greater importance and concernment to them. 'Hear ye me,' saith he; it is not your own counsel, nor your own valour, that hath brought about this great work, this mighty victory; the Lord himself hath done it, by his presence with you. It is not of any concernment unto you, what other

nations do, or may do, but the presence of God concerns you alone to look after. The great concernment of any people or nation, is to know, that all their prosperity is from the presence of God amongst them, and to attend to that which will give continuance thereunto. You may tire yourselves in the imaginations and contrivances of your own hearts, and lay out your thoughts and time about things that will not profit nor advantage you; this is your interest, this is your concernment: 'Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah, and Benjamin.'

For the words themselves, the first thing proposed to be inquired into for their explanation is this :

First, What is it for God to be with a people?

God may be said to be with men, or present with them in sundry respects.

1. He may be said to be with them in respect of the omnipresence of his essence. So he is naturally and necessarily present with all creatures, indistant from them, present with them. The ubiquity and immensity of his essence will not allow that he should be distant from any thing to which he hath given a being. 'The heavens, even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him;' 1 Kings viii. 27. Doth he not fill heaven and earth? Is he a God at hand only, and not afar off, as to the ends of the earth? This presence of God with all things David emphatically declares, Psal. cxxxix. 7—12. But it is not that, that is here intended; that is universal to all creatures, natural, and necessary, this especial to some, voluntary, and of mercy: that of nature and essence, this of will and operation.

2. God may be said to be with one in respect of personal union. So he was with, and only with the man Jesus Christ; Acts x. 38. *Θεὸς ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ*, 'God was with him:' that is, in personal union, the human nature being taken into subsistence with the Son of God.

3. God is present, or with any, in respect of the covenant of grace. He is with them to be their God in covenant; the tenor whereof is, that he will not leave them, nor shall they forsake him, he will be for them, and they shall be for him, and not for another. He is with them for all the ends of mercy, love, kindness, pardon, salvation, that are 'proposed

and exhibited in it. But neither is this the presence of God here intended; though this be something that flows from it, and does attend it. For,

(1.) That presence of God with his people hath not such a conditional establishment, as this here mentioned; it stands on other terms, and better security, than that here proposed; it hath received an eternal ratification in the blood of Christ, is founded in the immutable purpose of grace, and is not left to the conditionality here expressed, as we shall see afterward.

(2.) The presence here mentioned respects the whole body of the people, all Judah and Benjamin in their national state, and consideration, unto whom, as such, the effectual covenant of grace was never extended: for they were not all Israel who were of Israel.

(3.) The presence here promised respects immediately the peculiar end of blessing the whole people with success in their wars and undertakings, so the occasion of the words, and the context, with regard to the following discourse do undeniably evince. It is not then this presence of God only that is intended, though, as it will afterward appear, it is not to be separated from it.

4. There is a presence of God in respect of providential dispensations. And this is twofold:

(1.) General; ordering, disposing, guiding, ruling all things, according to his own wisdom, by his own power, unto his own glory. Thus he is also present with all the world; he disposes of all the affairs of all the sons of men as he pleaseth; sets up one, and pulls down another; changes times, seasons, kingdoms, bounds of nations, as seems good to him. The help that is given to any, he doth it himself. The shields of the earth belong unto God, he works deliverance in the earth, even among them that know him not. And the evils, desolations, and destruction, that the earth is full of, are but the effects of his wrath and indignation, revealing itself against the ungodliness of men. He is thus present with every person in the world, holds his breath, and all his ways in his hand; disposes of his life, death, and all his concerns, as he pleaseth. He is present in all nations, to set them up, pluck them down, alter, turn, change, weaken, establish, strengthen, enlarge their

bounds, as he sees good; and the day is coming, when all his works will praise him. Neither is this here intended: it is necessary, and belongs to God, as God, and cannot be promised to any; it is a branch of God's natural dominion, that every creature be ruled and disposed of, agreeably to its nature, unto the end whereunto it is appointed.

(2.) Special; attended with peculiar love, favour, goodwill, special care towards them with whom he is so present. So Abimelech observed that he was with Abraham, Gen. xxi. 22. 'God is with thee in all that thou doest:' with thee to guide thee, bless thee, preserve thee, as we shall see afterward. So he promised to be with Joshua, chap. i. 5. And so he was with Gideon, Judges vi. 12. to bless him in his great undertaking. And so with Jeremiah, chap. xv. 20. This is fully expressed, Isa. xliii. 1, 2. 'I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the water, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.'

And this is the presence of God here intimated: his presence with the people, as to special providential dispensations, as is manifest from the whole discourse of the prophet; and wherein this consists, shall be afterward at large declared.

Secondly, What is a people's abiding with God?

There is a twofold abiding with God:

1. In personal obedience, according to the tenour of the covenant. This is not here intended, but supposed. There is no abiding in any thing with God, where there is not an abiding in this thing: yet this, as I said, is not here principally intended, but supposed; something farther is intended: for as hath been declared, it is national work, and national abiding, that is intended. So that,

2. There is an abiding with God in national administrations: this is a fruit of the other, in those who are called to them. And that this is principally here intended, is evident from that use that Asa made of this information and exhortation of the prophet. He did not only look to his personal walking thereupon; but also immediately set upon the work of ordering the whole affairs of the kingdom, so as God might be glorified thereby. How this may be effected shall at large afterward be declared: what hath already been

spoken may suffice for a foundation of that proposition, which I shall this day insist upon: and it is this:

Observation. The presence of God with a people, in special providential dispensations for their good, depends on their obediential presence with him, in national administrations to his glory.

