

**SERMON XII.\***  
**GOD'S WORK IN FOUNDING ZION,**  
**AND HIS**  
**PEOPLE'S DUTY THEREUPON.**

---

<sup>a</sup> This sermon was preached in the abbey church at Westminster, at the opening of the Parliament, Sept. 17, 1656.

TO HIS HIGHNESS  
THE LORD PROTECTOR,

AND TO

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF ENGLAND,  
SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND, &c.

---

ALTHOUGH I need plead no other reason for the publishing of the ensuing discourse, but your order and command for my so doing; yet because I know that your peculiar interest, as governors of this commonwealth, in the several stations wherein you are placed of God, is truly stated therein; in the pursuit whereof your peace, and the peace of these nations will be found to lie; I crave leave to add that consideration also. Being fully acquainted in and with what weakness it was composed and delivered, I cannot but conclude, that it was merely for the truth's sake therein contained, which is of God, and its suitableness, through his wise providence, to the present state of things in these nations, that it found acceptance and entertainment with you, which also makes me willing to be therein your remembrancer a second time. From the day wherein I received a command and call unto the service of preaching unto you, unto this issue of it, wherein it is clothed anew with obedience to your order, I found mercy with God to have that caution of the great apostle abiding in my heart and thoughts: 'If I yet please man, I am not a servant of God.' Hence I can with boldness pro-

fess, that, influenced in some measure with the power of that direction, I studiously avoided whatever might be suggested with the least unsuitableness thereunto with respect either to myself, or others.

It was for Zion's sake that I was willing to undertake this duty and service, rejoicing that I had once more an opportunity to give public testimony to the great concernment of the great God, and our dear Lord Jesus Christ in all the concussions of the nations in the world, and peculiarly in his wonderful providential dispensations in these wherein we live. And here as the sum of all, to use plainness and liberty of speech, I say, If there be any thing, in any person whatever, in these nations, that cannot stand with, that can stand without, the general interest of the people of God pleaded for, let it fall and rise no more : and the Lord I know will send his blessing out of Zion, on whatever in singleness of heart, is done in a tendency to the establishment thereof.

Farther I shall not need to suggest any thing of the ensuing discourse : they who take themselves to be concerned therein, will acquaint themselves with it, by its perusal. I shall only add, if the general principles asserted therein be in your hearts, if in pursuit thereof you endeavour, that in no corner of the nation it may be said, This is Zion that no man careth for ; but that those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and are by faith and obedience separated from the perishing world, following the Lamb, according to the light which he is graciously pleased to impart unto them, and engaged by the providence of God in that work, which he hath undertaken to accomplish amongst us, be not overborne by a spirit of profaneness and contempt of the power of godliness, raging in the earth ; that they may be preserved and secured from the re-

turn of a hand of violence, and encouraged in the testimony they have to bear to the kingdom of Christ, in opposition to the world, and all the ways which the men thereof have received by tradition from their fathers, that are not according to his mind ; you will undoubtedly in your several conditions receive blessing from God. Which also that you may in all your concernments, is the daily prayer of,

Your humble servant

In the work of our dear Lord Jesus,

JOHN OWEN.

## SERMON XII.

*What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.—ISAIAH xiv. 32.*

THE head of the prophecy, whereof these words are the close, lies in ver. 28. 'In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden:' which 'gives us the season, and just time of its revelation and delivery. The kingdom of Judah was at that season low, and broken; foreign invasions, and intestine divisions had made it so. An account hereof is given us, 2 Chron. xxviii. throughout; as it is especially summed up, ver. 19. of that chapter: 'For the Lord brought Judah low, because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.' Amongst their oppressing neighbours that took advantage at their low and divided condition, their old enemies the Philistines, the posterity of Cham in Canaan, had no small share, as ver. 18. of that chapter: 'The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho, with the villages thereof, and Timnah, with the villages thereof, Gimzo also, and the villages thereof; and they dwelt there.'

In this state of things God takes notice of the joy and triumphing of the whole land of Palestina, that is, the country of the Philistines. In that 'the rod of him that smote them was broken:' that is, the power of the kings and kingdom of Judah, which for many generations had prevailed against them, especially in the days of David, 2 Sam. v. and of Uzziah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 6. and kept them under, was made weak and insufficient for that purpose, ver. 29. 'Rejoice not thou, whole land of Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken.'

It is no wonder if Palestina, that was to be smitten, and broken by the rod of God among his people, rejoice at their perplexities and distresses, when we have seen men so to do who pretend to dwell in Judah.

To take them off from their pride and boasting, their

triumph and rejoicing ; the Lord lets them know, that from the people whom they despised, and that broken rod they trampled upon, their desolation was at hand ; though they seemed to be perplexed, and forsaken for a season, ver. 29—31. ‘ Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken ; for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety, and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay the remnant. Howl, O gate, cry, O city, thou whole Palestina art dissolved ; for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times.’ That it is Hezekiah who is principally intended in these lofty allegorical expressions, that was then rising up from the broken rod of Judah, is evident. He is termed a cockatrice, and a ‘ fiery flying serpent,’ not from his own nature, which was tender, meek, and gentle, wherein the comparison doth not at all lie, nor hold ; but in respect of the mischief that he should do unto, the irrecoverable destruction that he should bring on the land of Palestina ; which accordingly he performed ; 2 Kings xviii. 8. ‘ He smote the Philistines even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced cities ;’ that is, he wasted and destroyed the whole land, from one end even to the other.

It is, it seems, no new thing, that the season of the enemies’ rejoicing, built upon the outward appearance and state of things among the people of God, is the beginning of their disappointment and desolation. The Lord make it so in this day of England’s expectation, that the rod of it may be strengthened again, yet to smite the whole land of Palestina.

The words of my text are the result of things, upon God’s dealings and dispensations before mentioned. Uncertain it is, whether they ought to be restrained to the immediate prophecy beforegoing concerning Palestina, or whether they relate not also to that in the beginning of the chapter, concerning the destruction of the Assyrian, which is summed up, ver. 24, 25. ‘ The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass ; and as I have purposed, it shall stand : that I will break the

Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountain tread him under foot; then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden from off their shoulders.' It is the ruining of Sennacherib, and his army in the days of Hezekiah, that is foretold. Yea, and this seems to claim a peculiar share and influence into this ἐπινίκιον, or triumphant close; because eminently and signally, not long after, messengers were thus sent from Babylon to inquire of the health, and congratulate the good success of Hezekiah. And well had it been for him, and his posterity, had he given those messengers the return to their inquiry, which was here prepared for him some years before. His mistake herein was the fatal ruin of Judah's prosperity. Let not then that consideration be excluded, though the other insisted on, be principally intended.

The words you see have in them, an inquiry and a resolution thereof. I shall open them briefly, as they lie in the text.

First, there is an inquiry.

1. 'What shall one:' what shall, or what ought: what is it their duty to do, or to say? or what shall they, upon the evidence of the things done, so do, or say? Either their duty, or the event is denoted, or both, as in such predictions it often falls out.

2. 'What shall one:' that is any one, or every one. The answer spoken of is either the duty of every one to give; or it will be so evident, that any one shall be able to give it. The word one, I confess, is not expressly in the original, but is evidently included in the verb וְכִי יִעֲנֶה; what shall be answered, that is, by any one whatever. There is no more in the translation, than is eminently infolded in the original expression of this thing.

3. 'What shall one then:' that is, in the season when God hath disappointed the hopes and expectations of the enemies of his people, and hath strengthened their rod to bruise them again more than ever. That is a season wherein great inquiry will be made about those things. What shall one then answer? This word also, is included in the interrogation; and much of the emphasis of it consists therein.

4. 'Answer the messengers:' that is, men coming on set purpose to make inquiry after the state of affairs among

God's people, ambassadors, agents, spies, messengers, inquirers of any sort; or the word may be taken more largely, for any stranger that came to Jerusalem. The septuagint render these words βασιλεῖς ἐθνῶν, 'the kings of the nations.' What shall they say in this case? τὶ ἀποκριθήσονται; 'what shall they answer,' or 'say?' So that word is sometimes used. Some think that for מַלְאכִי, which they should have rendered ἄγγελοι, or 'messengers,' they read מְלָכִי, or 'kings,' by an evident mistake: but all things are clear in the original.

5. 'Of the nations:' that is, of this or that nation, of any nation that shall send to make inquiry: גִּי 'of the heathen,' say some those commonly so called, or 'the nations estranged from God,' are usually denoted by this word in the plural number; yet not always under that consideration: so that there may be an enallagy of number, the nation for the nations, which is usual.

'What shall one answer' them? They come to make inquiry after the work of God among his people, and it is fit that an answer be given to them.

Two things are observable in this interrogation.

I. The nations about will be diligently inquiring after God's dispensations among his people.

Besides what reports they receive at home, they will have messengers, agents, or spies to make inquiry.

II. The issues of God's dispensations amongst his people shall be so evident and glorious, that every one, any one though never so weak, if not blinded by prejudice, shall be able to give a convincing answer concerning them to the inquiries of men.

Something shall be spoken to these propositions in the process of our discourse.

Secondly, there is the resolution given of the inquiry made in this interrogation. Hereof are two parts,

1. What God hath done.

2. What his people shall, or ought to do.

Wrap up at any time the work of God, and the duty of his people together, and they will be a sufficient answer to any man's inquiry after the state of things among them. As to our wisdom in reference unto providential dispensations, this is the whole of man.

1. The first thing in the answer to be given in, is the



work of God. 'The Lord hath founded Zion:' Zion, that is, his church, his people, his chosen ones, called Zion from the place of their solemn worship in the days of David, the figure and type of the gospel church; Heb. xii. 22. 'Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' It is generally used not for the whole body of that people, unless as they were typically considered, in which respect they were all holy; but for the secret covenanted ones of that people, as is evident from all the promises made thereunto, yet with special regard to the ordinances of worship.

This God 'hath founded:' founded, or established, strengthened, that it shall not be removed. Psal. lxxxvii. is a comment on these words, 'he hath founded' it, that is, in faithful promises, and powerful performances, sufficient for its preservation and establishment.

Now this expression, 'The Lord hath founded Zion:' as it is an answer to the inquiries of 'the messengers of the nation,' may be taken two ways.

(1.) As giving an account of the work itself done, or what it is that God hath done in and amongst his people. What is the work that is so famed abroad, and spoken of throughout the world, that being attempted in many places, and proving abortive, is here accomplished? This is it, shall one say: God hath established his people and their interest. It is no such thing as you suppose, that some are set up, and some pulled down; that new fabrics of government or ruling are erected for their own sakes, or their sakes who are interested in them; but this is the thing that God hath done, 'he hath founded Zion,' established his people and their interest in despite of all opposition.

(2.) As giving a reason of the work done. Whence is it that the Lord hath wrought so mightily for you, amongst you, in your behalf, preserved you, recovered you, supported you, given you success and victory, when all nations conspired your ruin? Why, this is the reason of it: 'God hath founded Zion,' he bore it good-will, hath taken care of the interest of his church and people.

The words may be taken in either sense; the issue of their intendment as to our instruction, will be the same. This is the answer to be given to 'the messengers of the na-

tion,' who perhaps expected to have heard of their strength and policy, of their counsellors and armies, of their wealth and their riches, of their triumphs and enjoyments. No: 'God hath founded Zion.' And well had it been for Hezekiah, had he given his answer prepared for him so long before, to the messengers of Babylon.

III. The great design of God in his mighty works, and dispensations in the world is the establishment of his people, and their proper interest, in their several generations.

Give me leave to say it is not for this or that form of government, or civil administration of human affairs; it is not for these or those governors, much less for the advantage of one or other sort of men; for the enthroning of any one or other persuasion, gainful or helpful to some few or more, that God hath wrought his mighty works amongst us: but it is that Zion may be founded, and the general interest of all the sons and daughters of Zion be preserved; and so far as any thing lies in a subserviency thereunto, so far, and no farther, is it with him accepted. And whatever, on what account soever, sets up against it, shall be broken in pieces.

What answer then should we give to inquirers? 'That the Lord hath founded Zion.' This is that, and that alone, which we should insist upon, and take notice of, as the peculiar work of God amongst us. Let the reports of other nations be what they will, let them acquaint the messengers of one another with their glory, triumphs, enlarging of their empires and dominions. When it is inquired what he hath done in England, let us say, 'He hath founded Zion.' And he will not leave until every man concerned in the work shall be able to say, We have busied ourselves about things of no moment, and consumed our days, and strength, in setting up sheaves that must bow hereunto. This is the main of God's intendment, and whilst it is safe, he hath the glory and end of his dispensations.

2. The other part of the answer relates to the people: 'The poor of his people shall trust in it.'

The words contain either their duty, they ought to do so; or the event, they shall do so; or both jointly.

(1.) 'The poor of his people;' verse 30. they are called, 'the first-born of the poor and needy:' that is, those who are very poor. Now this expression may denote either the

people in general, who had been poor and afflicted; and so 'the poor of his people' is as much as 'his poor people:' or some in particular, that partly upon the account of their low outward condition, partly on the account of their lowliness of mind, are called 'the poor of his people;' and so the words are excellently paraphrased, Zeph. iii. 12, 13. 'I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted, and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, and none shall make them afraid.' We may take the words in a sense comprising both these: namely for the poor, preserved remnant, carried through the fiery trial, and preserved to see some comfortable issue of God's dealing with them, though yet wrestling with difficulties and perplexities.

(2.) What shall they do? They 'shall trust in it:' וְבָה יִחְסוּ 'and in it they shall trust:' that is, being 'in it they shall trust,' confide, acquiesce, namely in the Lord, who hath wrought this work: or 'in it,' that is, either in the work of God, or in Zion so established by God.