For the explication of this proposition some few things are to be premised.

1. The presence of God with his people as to special grace in the covenant, and his presence with them as to special assistance in providence, proceed on very different accounts.

(1.) They have a very different rise. The foundation, and principal law of special grace, dispensed in the covenant is this; that some sinned, and another was punished. So it is laid down expressly, Isa. liii. 6. 'All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.' 2 Cor. v. 21. 'He was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.' Gal. iii. 13, 14. 'A curse for us, that the blessing of faithful Abraham might come on them that believe;' 1 Pet. ii. 24. This is the great and sovereign principle of the covenant of grace, that a commutation should be made of persons, as to punishments and rewards; that sinners should be provided of a substitute, one that should undergo the punishment due to them, that they might go free; and procure a reward for them who could procure none for themselves.

Now the supreme and sovereign law of providential dispensations is utterly diverse, and alien from this of the covenant of grace. This you have asserted, Ezek. xviii. 20. 'The soul that sinneth it shall die: one shall not bear the iniquity of another: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.' Take this for a law of universal right and indispensable, extend it to the covenant of grace, and it is absolutely exclusive of the substitution and satisfaction of Christ. But it is the ground, rule, and law of providential dispensations, that God is there treating about; and vindicating his dealing with any people as to his presence with them, and acting towards them therein, which is diverse, as

you see, from the foundation of the covenant before mentioned.

(2.) As the foundations are diverse, so is the rule of their continuance. What is the rule and measure of God's continuance with his people in the covenant of grace? Plainly this: that he will never forsake them; and on that account will take care that they shall never forsake him, but abide with him for ever. It is not whilst they do so and so, he will abide with them, and when they cease so to do, he will forsake them, as to his federal and covenant presence: there is not such a sandy foundation left us, of our abiding with God in Christ. See the tenour of the covenant, Jer. xxxi. 33. xxxii. 38—40. The sum is, that God will be with them, and take care that they always abide with him; and therefore hath he provided for all interveniencies imaginable, that nothing shall violate this union. God lays his unchangeableness as the foundation of the covenant, Mal. iii. 6. and he therein makes us unchangeable; not absolutely so, for we change every moment; but with respect to the terms and bounds of the covenant, he hath undertaken, that we shall never leave him. The law of God's presence in respect of providential dispensations, and all special privileges attending it, is quite of another importance: it is purely conditional, as you may see in my text. The tenour of it is expressed to the height, 1 Sam. ii. 30. 'I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, that be far from me; for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.' Here is no alteration of counsel or purpose in God; but merely an explanation of the rule, law, and tenour of providential dispensations; no interpretation of the covenant of grace. Eli held not the priesthood by that covenant, but an explication of the tenour of a privilege given in special providence, Psal. lxxxix. 32, 33. Hence is that variety of God's dealings with men, mentioned in the Scripture, which yet are always righteous, according to one or other of these rules and laws. Isa. xliii. 23, 24. says God of his people, 'Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy

sacrifices. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices : but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities.' What then shall be done with this people ? depart from them, destroy them, let them die ? No, ver. 25. 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' So also chap. lvii. 17. 'For the iniquity of his coveteousness I was wroth, and smote him : I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.' Surely now God will utterly consume them, root and branch, as persons incorrigible, and irrecoverable. No, the case is quite otherwise, ver. 18, 19. 'I have seen his way, and will heal him ; I will lead him also, and restore comfort to him : ' I will pity him, pardon him, save, sanctify him, and fill him with consolation. Go now to Ezekiel, chap. xxxiii. 18. 'When the righteous turns from his righteousness,' what then ? God will heal him and restore comforts unto him, as it was in the places before mentioned. No, no : he shall die, he shall be cut off. What is the reason of this diversity ? Why, in the first place, God speaks of his dealings unto their souls as to his covenant of grace, and all the mercies of it ; in this last, as to his dealings with their persons, and their outward concernments, in the dispensations of his providence. And the not heeding hereof hath made some pronounce inconsiderately, the covenant of grace to be merely conditional, because they find many mercies and privileges spoken of under such a notion ; not considering that all those proposals belong to the law of outward providence, and not to the nature of the covenant of promise, established in the blood of Christ. And unless this be allowed, nothing can be more contrary to my text, than that promise, and such as that which we have Isa. liv. 9. where provision is made for God's abiding with his people, notwithstanding all their backslidings and provocations ; which he will so far heal, as that he may not forsake them. And this is first to be observed, that we do not in the consideration of God's presence and withdrawals, as to providential dispensations, cast any reflection on the stability and unchangeableness of the covenant of grace. David hath fully stated this business ; 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. saith he, 'Although my house be not so

with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.' David had a promise for the prosperity of his house ; he had also an engagement of the sure mercies of the covenant : the different tenour of these engagements, as to their success and establishment, he gives us this account of : The covenant is absolute and unchangeable, that is, ordered in all things and sure ; the prosperity of his house depends on another law and rule, that is subject to alteration.

2. Observe the nature of this dependance of God's presence on our abiding with him. It doth not depend upon it, as the effect upon its proper cause, as though it were procured by it, merited by it ; we enjoy not the least morsel of bread on any such account, much less such eminent privileges as attend God's special providential presence. We deserve nothing at the hand of God ; and therefore if he should take us in the midst of the choicest obedience, and fill us with the fiercest of miseries, he did us no wrong ; and therefore the Lord does so deal sometimes with his ; and that not only with particular persons, as in the case of Job, but also with his people in general, as Psal. xlv. 17—19. ' All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way. Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.' Though he requires our duty at our hands, yet he is not tied to any such present reward. This is all : it ordinarily depends upon it as a consequent upon an antecedent, which allows an interposition of grace and mercy, as Nehemiah ix. 16. ' Nevertheless thou being merciful forsookest them not.' So elsewhere that good man prays, ' Remember me for good, and spare me according to the multitude of thy mercies.' For the glory of his righteousness, and of his ways in the world, God hath ordered, that his people shall walk with him, when he abides eminently and conspicuously in a special manner with them.

3. Observe, that our abiding with God, even in national administrations, is the proper effect of his presence with us in covenant dispensations ; so that all in the issue is of mere

mercy, and grace: though the condition seems to be imposed on us, yet it is from him alone that we have strength for its performance. It is in this, and such like cases, as David said it was with them, at their dedicating their silver and gold for the building of the temple: *τὰ σὰ, ἐκ τῶν σῶν*, 'of thine own, Lord, have we given unto thee:' we do but return him his own, we give him but the fruits of his own grace; and without it we can make no return whatever.

These things being premised, I shall give the proposition some confirmation, and so descend to the due improvement of it.

I suppose I need not go for proof, beyond the observation of the constant tenour of God's proceedings with his people of old. When did he not deal thus with them? What instance can be given of transgressing this rule? Is the whole story of the nation of the Jews any thing, but the illustration of this proposition? Some ruled well, and sought the Lord; and the Lord was with them, and prospered them in all their ways: some fell from him, and walked according to their own imaginations; and the Lord cut them short on that account. Yea, sometimes the same man, as Solomon, Asa, Uzziah, experienced both these states and conditions. Hath not the state of all nations, since they came into the power of men, professing the knowledge of him, been the same? Look on the Roman empire, did it not flourish under the hand of men who ruled with God, and were faithful with the saints? Is not the present distraction of it, under the fury and cruelty of Turk and pope, the issue of the violence, unrighteousness, idolatry, luxury, and persecution of ill governors? Doth not the demonstration of all God's people in the world, the consideration whereof in particular might be insisted on as the ground and reason of the truth insisted on, require that it should be thus? Lev. xxvi. and almost the whole book of Deuteronomy, are sermons on this text, and every verse almost in them would afford a new confirmation of the truth in hand. I shall need rather then to caution from mistakes, than farther to confirm the proposition. For this end, take these ensuing observations.

1. All outward flourishing, or prosperity of a people,

doth not always argue the special presence of God with them. There are sundry things required to make success and prosperity an evidence of the presence of God.

(1.) That the people themselves prospered be his people, his peculiar. How many wicked nations are there in the world, that for a long season have received blessings (as it were) and success in their undertakings? Is the Lord amongst them by his special presence? Not at all. He is using them indeed for his own end and purposes, to break others, or fill up the measure of their own iniquities; that their destruction may be an evident demonstration of his vengeance, and righteous judgments to all the world; but present with them in the sense contended about, he is not. The case is stated, Hab. i. ii. as you may see in those chapters at large. It is the same case with the antichristian and and Mahometan nations, in the world at this day. Their prosperity is no evidence of God's presence, because themselves are his enemies. Other bottoms, reasons, and grounds there are of their successes; God's owning of them, is none of them.

(2.) That the whole work be good, and have a tendency to God's glory, wherein they are engaged. David's counsel for the killing of Uriah prospered and took effect; yet was not God with him therein. The work engaged in must be according to his mind. And,

(3.) Made useful and subservient to his glory. When the hearts of a people can secure themselves in these things, then may they rejoice in their prosperity, as a pledge of God's presence with them.

2. Even great afflictions, eminent distresses, long perplexities, may have a consistency with God's special presence. Though the wheel goes on, yet it may have a cross wheel in it, that may cause rubs and disturbances. The rule of God's acting in his presence is his own wisdom, and our good in the issue, not our partial self-destroying desires. Had the best people in the world all their own desires, they would be every way ruined. When God is nigh to us, he knows what is best for us. Security from destroying evils, not trying evils, he gives to them with whom he is.

And this is all that I shall offer for the explication, con-

firmation, and cautioning of the proposition insisted on; what remains farther to be opened, will fall in under the uses of it, which now ensue.

Use 1. This special presence of God being, as you have heard, the great and only concernment of any people, the tenour, or condition thereof, being our abiding with him; let our first use be to instruct us particularly,

(1.) What this special presence of God is, and wherein it doth consist.

(2.) What it is for us to abide with God, so as we may enjoy it.

(1.) For the full discovery of the first, I shall consider it in that eminent instance, wherein of old he did grant his presence to his people. The bottom of that stupendous undertaking of the Israelites in leaving Egypt, and journeying through the wilderness into Canaan, lay in the promise of this presence of God with them; *Exod. vii. 10—12.* On this one consideration their whole undertaking and affair turned; to this issue it is put by Moses, *Exod. xxxiii. 15.* ‘If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence:’ they will not move one step without him; and with him they care not whither they go.

Now this presence of God with them, symbolically did consist in, or rather was represented by, two things: [1.] The pillar of the cloud, and fire, which was with them ordinarily; [2.] The appearance of his glory which they enjoyed on extraordinary occasions.