The word here used for 'trusting,' is sometimes taken for to 'repair,' or to retreat to any thing (and not properly to put trust), affiance, or confidence; and so it is rendered in the margin of your books: 'They shall betake themselves to it.' So is the word used, Judges ix. 15. Psal. xxxvi. 7. So the intendment is: That the poor, preserved people of God, seeing his design to found Zion, and to establish the interest of his chosen, shall leave off all other designs, aims, and contrivances, and wind up all on the same bottom: they shall not, at least they ought not (for I told you the words might denote either their duty, what they ought to do; or the event, what they shall do), set up designs and aims of their own, and contend about other things; but betake their hopes to that which is the main intendment of God, the establishment of the interest of his people, and cast all other things in a subserviency thereunto. The sum is:

IV. It is the duty of God's poor preserved remnant, laying aside all other aims and contrivances, to betake themselves to the work of God, founding Zion, and preserving the common interest of his people.

Of the propositions thus drawn from the words, I shall

treat severally, so far, as they may be foundations of the inferences intended. And,

I. The nations about will be diligently inquiring concerning God's dispensations among his people.

Their eyes are upon them, and they will be inquiring after them.

In the handling of this, and all that follows, I humbly desire, that you would consider in what capacity, as to the discharge of this work, I look upon myself and you. As you are hearers of the word of God (in which state alone at present, though with reference to your designed employment, I look upon you), you are not at all distinguished from others, or among yourselves, but as you are believers, or not; regenerate persons, or coming short thereof. And on this account, as I shall not speak of my rulers without reverence, so I shall endeavour to speak to my hearers with authority.

I say, then, there are certain affections and principles, that are active in the nations, that will make them restless, and always put them upon this inquiry. The people of God, on one account or other, shall be in all seasons a separated people; Numb. xxiii. 9. 'Lo the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations;' yea, they are separated from them, whilst they are in their bowels, and dwell in the midst of them; Micah v. 7, 8. whether they are amongst them, as the spring of their mercies, or the rise of their destruction (one of which they will always be), yet they are not of them. No sooner then is any people, or portion of them, thus dedicated to God, but all the nations about, and those amongst them not engaged in the same way with them, instantly look on them, as utterly severed from them, having other ways, ends, and interests than they; being built up wholly on another account and foundation. They reckon not of them as a people, and a nation. 'The conclusion they make concerning them is, that of Haman, Esther iii. 8. 'There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people.' Not their moral and judicial laws, which were the sum of that perfection, which all nations aimed at (on which account they said of them, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and un-

derstanding people ;' Deut. iv. 6. and the keeping of those laws was their wisdom and understanding among all nations), nor yet merely the laws of their religious worship ; but the whole way, interest, design, profession of that people, is comprised in this expression, they 'are diverse from all people.' Looking on them in this state, they have principles, as I said, that will carry them out to an inquiry into their state and condition.

1. They are full of envy against them : 'they shall be ashamed of their envy at thy people ;' Isa. xxvi. 11. Looking on them, as wholly separated from them, and standing on another account than they do, they are full of envy at them. Envy is a restless passion, full of inquiries and jealousies ; the more it finds of poison, the more it swells and feeds. It will search into the bottom of that which its eye is fixed on. The transaction of the whole business between Nehemiah and Sanballat gives light to this consideration. See Nehem. iv. 1—6. And ever the nearer any nation is to this people, the greater is their envy. It was Edom, and Moab, and Ammon, the nations round about, that were most filled with wrath and envy against Israel. Yea, when that people was divided among themselves, and the true worship of God remained with Judah, and they became the separated people, Ephraim was instantly filled with envy against them ; Isa. xi. 13. 'The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off : Ephraim shall not envy Judah : ' for there must be a desire of the same thing, as something answering it (which befalls in proximity of habitation), that a man is envied for, in him that envies him. This is one fountain of the nations' inquiry after your affairs.

Through the providence of God you dwell alone, that is, as to your main design and interest. You are not reckoned among the nations, as to the state of being the people of God ; so far, and under that consideration they count you not worthy to be reckoned or esteemed a nation. They envy to see the men of their contempt exalted, blessed. The same is the condition of Ephraim amongst us, men not engaged in the same cause and way with you, they are full of envy. Wherefore do they inquire of your welfare, of your state and condition, of your affairs ? Is it that they love you,

that they desire your prosperity, that they would have you an established nation? no, only their envy makes them restless. And as it is in general, so no sooner doth any man upon a private account separate himself from the public interest of the people of God, but he is instantly filled with envy against the managers of it. And notwithstanding all our animosities, if this hath not befallen us in our differences and divisions, I no way doubt a peaceable composure, and blessed issue of the whole. If envy be not at work, we shall have establishment.

2. A second principle, whereby they are put upon their inquiries, is fear. They fear them, and therefore will know how things stand with them, and what are the works of God amongst them; Hab. iii. 7. 'I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.' 'I saw' it: when God was doing the great work described in that chapter, with many lofty allegorical expressions of bringing his people out of bondage, to settle them in a new state and condition; the nations round about, that looked on them, were filled with affliction, fear, and trembling. They were afraid whither these things would grow. Psal. xlviii. 1—6. 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together: they saw it, and so they marvelled: they were troubled, and so they hasted away. For fear took hold upon them there, and pain as of a woman in travail.' The close of all the considerations of these kings, and their attendants, is, that fear took hold upon them. Fear is solicitous and inquiring; it will leave nothing unsearched, unlooked into; it would find the inside and bottom of every thing, wherein it is concerned. Though the more it finds, the more it is increased; yet the greater still are its inquiries, fearing more what it knows not, than what it knows; what is behind, than what appears. This puts the nations upon their inquiry; they are afraid what these things will grow to. Psal. cxxvi. 2. 'Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great

things for them :’ they are the words of men pondering their affairs, and filled with fear at the issue. If God do such things as these for them, what think you will be the issue? I dare say of the proudest adversaries of the people of God at this day, notwithstanding all their anger, they are more afraid than angry. The like also may be said concerning their wrath, revenge, and curiosity, all pressing them to such inquiries.

This is the issue of this proposal. If we are not a separated people unto God; if our portion be as the portion of the men of the world, and we are also as they, reckoned among the nations; if we have had only national works, in the execution of wrath on men fitted thereunto amongst us; woe unto us that we were ever engaged in the whole affair, that for some years we have been interested in. It will be bitterness and disappointment in the latter end. If we be the Lord’s peculiar lot, separate unto him, the nations about, and many amongst ourselves, on the manifold accounts before-mentioned, will be inquiring into our state and condition, and the work of God amongst us. Let us consider what we shall answer them, what we shall say unto them, what is the account we give of God’s dealings with us; and of his mighty works amongst us, what is the profession we make. If we seek ourselves, if we are full of complaints and repinings one against another, if every one hath his own aims, his own designs (for what we do, not what we say, is the answer we make), if we measure the work of God by its suitableness to our private interests; if this be the issue of all the dealings of God amongst us, we shall not have wherein to rejoice. But of these things afterward. The second proposition is,

II. The issue of God’s dealing with, and dispensations among his people, shall be so perspicuous and glorious, that one, any one, every one, shall be able to give an answer to them that make inquiries about them.