[1.] The first, with the first use of it, is mentioned, *Exod. xiii. 21, 22.* ‘And the Lord went before them by day in the pillar of a cloud, to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; to go by day and night: he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day; nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.’ There is mention here as if it were of two pillars, one by day, and another by night; but it seems to have been the same pillar with several properties. For *chap. xiv. 19, 20.* the same pillar at the same time, performs both these offices, in respect of several persons; to some it was on the one side a cloud and darkness, to others bright and shining as fire. ‘The pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of

the Egyptians, and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud of darkness to them, and it gave light by night to these.' After this, when the ark was made, and the tabernacle erected, this cloud, which until then went before the camp, came and covered the tabernacle night and day, as it stood in the midst of the camp, or the congregation; as a cloud it was by day, and as a pillar of fire by night, *Exod. xl. 34—38.* and there it continued with the people all the while they were in the wilderness; *Nehem. ix. 19.* This being the first eminent pledge of the presence of God with that people, let us consider what was indulged or granted to them thereby.

1st. They had hereby constant direction in all their journeyings and undertakings; they were by this pillar directed in their way; so at large it is expressed, *Numb. x. 33.* as also, *Exod. xl.* God, by this pledge of his presence, was the beginning of all their rest and motion, the guide and director of all their undertakings; so that they moved, acted, rested, proceeded, according to his will and counsel. He guided them by his eye, and led them by his counsel. Sometimes perhaps they would be forward, they would be up, acting, doing, their hearts are full of desires, and they are impatient of delay. If it be not according to his mind, he will cause a cloud to abide on their tabernacle, or their assemblies and meetings; a cloud that shall darken them, and distract them in their consultations, that they shall not be able to take one step forward. Though their desires be great, their intentions good, yet the cloud shall be upon them, and they shall not know their way. Sometimes perhaps they are heavy, fearful, slothful, there is a lion in the way, giants are in the land, difficulties and perplexities lie in the way before them in such and such undertakings, they have no heart to them, the way is long, and perilous, better return than go forward. Would God now have them pass on, and engage? The cloud shall break up, and go before them, they shall see so far on their way, as to go forth with cheerfulness. Only observe this, that when the cloud was taken up, they knew they were to go on in the way wherein they were, and journeyed accordingly; yet they knew not whither they should go, nor what would be the end of their journey. And therefore it is said, that when they journeyed, the ark went before them

to seek out a resting-place for them; Numb. x. 33. It was carried on, to see where the pillar, or cloud of direction would stay, and there they rested wherever it was. When God gives a people so much direction, as that they see it is their duty to go on, and to trust him in so doing, though they see not the end, nor know what their resting-place will be, yet it is a pledge of God's presence with them. I suppose in your assembly you have had the cloud taken off, as to your engagements in some undertakings, concerning which you are to trust, that the ark of God's presence, the Lord Jesus Christ, will find you out a resting-place, which as yet appears not unto you.

What a full experience have we had of this kind of proceeding among us? In the last assembly of parliament how many had no less real intentions to be at work for God, than now? God saw that it would not be for the advantage of the people, that they should proceed; hence the cloud rested on that assembly, that they could not see how to take one step forward. He was still present with us, but it was by a darkening cloud, that we could not journey towards our rest. Nor is it the will, or counsel of man, but of God, that is to be looked to in these things. We now hope the cloud is up, and we are journeying towards our rest. The great angel of his presence will find a rest for us in the good providence of God. This then lies in God's special presence, he is with us to give us direction in all our undertakings; to take away darkness, perplexities, difficulties from our counsels; or to cause us to rest, and cease from whatever may come into our hearts, that is not according to his mind. The Lord give us evermore of this his presence.

I cannot stay to shew you the several ways whereby God now communicates direction to a people; how he inclines their hearts insensibly, yet powerfully; fixes the bent of their spirits effectually, their hearts being in his hand as the rivers of water, which he turns as he pleaseth; supplies them with reasonings and consultations, beyond the verge of their own wisdom, proposes occasions, invitations, provocations; gives them spirit and courage beyond their natural frames and tempers; enlarges them in prayer, or shuts them up; makes walls on the one hand, and open paths on the other; with innumerable such ways and means, as in his

infinite wisdom he is pleased to make effectual for their guidance. It suffices, that in the use of means, through patience and waiting upon him, they shall be directed to that which is pleasing to him; so is he with them.

2dly. The second use of this pillar was, to give them protection and defence in their ways: so Exod. xiv. 19, 20. 24. This protected them from the Egyptians, and from thence God troubled their enemies, out of the pillar, that is, from his especial presence. This use of it is insisted on, Isa. iv. 5, 6. The cloud that was as smoke by day, and as fire by night, was also a shadow, a place of refuge, and a covert; in one word a protection, or a defence.

And this is a second thing which is in God's special presence; he will protect or defend them, with whom he is so present. He is their dwelling-place, Psal. xc. 1. then when in this world they have none; their refuge in the time of trouble: so Isa. xxv. 4. xxvi. 1. xxxi. 4. Promises and instances to make this good abound, are known to all; the time would fail me to insist upon them. I might go over all the causes, means, and ways of the fears, dangers, ruins of such a people, and shew you how a defence is provided against them all. Are their fears from themselves, because of their folly, weakness, and division; or from pretended friends, because of their envy and desertion; or from open enemies, because of their power, cruelty, malice, and revenge? A defence is provided on every account, heat, rain, tempests, storms, adversity, prosperity, all are provided against, where God is present; Isa. xxxii. 1, 2.

And if any people in the world have experience of this truth, we have it this day. Had not the Lord been with us, who had not destroyed us? Enemies, friends, abroad, at home, our own follies, all, any of them had done the work, had not the Lord himself been with us.

Only observe, that the presence of God, as to these effects may sometimes in some particulars be eclipsed, and the effects themselves for some season be entangled, though there be not an utter breach between him and his people. How often did the Israelites attempt things without his direction? How often did he break in upon them to their woe and sorrow? Yet for the main he forsook them not, until the great work intended by them was accomplished; Nehem.

ix. 19. It is not every entanglement, every disappointment, every defeat, that argues God's departure, as to his special presence. It may be good for us sometimes to be in such a condition; and then that desertion, that carries into it, is from the presence of God. We are now grown to that, that if every thing immediately surmount not our imagination, say some, God is gone from them; not because it is so, but because they would have it so. But he is merciful, with whom we have to do, and will not cast off his people for ever.

[2.] The people with whom God was, had the glory of Jehovah, as a pledge of his presence with them. This appeared only at extraordinary seasons; so it did at the giving of the law, *Exod. xxiv. 16.* so also at the setting up of the tabernacle. It differed from the cloud; for when the cloud was upon the tabernacle, the glory of the Lord filled it. It appeared again to all the people; *Levit. ix. 23.* I shall not now inquire, what was this visible representation of the majesty of God; it sufficeth, as to the purpose in hand, that when God gives his presence to a people, at extraordinary seasons, he affords them extraordinary manifestations of his glory. So in *Ezekiel's* vision of those dreadful wheels of providence, the glory of the Lord is said to appear in the temple; and as his especial presence departed from the temple, and the city, so the glory by several degrees departed also; *chap. ii. 10. 18, 19. xi. 23.*

Eminent and glorious appearances with and for a people in extraordinary seasons, is then another thing that accompanies God's special providential presence with them; when they are at an utter loss in their counsels, at a stand in their motions, disappointed in their undertakings, deserted in their enterprises, pressed on every side above measure, or called to some extraordinary work, so that their ordinary direction and protection will not carry them on, nor bear them up; then will God relieve them by some especial appearance of his glory. In the 'mount will the Lord be seen.' This will give a relief when all is at a loss. And in this lies the most discriminating evidence of special providence. Glorious appearances in great straits are eminent testimonies of God's regard.

Could I now insist on some of the instances that might

be given of this kind of dealing with us in England, in the pursuit of the cause we have in hand, it would make us ashamed of all our unworthiness, carnal fears, and unbelief.

This is the second evidence of God's presence. He is with a people to direct them, to protect, to manifest his glory amongst them; his glory in balancing the issues of providence one in respect of another, so that all shall acknowledge, that of a truth the Lord is amongst them. 'Blessed is the people that is in such a case; yea, blessed is the people whose God is the Lord.' What would you have more? Here is ease of all cares, a remedy for all sores, security in the midst of troubles, rest, and peace, and assured dwelling-places, though the Assyrian should be in the land.

Thus you see what is this great concernment of any people.

(2.) Let us now consider the tenure of this blessedness, on what account it is to be obtained, or enjoyed. Now this is, our abiding with God. This then is nextly to be considered, what it is for a people, what it is for you, and us, so to abide with God, as that we may in all our affairs enjoy his presence in the ways before described.

Now something is hereunto previously required: something it consists in.

[1.] That we may abide with God, this is indispensably required: That we may have peace with him in Jesus Christ. If we are never with him, we cannot abide with him; no man can abide where he never comes. The acceptance of our persons lies at the bottom of the acceptance of our duties. As the special presence of God with any is in and by Christ, and no otherwise; so is our abiding with God in and through him. 'God with us' is the name of Christ: our being with God is in him, who is our peace. 'Two cannot walk together, unless they be so agreed;' Amos iii. 3.

Now because this is not to be expected from all the individuals of a nation, yet this thing is to be endeavoured: That the rulers of it be such as have this interest. I do not divest of a share in government those, who have no share in Christ, if lawfully called thereunto. But, I say, when God

gives governors, whom he intends to make a blessing unto a people, they shall be such as are blessed of him in Christ. And if ever the government of this nation, in this present constitution, suppose it the most exactly framed, and balanced, in the several parts of it, for the furtherance of public good, be devolved into the hands of men not interested in God by Christ; though the constitution may be absolutely good, yet the government will not be blessed, and the nation will be ruined: for God and his glory will depart; Micah. v. 5, 6. It is Christ that is our peace, even in outward troubles. They are 'seven shepherds under him,' and 'eight principal men' accepted with him, that are to be our relief.

It is true, for some particular actions or works a wicked man may be anointed particularly; as Jehu, and Jeroboam the son of Joash. But you have no instance, that ever God was with a people to bless them indeed, in a course of special providence, when wicked men by their own consent were their rulers, where the union and relation between them and the people is considerable. I confess unto you, I never think of the state of England, but my heart trembles at this thing; namely, that those who have, and it is fit should have, so great a share in the government of this commonweal, should have their rise from the body of the people, that is dark, and profane, and full of enmity against the remnant. Did not God overrule men, contrary to their own inward principles and lusts, how soon would ruin and desolation break in upon that hand? And give me leave to say, that God in his sovereign providence, having called so many at this time to the place of rule and authority, who indeed (as we believe) love the Lord Jesus in sincerity; it seems to me to look as your duty, to consider all ways and means, whereby the power of these nations may be in succeeding seasons devolved on men of the like spirit and condition.