‘What shall one then say?’ Whether it be for judgment, or mercy, all is one: he will make the event to be evident and glorious. He ‘is our rock, and his work is perfect;’ and he will have his works so known, as that they may all praise him. Be it in judgment, see what issue he will bring his work unto; Deut. xxix. 24, 25. ‘Even all nations shall

say: Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say: Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them, when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.' Men shall say, ordinary men shall be able to give this sad account of the reason of the works of God, and his dealings with his people. So also as to his dispensations in mercy; Isa. xxvi. 11. 'Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.' He will not leave the work of his favour towards his people, until those who are willing to shut their eyes against it do see, and acknowledge his hand and counsel therein.

I do not say, this will hold in every dispensation of God, in all seasons, from the beginning to the ending of them. In many works of his power and righteousness he will have us bow our souls to the law of his providence, and his sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness therein, when his footsteps are in the deep, and his paths are not known: which is the reasonablest thing in the world. But this generally is the way of his proceedings, especially in the common concernment of his people, and in the disposal of their public interests; his works, his will, and counsels therein shall be eminent and glorious. It is chiefly from ourselves, and our own follies, that we come short of such an acquaintance with the works of God, as to be able to give an answer to every one, that shall demand an account of them. When David was staggered at the works of God, he gives this reason of it: 'I was foolish, and as a beast before him;' Psal. lxxiii. 22. That thoughtfulness and wisdom which keeps us in darkness, is our folly.

There are sundry things that are apt to cloud our apprehensions, as to the mind of God in his dealing with his people. As,

1. Self-fulness of our own private apprehensions and designs. A private design and aim in the works of Providence, is like a private, by opinion in matters of religion. You seldom see a man take up a by opinion (if I may so speak), but he instantly lays more weight upon it, than upon all religion besides. If that be not enthroned, be it a matter of



never so small importance, he scarce cares what becomes of all other truths which he doth embrace. When men have fixed to themselves, that this or that particular must be the product of God's providential dispensations, that alone fills their aims and desires, and leaves no room for any other apprehension. Have we not seen persons in the days wherein we live, so fixed on a reign, a kingdom, I know not what, that they would scarce allow God himself to be wise, if their minds were not satisfied: 'Give me this child or I die.' Now is it probable, that when men's whole souls are possessed with a design and desire of their own, so fully, that they are cast into the mould of it, are transformed into the image and likeness of it, they can see, hear, think, talk, dream nothing else, that they shall be able to discern aright, and acquiesce in the general issue of God's dispensations, or be able to 'answer the messengers of the nations,' making inquiry concerning them? Fear, hope, wrath, anger, discontentment, with a rabble of the like mind-darkening affections, are the attendants of such a frame. He who knows any thing of the power of prejudices, in diverting the minds of men from passing a right judgment on things proposed to them, and the efficacy of disordered affections for the creating and confirming of such prejudices, will discern the power of this darkening disturbance.

2. Private enmities, private disappointments, private prejudices, are things of the same consideration. Let a man of a free and large heart and spirit abstract his thoughts from the differences that are among the people of God in this nation, and keep himself from an engagement into any particular design and desire: it is almost impossible that he should wink so hard, but that the issue and reason of God's dealing with us will shine in upon his understanding, so that he shall be able to give an account of them, to them that shall make inquiry. Will he not be able to 'say to the messengers of the nations,' and all other observers of the providential alterations of the late times, that have passed over us, The people of God in this nation were despised, but are now in esteem: they were under subjection to cruel task-masters, some in prisons, some banished to the ends of the earth, merely on the account of the worship of their God, the consciences of all inthralled, and of many defiled

and broken on the scandals laid before them, whilst iniquity and superstition were established by law; but this is that which God hath now done and accomplished, the imprisoned are set at liberty, the banished are recalled, they that have lain among the pots have got doves' wings, conscience is no more intralld, their sacrifices are not mixed with their blood, nor do they meet with trembling in the worship of God. O ye 'messengers of the nations,' this is that which the Lord hath done! Who, I say, not entangled with one prejudicate engagement or other, may not see this with half an eye? But such is our state and condition, such our frame and temper, so full are we of our own desires, and so perplexed with our own disappointments, that we can see nothing, know nothing, nor are able to give any word of account, that may tend to the glory of our God, to them that inquire of us; but every one vents his own discontentments, his own fears, his own perplexities. The Lord look down in mercy, and let us not be found despisers of the work of his power and goodness. Ah! how many glorious appearances have I seen, of which I said, under the shadow hereof, 'Shall we live among the heathen?' but in a short space they have passed away. Shall we therefore, 'choose us a captain, and go down again into Egypt?' The third proposition ensues.

III. The great design of God in his mighty works and dispensations is the establishment of his people, and their proper interest, in their several generations.

To make this clear some few things are previously to be considered. As,

1. The proper interest of the people of God is to glorify him in their several places, stations, and generations: none of us are to live unto ourselves. It is for this end that God hath taken a peculiar people to himself in this world, that he might be glorified by them, that his name may be borne forth by them, and upon them. This is the great end whereunto they are designed, and that which they ought to aim at only, even to glorify God. If this be not done, they fall off from, and are besides their proper interest. Besides innumerable testimonies to this purpose, I might give evidence to this assertion from God's eternal, electing love towards them, with his intendment therein; from their redemption

out of every kindred, tribe, and family under heaven, by the blood of Christ; from their separation from the world, by their effectual calling, and the like considerations. But I have the consenting voice of them all in general, and of every individual in particular, crying out, This is our, this is my proper interest, that we may glorify God; fail we, and come short in this, we come short, and fail in the whole: so that I shall not need farther to confirm it.

2. God is the only proper and infallible judge, in what state and condition his people will best, and most glorify his name, in their several generations. I think I need not insist on the proof of this assertion. 'Should it be according to thy mind,' saith he, in Job xxxiv. 33. or according to the mind of God? Should the disposal of things be according to his will, or ours? Whose end is to be obtained in the issue of all? is it not his glory? Who hath the most wisdom to order things aright, he or we? Who hath the chiefest interest in, and right unto the things contended about? Who sees what will be the event of all things, he or we? Might men be judges, would they not universally practically conclude, that the condition wherein they might best glorify God would be, that they might have peace and rest from their enemies, union and a good understanding among themselves, that they might dwell peaceably in the world, without control, and have the necks of their adversaries under their feet? this in general: in particular, that this, or that persuasion, that they are peculiarly engaged in, might be always enthroned; that their proper sheaf might stand upright, and all others bow thereunto, and that nothing is contrary to the glory of God, but what disturbs this condition of affairs? I know not what may be accomplished before the end of the world; from the beginning of it hitherto, for the most part, the thoughts of God have not been as these thoughts of ours: he hath judged otherwise as to the condition wherein his people should glorify him. God is judge himself; let us, I pray you, leave the determination of this difference to him; and if it be so as to our general condition, much more is it so as to our peculiar designs and aims, wherein we are divided.

3. Providential dispensations are discoveries of the wisdom of God in disposing of the condition of his people, so

as they may best glorify him. To dispute against the condition wherein at any time we are cast by his providence, is to rise up against his wisdom in disposing of things to his own glory.

These things being premised, it is easy to give light and evidence to the assertion laid down.

I might go through the stories of God's dealings with the nations of the world, and his own people amongst them, and manifest in each particular, that still his design was the establishment of his people's proper interest. But instead of instances, take two or three testimonies that occur: Deut. xxxii. 8. 'When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel:' from the beginning God hath so ordered all the nations of the world, that they may bear a proportion to what he hath to do with his people; that he may so order and dispose of them, as that his design towards his own may be accomplished. Amos ix. 9. 'For, lo, I will command and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth:' all the stirs and commotions that are in the world, are but God's siftings of all the nations, that his chosen ones may be fitted for himself, and not lost in the chaff and rubbish. Heb. xii. 26, 27. 'Whose voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken, may remain:' all the shakings of the nations are, that the unshaken interest of the saints may be established. Isa. li. 15, 16. 'But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared, the Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people:' heaven and earth, and all things therein, are disposed of, that Zion may be built and established. All God's works in this world lie in a subserviency to this end and purpose. Doth God at any time prosper an evil,

or a wicked nation? an antichristian nation? is it for their own sakes? Doth God take care for oxen? hath he delight in the prosperity of his enemies? No: it is only that they may be a rod in his hand for a little moment, and a staff for his indignation against the miscarriages of his people. Isa. x. 5. 'O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.' This in such a season is their proper interest, to glorify God in distress. Doth he break, ruin, and destroy them, as sooner or later he will leave them neither root nor branch? All that he doth to them is a recompense for the controversy of Zion. Isa. xxxiv. 9. 'For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.'

We see not perhaps at this day, wherein the concernment of the remnant of God's people doth lie, in the great concussions of the nations in the world: we know not what design in reference to them may lie therein. Alas! we are poor short sighted creatures, we know nothing that is before us; much less can we make a judgment of the work of God, in the midst of the darkness and confusion that is in the world, until he hath brought it to perfection. All lies open and naked to his eye, and the beauty of all his works will one day appear. The true and proper interest of his people, so as they may best glorify him in the world, is that which he is pursuing in all these dispensations.

The grounds, reasons, and foundations of this truth, in the counsel, from the love, and attributes of God, the redemption in the blood of Jesus, I must not now pursue. This one thing I shall only offer: The state of Zion, of the people of God, being much to depend upon the disposals of them whom God by his providence raiseth up to rule and government among the nations; though sometimes he sets up men whose hearts and minds are upright with himself, yet he will not trust his own to their mercy, and the variableness of their wills in general; but will so dispose, alter, weaken, and strengthen them, to set them up, and pull down, that it shall be their interest, to which they will always abide faithful, so to deal with his people, as he will have them dealt with, that they may best glorify him in their generations.

If it be in the infinite, wise counsel of God, to give his saints in this nation peace and tranquillity, they shall not

have it precariously upon the wills of men; for he will not leave moulding and disposing of the affairs of the nation, until it find, that it is its proper interest to give, and measure out unto them, what is to the mind of God. All that hath been done amongst us, all that we are in expectation of, turns on this hinge alone. But lastly,

IV. It is the duty of God's preserved remnant, laying aside all other aims and contrivances, to betake themselves to the work of God, founding Zion, and preserving the common interest of his people.

'God hath founded Zion, and the poor of the people shall trust therein,' or betake themselves unto it. We are apt to wander on hills and mountains, every one walking in the imagination of his own heart, forgetting our resting-place. When God was bringing the power of the Babylonian upon his people, the prophet Jeremiah could neither persuade the whole nation to submit to his government, nor many individuals among them to fall to him in particular. And when the time of their deliverance from that captivity was accomplished, how hardly were they persuaded to embrace the liberty tendered? Notwithstanding all encouragements and advantages, the greatest part of them abide in that place of their bondage to this day. So hardly are we brought to close with God's peculiar work, and our own proper interest, although his glory, and our own safety lie therein. The reasons of this frame I have in part touched before; I shall add but two more.

1. Discontentment with our peculiar lot and portion in the work of the Lord, and common interest of his people. It is with us in our civil affairs, as the apostle saith it is not in the natural body, nor ought to be in the spiritual or church body. The foot doth not say, because I am not the head, I am not of the body; no, it doth not, but is content with its own place and usefulness. It is so with the rest of the members that are more noble, and yet are not the head neither. It is otherwise with us. I interpose not my thoughts, as to your present constitution, and the order of things amongst us. I speak no more than I have sundry years since, sundry times complained of to a parliament of this commonwealth. Every one, if not personally, yet in association with them of some peculiar persuasion with himself,

would be the head ; and because they are not, they conclude they are not of the body, nor will care for the body, but rather endeavour its ruin. Because their peculiar interest doth not reign, the common interest shall be despised. And this hath been the temper, or rather distemper, of the people of God in this nation now for sundry years ; and what it may yet produce I know not. Only for the present the work of God in founding Zion, in pursuing his people's common interest, is despised, thought light of, and all the pleasant things thereof trodden under foot. Unless God end this frame, my expectations, I confess, of an happy issue of the great work of God amongst us will wither day by day.

2. The suffering of our wills and judgments, as to the products of providence, to run before the will of God. This the experience of these days hath taught us. Those who have a forwardness in prescribing to God what he should do, as to the 'modus,' or manner of the work, which at any time he hath to accomplish, are stubbornly backward in closing with what he doth actually produce. These, and the like things, which might be in large catalogues reckoned up one after another, detain the minds of men from acquiescing in the common interest of Zion, whose preservation is the whole peculiar design of the great work of God in any place or season. These foundations being laid in the words of the text, let us now see what inferences from them may be made for our advantage and instruction.