I shall not interpose in that, which by some is so much spoken of, the reign of the saints. I am sure the means used, and attempted by some, to set upon, and to set up such a rule and dominion, have not become sober men, much less saints of Christ. Yet this I must say, and in the saying of it, I dare say, 'Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah, and Benjamin;' if ever God cease to call saints, that is,

men interested personally in Christ, to places of chief authority in this nation, or commit the power of it into other hands ; and when those called to power, cease to exert it in a subserviency to the kingdom of Christ, for the true spiritual advantage of his people, there will be an end of England's glory and happiness. I say, Hear ye this, all ye people. This I have delivered long ago, and many times in this place ; this I say still, and in this persuasion hope to live and die. The Lord guide you in this thing : however we shall live on the good providence of our God, who hath hitherto taken care for us.

This then, I say, is pre-required, as a qualification of any person to the performance of this duty of abiding with God: It is the psalmist's advice, Psal. ii. 11, 12. Let this principle be always owned amongst you, by it honour Christ in the world, give him the pre-eminence, it is the Father's will he should have it in all things. Expect not the presence of God, but upon this account. Bear testimony herein against the world of profane men, who despise these things. Seeing then it cannot be expected to have this qualification diffused universally, as yet, through the body of the people ; let the rulers take care, that they be not the cause of God's departure from us.

[2.] What is it now for such persons to abide with God, so as they may expect comfortably the continuance of his presence with them, which is their all, that they need or desire ? I shall name some few things that are signally required thereunto.

1st. That they inquire of God, ask counsel at his hand, look to him for direction in all their affairs. He is present with them to give them direction : not to seek for it at his hand, is exceedingly to despise him. It must arise from one of these two apprehensions ; either he cares not for us, or he knows not how to direct us. When he gave direction by the cloud on the tabernacle, the people being reprov'd for their carnal fears, and unbelief, upon the return of the spies, some of them would needs instantly into the mountain, and fight with the Canaanites : but says the Holy Ghost, the 'ark abode in the camp ;' they went without God's direction, and prospered accordingly. With what contempt doth God speak of the wisdom and counsels of the sons of

men, when they will adhere unto them? How does he make it his glory to turn all their consultations into folly, and to make them err in their ways, like a drunken man? How doth he bid them take counsel together, when he intends to destroy them? What instances may be given of all good and prosperous rulers of old, of their seeking direction from God? What promises of a success, and a blessed issue in so doing are there? The words of my text will suffice, as an instance in every kind.

But you will say, How shall we inquire of God?

The nations had their oracles, whereby they deluded themselves. The people of God had their Urim and Thummim, their prophets and oracle. Bring hither the ephod, and inquire of God, was the word with them. But alas, what is all this to the advantage we have of seeking counsel of God, and taking direction from him? We have a high priest always present with us, by whom we may inquire. Our High Priest is the angel of God's presence, the mighty Counsellor, the power, and eternal wisdom of God himself. And where is he? he appears in the presence of God for us, in the holy place, not made with hands, having made a new and living way for us to come within the vail, to inquire of the oracle. What would we have more? He is our captain, our leader, our High Priest, Urim and Thummim, our oracle, our ark, on whom the cloud of direction rests and abides for ever. Would you then be with God? Take direction from him by Christ in all your undertakings; so do in deed, and not in word, or profession only.

I hope, I need not stay to give you directions how this duty is to be performed. The unction will teach it you, and your 'fellowship,' I hope, 'is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus.' Only now take these few words with you.

(1st.) Captivate all your desires to his glory. Set your hearts on nothing, with but this express reserve, if it is consistent with, and expedient unto the glory of Christ, and his kingdom. Be not sick of your own violent desires; but lay all your aims and designs at his feet always, becoming as weaned children before him.

(2dly.) Bear before him a real sense of your own weak-

ness and folly, both severally and jointly, if not directed by him, that in his pity and compassion he may relieve you.

(3dly.) Keep you hearts in that integrity, that you may always press and urge him with his own concernment in all your affairs. This is a thing that none but upright hearts can do uprightly.

(4thly.) Actually inquire by faith and prayer, what is his will and mind; do it severally and jointly; do it privately, publicly; do it every day, and in days set apart for that purpose: he will assuredly be found of you. You know how easy it were to exemplify all these things by testimonies and instances; but time will not permit.

If, instead of these things, you bear yourselves up on the wings of your own wisdom, and contrivances; though you may seem for a season to have attained a fair pitch and flight, you will be entangled, and brought down in the midst of your course with shame and sorrow: for the Lord will not be with you.

2dly. Another thing, wherein we are to be with God, is by trusting in him for protection. 'O, trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. This man made the Lord his refuge. He that trusteth in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, that shall never be removed. Commit your ways to the Lord, roll your burden on him, stand still and see his salvation.' What glorious things are spoken of this trusting to the Lord for protection, you all know. It were endless to insist on commands and promises to this purpose; and to single out one or two, were but to weaken the cause in hand, seeing hereunto the whole Scriptures bear witness. I shall only shew you what it is so to do, in some few particulars.