*Use 1.* Let us then consider diligently, what we shall 'answer the messengers of the nations.' Some think that by the 'nation,' is peculiarly intended the nation of the Jews themselves, whose messengers from all parts came to Jerusalem to inquire of the work of God, and to advise about the affairs of the whole. In this sense you are the messengers of this nation, to whom an answer is to be returned. And because the text saith, one shall do it, that is, any one, I shall make bold, before we close, to give an answer to your inquiries, and endeavour to satisfy your expectations. In the mean time, as the words seem more directly to respect the inquiries of other nations ; so it is in a special manner incumbent on you, who will be especially inquired of, to return an answer to them. Be provided then, I pray, in your own hearts, to give an answer in this business. And oh

that you could do it with one heart and lip, with one consent, and judgment! On whom are the eyes of this nation, and of those round about? from whom are the expectations of men? to whom should we go to inquire what God hath done in this nation, what he is doing, what are the effects of his power, if not of you? Some of you have been engaged in this work with the Lord from the beginning. And I hope none of you have been engaged in heart, or hand against it; and you speak still with living affections to the old and common cause. If you will be able to steer your course aright, if you would take one straight step, have in a readiness an acquaintance with the work of God, what it is that he aims at, by which you may be guided in all your undertakings. Suppose now a man, or men, should come and ask of you, what God hath done in these nations; what he hath wrought and effected; what is brought forth? Have you an answer in readiness? Certainly God hath done so much, as that he expects you should be able to give an account of it. Take heed that every one of you be not ready to speak the disquietness of your own spirits, and so cast contempt on the work of God. Something else is required of you. I have sometimes in darkness, and under temptations myself, began to think, that what hath been, is the thing that is, and there is no new thing under the sun. As it hath been among the heathen of old, so it hath been amongst us; or, as it was with Israel; 1 Kings xvi. 21, 22. 'Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts, half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned:' that a common thing, and frequent in the world, had fallen us, wherein God had no hand, but that of common providence, in dashing one sort of men against another. So foolish have I been, and as a beast, so ready to condemn the generation of the righteous, so unbelieving and ready to cast away the faith and prayer of ten thousand saints; one of whose sighs shall not be lost. But such fearful effects sometimes trouble, disquietment, disappointment, and carnal fear will produce. But certain it is, none of the many cries of the people of God shall be lost, nor their faith be disappointed. God hath a peculiar design



in hand, and we are to find it out, that we may be able to answer them that make inquiries. If you lay not this foundation of your procedures, I shall not wonder if you err in your ways. It is your pole-star, and will be so, by which your whole course is to be steered: your shield, which whilst it is safe, though you die, your glory abides.

But you will say: What then is this great design of God among his people? Let the Holy One of Israel bring nigh his work, that we may know it. What is that true and general interest of Zion that he hath founded? Let us know it, that we may be able to give an answer to them that inquire after it. Ask themselves, those who have prayed for it, waited for it, expected it, are made partakers of it, do enjoy it, live upon it; probably they will be able to give you an account what is their peculiar and only interest, as to these providential dispensations; surely they cannot but know that which they enjoy and live upon.

But you will say: Of all others this is the most unlikely and irrational course, a way to perplex and entangle, not to inform us at all. Is it not clear, that they are divided among themselves? Is not their language, is not their voice, like that of the Jews at the building of the second temple? Some shouted for joy, and some wept at the remembrance of the former temple? Are not their desires rather like that, and those of theirs, who built Babel; than of those who cry grace, grace, whilst God is founding Zion? Do not many of them utterly deny any work or design of God (I mean that is peculiar) in the affairs of this nation; and utterly fall away from the society of them, who are otherwise persuaded? And is it likely that we can gather any resolution from them? Doth not the greatest danger of our own miscarriage lie in this, that we may be apt to attend to their peculiar desires, and so to divide amongst ourselves as they are divided?

And is this the return that indeed is to be made? O that mine eyes might run down with water day and night on this account, that my heart might be moved within me, for the folly of my people. 'Ah foolish people and unwise, do we thus requite the Lord!' It is true, many at all times have desired the day of the Lord, who, when it hath come, have not been able to abide it; it hath consumed them, and all the principles whereon they have acted, and upon which

they did desire it. But that those who have their share in it indeed, should be thus broken among themselves, should bite one another, devour one another, and scarce allow one another to be sharers in the common interest of the saints, in that day, this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation. But yet something may be farther pressed on them in this business. When one went to demand of the philosophers of the several sects, which was the best of them; every one named his own sect and party in the first place; but all of them in the second place granted that of Plato to be the most eminent. The inquirer knew quickly what to conclude; setting aside prejudicate affections, self-love, and by-interests, he saw that the judgment of all ran on that of Plato, as the best and most eminent sect, and which thereupon he preferred before the rest.

May not some inquiry of the like nature be made of the people of God amongst us? Ask them, what is the common interest of Zion, that God takes care of, that he hath founded in the days wherein we live, in the great transactions of providence that have passed over us? Say some, That such a form of church worship and discipline be established, such a rule of doctrine confirmed, and all men whatever compelled to submit unto them; herein lies that kingdom of Christ, which he takes care of, this is that which God will have founded and established. And what this form, what this rule is, we are to declare. That that discipline be eradicated, the ministers' provision destroyed, and the men of such a persuasion enthroned, to rule all the rest at their pleasure; seeing, that notwithstanding all their pretended reformation, they are yet antichristian, say others. Say some, That a kingdom and rule be set up in our hands, to be exercised in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, taking away all law and magistracy already established, to bring forth the law of righteousness conceived in our minds and therein to be preserved; all uniting only in this, that a sovereignty as unto administration of the things of God is to be theirs. Say others, lastly, That the people of God be delivered from the hands of their cruel enemies, that they may serve the Lord without fear all the days of their lives in righteousness and holiness; that notwithstanding their present differences, they may live peaceably one with, or at

least one by another, enjoying rule and promotion, as they are fitted for employments, and as he gives promotion, in whose hand it is: that godliness, and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ be preserved, protected, and secured, from a return of the hand of violence upon it. Herein, say some, lies the common interest of the people of God; this he hath wrought out for them, herein he hath founded Zion. Ask now the people of God in this nation, I say, or any of them, one or more at any time, what he, or they, look upon as the chief thing aimed at in the mighty dispensations of God amongst us. Will they not every one answer in the first place, that is aimed at, that is to be enthroned, that so doing is the will of God, the end of his works among them, wherein their, or his, particular engagement and interest lies? But ask them now again in the second place, Which of the remaining persuasions concerning the work of God, and the common interest of his people, they would prefer next to their own? Will they not all unanimously fix on that mentioned in the last place, rather than any of the other? Is it not then evident that setting aside prejudicate affections, and such determinations as may reasonably be supposed to arise from them; laying away all private animosities, and desire of rule and pre-eminence, with other worldly and selfish designs, the universality of the people of God, do answer to them that inquire, that in the last persuasion lies the aim, and work of God in our generation. For my own part, on this, and other considerations hereafter to be mentioned, I shall dare freely to give this answer to the messengers of this, or any nation in the world, who shall make inquisition after the work of God amongst us, and his design in reference to his people; and it is no other than my heart hath been fixed upon for many years, and which I have several times, on one account or other intimated, or pressed unto the parliament, which first undertook to manage, and successfully carried on that cause, in whose protection you are now engaged.

This I say then, 'God hath founded Zion,' he hath taken care of the generation of the righteous, the children of Zion, however differenced among themselves; hath broken the yoke of their oppressors, given them peace, ordered the affairs of this nation so, that they do, or may, all of them

enjoy quietness, one not envying the other, nor they vexing them, but serving God according to the light which he is graciously pleased to afford them, they wait for farther manifestation of the glorious gospel; and that God hath broken, and will break, every design, that either openly, and professedly, or under specious pretences of crying, lo here is Christ, or lo there, hath sought, or shall seek and endeavour to subvert this his work, to the preservation whereof he will certainly mould the government, and interest of this nation, ordering its affairs in a peculiar manner on that account only; and not that he delighteth in one way or form, whereinto it hath been cast, more than another. And whatever high-minded men, full of their own apprehensions and wisdom, may do, to this 'work of God, the poor of his people shall repair.' And for my insisting on this answer, and this only, I have these farther reasons to add for my justification.

(1.) This is an interest comprehensive of all the sons of Zion, whose founding God intends; it excludes none that can claim a share in the city of the living God. God takes equal care of all the dwelling-places of Zion. Every dwelling-place of Zion hath its beauty, hath its glory; Isa. iv. 5. The glory of one may be as the glory of the sun, of another as the moon, of others as the stars, and those differing from one another in glory; yet each hath its glory, 'and upon it there shall be a defence,' a covering, a protection. This is the promise, this hath been the work of God.

(2.) This compriseth all them who have lived by faith, and abode in supplications in reference to God's late dispensations amongst us. Who dare despise any one of those little ones, and say, God hath heard me, not you; regarded me, not you; you have no share or portion in the returns of supplications, which we enjoy?

(3.) This alone preserveth the dwellers of Zion from offering violence one to another, from taking the work of Babylon out of its hands, and devouring one another. Let any other apprehension whatever of the work of God be embraced, and the first work that thereby men will be engaged in, is the oppressing, persecuting, ruining of their brethren; which whether it be the founding of Zion, or no, the day of judgment shall determine.

(4.) This is that, which the common enemy seeks to destroy. It is not this, or that party, that he would devour; it is not this, or that persuasion, he would cast down; his hatred is, *πρὸς τὸ γένος*, 'against the whole race' and kind. This is that which he would accomplish, that all the children of God, however differenced among themselves, might be ruined, destroyed, cast down, and rooted out for ever, that the name of Israel might no more be had in remembrance. This then is that which God, in their disappointment, aims to establish.

(5.) Because the founding of Zion doth not consist in this, or that form of the civil administration of human affairs; there being nothing promised, nor designed concerning them, but that they be laid in an orderly subserviency to the common interest of the saints; which let men do what they will, yea, what they can, all government shall at last be brought unto. And who is there amongst us, that in singleness of heart dares make such an 'answer to the messengers of the nations,' inquiring after the peculiar work of God amongst us, namely, that it consists in the establishment of this, or that form of civil administration, though much of the work of God lies therein, in relation to this general end? This then is the answer which I 'shall give to the messengers of the nations,' and of it there are these three parts.

[1.] God hath broken, destroyed, ruined them and their contrivances, who made it their business to overthrow Zion, and to root out the generation of the righteous, not under this, or that way or form, whereby they are differenced among themselves, but as such, as the saints of the Holy One, and will continue so to do.

[2.] He hath given to them, to the poor of his people, peace, liberty, freedom from impositions on their consciences, with much glorious light in several degrees in his worship and service.

[3.] He hath cast (as he hath promised) the power of the nation into a subserviency to this common interest of Christ, and his people in this world; and hath made, or will make them to understand, that as the peace of Zion lies in their peace, so their peace lies in the peace of Zion. And what to say more 'to the messengers of the nation,' I know not.

*Use 2.* If this then be the work of God, let us repair to it. The poor of the people shall trust therein, or join themselves thereunto. That you may do this in judgment, be pleased to take these directions, which with all humility I offer to you, and I hope from the Lord.

(1.) Engage in no way, no counsels, be the reasonings and pretences for them never so specious, which have an inconsistency with this common interest of Zion in this generation. If, instead of repairing to the work of God, you should be found contending against it, and setting up your own wisdom, in the place of the wisdom of God, it would not be to your advantage. I know many things will be suggested unto you; settling of religion, establishing a discipline in the church, not to tolerate errors, and the like. From which discourse I know what conclusions some men are apt to draw, if no otherwise, yet from what they have been doing for many years. Do we then plead for errors and unsettlement? God forbid! God hath undertaken to found and establish Zion, to settle it, and he will do it; and I pray God you may be instrumental therein according to his mind. He will also give his people one heart, and one way; and I pray that you, by your example of union in love, and by all other good means, may be instrumental towards the accomplishment of that promise amongst us. It is only the liberty and protection of the people of God, as such, that is pleaded for; and he that shall set up any thing inconsistent therewith, as so set up, will lay the foundation of his building in the first-born of his peace, and set up the gate of it in the utmost and last of his welfare. In a word: The people of God may possibly in this nation devour one another, and wash their hands in the blood of one another, by widening the breaches that are among them; and woe be to them that shall be instrumental herein. But if ever they come to a coalescency in love and truth, it must be by their mutual forbearance of one another, until the Spirit be poured down from on high, and the fruits of peace be brought forth thereby. And herein the Lord make you as the mountains that bring forth righteousness, and the little hills that bring forth peace unto his people.

There are some things that I am afraid of, that lie contrary to what I am exhorting you unto. I wish the event

manifest that I am afraid without cause. However, give me leave to caution you of them, because I cannot be faithful to my call if I do not.

[1.] Take heed, lest that evil be still abiding upon any of our spirits, that we should be crying out, and calling for reformation, without a due consideration of what it is, and how it is to be brought about. I wish one of many of them, who have prayed for it, and complained for want of it, had endeavoured to carry it on as they might. Would you have a reformation? Be you more humble, more holy, more zealous; delight more in the ways, worship, ordinances of God; reform your persons in your lives, relations, families, parishes, as to gospel obedience, and you will see a glorious reformation indeed. What mean you by a reformation? Is it the hurting of others, or doing good to ourselves? Is it a power over other men's persons, or our own lusts? God hath now for sundry years tried us, whether indeed we love reformation, or no. Have any provoked us, or compelled us to defile the worship of God with ceremonies or superstitions, and our own consciences therewithal? Have we been imposed on in the ways of God by men ignorant of them? Hath not God said to us, You that have prayed under persecution for reformation; you that have fought in the high places of the field for reformation; you that have covenanted and sworn for reformation, go now, reform yourselves; you ministers, preach as often as you will, as freely as you please, no man shall control you; live as holily as you can, pray as often, fast as often as you will, be full of bounty and good works, giving examples to your flock, none shall trouble you; be instant in season, out of season, preach the whole counsel of God without control; you people, be holy, serve God in holiness, keep close to his worship and ordinances, love them, delight in them, bring forth such fruits as men may glorify God on your account; condemn the world, justify the cause of God by a gospel conversation, take seven years peace and plenty, and see what you can do? If after all this we still cry out, Give us a reformation, and complain not of our own negligence, folly, hatred of personal reformation, to be the only cause of that want, it is easy to judge what we would have, had we our desires.