(1st.) It is to strengthen and encourage your hearts in difficult affairs, a comfortable issue whereof you cannot on visible causes conjecture, on the account of God's engagement for your good. To omit the instances of Asa, Jehosaphat, and many others; take that signal one of David in his great distress at Ziklag, I Sam. xxx. You know the story: his habitation was burnt and spoiled, his wives and children captived, his people consulting to stone him, so that he was greatly distressed, the enemy numerous, and

without his reach ; all means of relieving his condition, and bringing it to a comfortable issue, far removed. But what course did he now take ? did he despond ? did he give over ? did he rest on his own counsel and strength ? No, saith the Holy Ghost : but David ‘ encouraged himself in the Lord his God.’ Have you any affair that lies before you that is good and honest ; but yet dreadful, difficult, entangled ? Your hearts are ready to faint whenever you think of it ; it is almost beyond your imaginations to contrive a comfortable issue. In such a season if you will be with God, he will be with you : if you so trust him, as to encourage your hearts on the account of his wisdom, goodness, power, that he can find out, and bring about a comfortable glorious end ; this is to trust him for protection. Psal. xlv. is this doctrine delivered to the full.

(2dly.) To trust God for protection, is to wait under discouragements and disappointments for a desired issue of the affairs we commit to him. ‘ He that believeth will not make haste ;’ Isa. xxviii. 16. This the Lord pleads for, Hab. ii. 3, 4. Men will have their desires precisely accomplished this year, this month, this week, or they will wait no longer : these, says God, are proud men, their hearts are lifted up in them, they trust not to me for protection. Men love to trust God (as they profess) for what they have in their hands, in possession, or what lies in an easy view ; place their desires afar off, carry their accomplishment behind the clouds, out of their sight, interpose difficulties and perplexities, their hearts are instantly sick, they cannot wait for God ; they do not trust him, nor ever did. Would you have the presence of God with you ? Learn to wait quietly for the salvation you expect from him. Then indeed is he glorified, when he is trusted in a storm, when he is waited for under long perplexities and distresses. Want of this ruined the Israelites in the wilderness ; their work was long, their difficulties and entanglements many ; they would have had an immediate end of their troubles. What ! more difficulties, more hardships ! Nay then let us ‘ choose a captain, and go down again into Egypt ;’ we know the worst of that ; where this will end we know not. This laid their carcasses in the wilderness, and deprived them of enjoying the good land.

(3dly.) It is to commit your affairs to the Lord with submission to his will, as to their issue and accomplishment. Trust respects protection, but it prescribes not, as to particular events. It is to commit our affairs to God with thoughts of his infinite wisdom, sovereignty, and goodness; with resolutions thereupon, that the product of his will is that which will be good, be best for us, though it should not at all fall in with our present desires. It is true, the psalmist says: 'Commit your ways unto the Lord; trust also in him; he shall bring it to pass;' Psal. xxxvii. 5. And so he shall, and will in all such cases, as that there particularly insisted on by the psalmist, wherein his own glory is particularly engaged. But this prescribes not as to all cases, that we should cry, 'Give me this child, or I die.' The rule is known; abide in this frame, and we shall have that we desire, or that which is better for us: but I must not abide in these things. See Psal. xxxvii. 3—5. lxxiii. 23—26.

And these are some of those ways wherewith we abide with God, as to our trusting of him in reference to special protection.

[3.] A third thing I should fix upon is, a people's universal owning of God's concernments in the world. His presence with them is, his owning their concernments; and certainly he expects that they abide with him in the owning of his. God's concernment in the world is his people, as invested with the privileges purchased for them by Christ; Deut. xxxii. 9. The Lord's portion is his people. This is that which the Lord has particularly kept to himself; the vineyard that he has chosen out of all the forests of the world; the handful that he hath taken to himself, his sons, and daughters, his family; these he expects that you should abide by, if you would have him abide by you: yea, it is most certain, as your respect and regard shall be to them and their interest, as his people; so will his respect, and regard be to you, and your interest, as the people of this nation. But I have formerly spoken hereof unto you, and therefore, though it be a matter of the greatest importance, I shall not farther insist upon it.

And these are some of the conditions of God's special presence with you. Pleasant conditions! their performance

is your glory, your rest, your blessedness ; not your bondage, not your burden. Not one duty doth God on this account require of you, but it is also your reward. O blessed terms of peace and agreement ! Blessed be the great Peacemaker ; cursed be the breakers of this blessed agreement. Is this all indeed that is required, that we may have the special presence of God with us for ever ? O how inexcusable shall we be, if we neglect these terms ! how just will be our ruin ! Behold, I have set before you life and death this day ; the life or death of these nations. O choose life, seeing it may be had on such easy, such blessed terms ; terms wherein in doing good to others, you will also do good to your own souls ; you will give peace to the nation, and have peace and rest in your own souls.

Use 2. Look on this presence of God as your main concernment. This is that which the prophet calls for in the words of the text. So the psalmist : ' There are many that say, Who will shew us any good ? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us ; ' Psal. iv. Let other men make what inquiries they please, look for good, for rest, for peace in what they best fancy ; acquiesce you in this, that the light of God's countenance, a pledge of his presence with you, is that alone which you are to inquire after. I remember since the beginning of these last wonderful days, how often we have thought ourselves utterly ruined : if such alterations come, we are undone ; if such men die, fall off, oppose, there is little hope of carrying on the work wherein we are engaged ; if such shakings, such divisions befall us, our ruin is at hand. If we break with such and such foreign nations, what hope remaineth ? But, alas ! we have found by experience, that our affairs have turned on none of these things ; our prosperity hath been built on none of those principles : such desertions, as we feared, have happened ; such alterations, such divisions have befallen us ; we have been sometimes almost reduced to Gideon's number ; such breaches with foreign nations have ensued : one party that was with us have gone off, and asked, what will ye now do ? and then another party hath gone off, and asked us, what will ye do now ? And no sooner do any fall off, but instantly they expect, and foretel destruction to them that do abide ; as though they were God, and not man ; or as though God

were bound to follow them with his presence in all their passions, in all their wanderings. It would, I confess, be more desirable unto me than life itself, to see all those at least, who stick to the cause of God in its greatest difficulties and trials, and then when it ceased to be carried on in the ordinary paths of nations, united again in the same common interest; to see their passions and prejudices cured, and their persons returned to their former usefulness. But this is that which is the result of all this discourse: it is not this, or that thing, or any thing whatever, but the presence of God alone with a people, that is their life, their preservation, their protection, and prosperity. If our strength had lain in any thing else in this world, our light had gone out long ago, and it had departed from us: but hence it is, that we are not consumed. Now if you are so careful not to lose these and these friends, this and that party of the nation, not to provoke this or that people causelessly; oh, what weight ought it to have upon your hearts and souls, that you provoke not the Lord to depart from you, that you take care for the continuance of his presence with you? This is your life, your safety, your success, your peace. Learn to prize it, value it.

Use 3. Whilst you have any pledge of the presence of God with you, be not greatly moved, nor troubled by any difficulties that you may meet withal; be not moved with any terror, but sanctify the Lord of hosts in your hearts, and make him your dread, and your fear, and he shall be a refuge, and a hiding-place unto you.

Some pretend to visions of God, and they prophesy your ruin and destruction; yea, they have limited times thereof, to the shame of their prognostications. Some are full of revenge, and they threaten your ruin, and talk what a catholic interest is complicating, and rising up against you. Some are troubled at your proceedings, that they are not in such equal paths as might be desired; as though that were a work and way of yesterday; as though we had not been turned, and driven out of old tracks and paths, above ten years ago; and as though the old paths were not so worn to the interest of a profane multitude, that it is yet impossible to keep the burden upright in them, whose guidance you are intrusted with. Some say you will never be able to go

through with the charge of your undertakings. As though God had never said, 'The gold and silver is mine.' Should these things busy or distract you? Doth the issue of the business in hand depend on the thoughts of these men? Will the end be according to their contrivances? Have these things indeed any influence at all into the determination of this controversy? Will not this one consideration guide your hearts and spirits, when all these waves roll all together upon you? Yea, but the whole of this affair must be ordered, and will fall out, according as the presence of God is with us, or otherwise. 'If God be with us, who shall be against us?' How may you on this account triumph against all oppositions whatsoever?

Use 4. Fix then your thoughts on the things which lie in a tendency towards the confirming of God's special providential presence with you. You have heard of the tenure of it, the means whereby it is procured and retained: these things I have spoken to in general before. Besides your own dependance on God, and comportment with his providence, the things incumbent on you are such, as respect either persons or things.

(1.) For persons, it is that which I have minded you of before, and which I shall do whilst I have life and opportunity to speak to you, or any concerned in the government of this nation, in public or private; because I know it is your life, your peace, your duty: and that is, that the end and aim of all your consultations be the protection, encouragement, liberty of the seed of Jacob, the remnant, the hidden people; those whom God hath owned, accepted, blessed, given his presence unto, and amongst them. I plead not for their exaltation, promotion, preferment, I know not what; but charge it as your duty to take care, that this be not trodden under foot, nor swallowed up, nor exposed to the rage and contempt of the men of the earth; it is not this or that party of them that I speak of, but the generation of them that seek the face of God, whose cause alone it is, and not of any other men, or frame of things, that is through the mighty power of God triumphant in these nations. They are to God as the apple of his eye, and let their safety be so also to you, and you will not fail of the presence of God.

(2.) For things, they are either, [1.] The things of God ; or, [2.] Men : of each a word.

[1.] For the things of God, or the public profession of religion in the land, my time is too far spent for me to enter into a serious discourse on the subject. Some things have of late been done, which when envy, and anger, and disappointment shall cease to operate, the whole people of God in this nation will have cause to rejoice in.

Let it not be thought amiss, if I mind you of one part of the nation in especial, the example of the saints allow us a special regard to those of our own nation, our kinsfolks in the flesh. It is for Wales I speak, where the unhappiness of almost all men running into extremes, hath disadvantaged the advancement of the gospel, and the progress of it, when we had great ground for the expectation of better things. Some are still zealous of the traditions of their fathers, and nothing almost will satisfy them, but their old road of beggarly readers in every parish. Others again, perhaps out of a good zeal, have hurried the people with violence beyond their principles, and sometimes it may be beyond the truth ; and as Jacob said, Over-driving the cattle, and young ones, have almost destroyed the whole flock. Between complaints on one side, and the other, I fear between misguided zeal, and formality, the whole work is almost cast to the ground ; the business of Zion, as such, is scarce by any cared for. The good Lord guide you to somewhat for its relief, that those who are godly may be encouraged, and those that need instruction may not be neglected.

[2.] The things of man, or righteous administrations of justice in things relating to this present pilgrimage. These wheels also are you to set going. Many particulars lie before you, more will present themselves ; troublesome times have always produced good laws ; your wisdom will be to provide for good execution, that not only the generations to come, but the present, may eat of the fruit of your labours and travail.

END OF VOL. XV.