[2.] Take heed, lest any who have formerly desired the

day of the Lord, considering the purity and holiness wherewith it will be attended, grow weary of it and its work, as not being able to abide it, and so lay aside all thoughts of growing up with it in the will of God ; lest any say, Is this the day of the Lord, that holiness, godliness, exact obedience, should be prized, exalted, esteemed ; that profaneness, pride, selfishness, formality should be despised, consumed, devoured ? We will have none of this day.

[3.] Take heed that there rise not up a generation that knew not Joseph : that knew us not in the days of our distress, and contending with those who would have destroyed us ; who were not engaged with us in praying, fasting, fighting in England, Scotland, and Ireland ; but were unconcerned in all our affairs : who know nothing of the cries, tears, trembling, and fears, wherewith this cause hath been managed. Can we expect that they should be acted by the spirit of it, or have a due sense of what they must be engaged in ? What know they of the communion we have had with God in this business all along, what answers he hath given us, what obligations he hath put upon us thereby ? The whole business is to them as a story only of that which is past, wherein they are not concerned. There are such abiding impressions left on the souls of as many as have been engaged in the work of God in this nation, from the beginning to the end, as will never be blotted out. If a spirit not sensible of former ways should arise amongst us, and prevail, it would be sad with the interest of Christ, and his people in this nation. To return to my directions :

(2.) Make this work of God your pole-star, that you may steer and guide your course by it. In all your consultations and actions, whatever is proposed, whatever is to be done, let this consideration attend it—But how will it suit the design of God in establishing Zion ? Men speaking of a thing of manifest evidence, say that it is written with the beams of the sun. Give me leave to tell you of a thing that is written in the prayers of the saints, the fears of your enemies, the condition of this nation, the counsels of princes of the earth, the affairs of the nations abroad in the world, all the issues of the providence of God in these days ; all which concurring, I suppose, will give as good an evidence as any thing in the



like kind is capable of. What is this, you will say? It is in brief, let the work of God as stated be your guide in all your consultations, and it will direct you to aim at these two ends.

[1.] To preserve peace, to compose differences, to make up breaches, to avoid all occasions of divisions at home.

[2.] To make up, unite, gather into one common interest, the Protestant nations abroad in the world, that we may stand or fall together, and not be devoured one after another. That these are the things which God calls you to mind, and do, if you will bear any regard to his present work, is, I say, written with all the beams of providence beforementioned. If the Lord should suffer you to be regardless either to the one or the other, know you not that it would be bitterness in the latter end? Ask your friends what they desire, your enemies what they fear, the nations abroad what they are doing; consider Babylon, consider Zion; and if one and the same voice come from them all, not to attend unto it, would be not to attend to the voice of God. It is indeed an easy thing for you to gratify Satan, satiate the desire of your enemies, lay a foundation of troubles; it is but attending to the clamours of men without, and the tumultuating of lusts and carnal wisdom within, and the whole work is done. But to carry on the work of God in the particulars mentioned, this is not so easy a task; self must be denied, many glorious pretences laid aside, contrary reasonings answered, men's weaknesses, miscarriages, failings borne withal, because they are men; and which is more than all, our own particular darling desires, it may be, let go unsatisfied, though moulded into contrivances for many years. The truth is, the combinations of the antichristian party in the world are so evident, their successes so notorious, their designs so fixed, their advantages to carry them on so many, that to persuade with them, who have power for that end and purpose, to make it their business to keep union amongst ourselves, on all good and honest terms, and to endeavour the union of all that call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours, in the world, were to cast a reproach upon their wisdom, foresight, and zeal. So that it sufficeth me to have mentioned these things.

*Use 3.* Encourage all things that lie in a tendency and subserviency to the work of God, unfolded and insisted on. For instance,

(1.) Wherever you see any work of real reformation, tending to the advancement of the gospel, discarding of old useless forms received by tradition from our fathers, separating the precious from the vile, according to the several measures of light, which God in his infinite wisdom hath graciously imparted, let not needless objections and hinderances lie in the way, but give in all due encouragements to the men of such engagements. Perhaps the business of carrying on reformation is grievous to some, who in their anger and wrath, revenge and disappointment, may make complaints of it to you, in private, or in public. The Lord give you wisdom, that you may never weaken the hands, or sadden the hearts of men, who are willing to join hearts and hands with you to save a poor nation, and to keep life in the work of God in the midst thereof.

(2.) What you find established already in this kind, encourage, preserve, improve, that the work fail not.

(3.) Find out what is wanting, and pursue it, as God gives you advantage and opportunity.

(4.) Where men, under pretence of religion, make it their business to defile themselves, or disturb the civil peace and quiet of others, let them know, that the sword is not borne in vain. I can but name these things.

Honourable, my heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may be the repairers of breaches, and the restorers of paths for men to walk in ; that you may be the preservers of the good old cause of England, according to the growth it received in, and under, several providential dispensations. Many particulars lie in my heart to propose unto you, but on very many considerations I shall name none at present of them, but close all with some few general directions.

[1.] Secure your spirits, that in sincerity you seek the public good of the nations, and the prosperity of the good people therein, who have adhered to the good cause of liberty and religion. If this be in your eye, as that which is principally intended, as you may pray in faith for the presence of God with you, and have a comfortable expectation of his protection and favour ; so if in the pursuit of it

through human frailty you should err, or mistake in the choice of means, paths, ways tending to that end, God will guide you, and lead you, and not leave you until he hath made straight paths for your feet. But if at the bottom there lie secret animosities, self-will, desire of obtaining greatness or power, on the one hand or other ; if every such thing be not on all hands subdued unto public good, prayers will be weakened, carnal wisdom increased, the counsel of God rejected, and you will wander in all your ways without success.

[2.] Keep alive this principle (which whether any will hear, or whether any will forbear, I know not ; but this I am sure of, in the latter end it will be found to be true) according as you regard, cleave to, promote, protect, on the one side ; or despise, condemn, and oppose on the other, the common interest of Zion, the people of God before laid down : so will your affairs either flourish, prosper, and succeed on the one hand ; or wither, decay, and be fruitless, on the other. In all other things that shall fall under your consideration, that relate to the civil government of the nations, prudence, conjecture, probability, consideration of circumstances, and the present posture of things, may take place ; this is capable of no framing to the one hand or other, upon any pretence whatever.

[3.] If it be possible, keep up a spirit of love and forbearance among yourselves ; 'love thinketh none evil.' Do not impose designs on one another, and then interpret every thing that is spoken, though in never so much sincerity and simplicity of spirit, in a proportion to that design ; this will turn judgment into wormwood, and truth into hemlock.