

SERMON III.*
RIGHTEOUS ZEAL ENCOURAGED
BY
DIVINE PROTECTION:

WITH
A DISCOURSE ABOUT TOLERATION, AND THE DUTY OF THE CIVIL
MAGISTRATE ABOUT RELIGION, THEREUNTO ANNEXED.

* This sermon was preached before the honourable House of Commons, Jan. 31,
1648. Being a day of solemn humiliation.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE
COMMONS OF ENGLAND,
ASSEMBLED IN PARLIAMENT.

SIRS,

IT hath always suited the wisdom of God to do great things in difficult seasons. He sets up walls in troublous times; Dan. ix. 25. His builders must hold swords and spears, as well as instruments of labour; Nehem. iv. 16. Yea, while sin continueth in its course here (which began in heaven, and having contempORIZED with the earth, shall live for ever in hell), great works for God will cause great troubles amongst men. The holy, harmless reconciler of heaven and earth bids us expect the sword, to attend his undertakings for, and way of making peace; Matt. x. 34. All the waves in the world arise to their height and roaring, from the confronting of the breath of God's Spirit, and the vapours of men's corruptions. Hence seasons receive their degrees of difficulty, according to the greatness and weight of the works which in them God will accomplish. To their worth and excellency is man's opposition proportioned. This the instruments of his glory in this generation shall continually find true to their present trouble, and future comfort.

As the days approach for the delivery of the decree, to the shaking of heaven and earth,^a and all the powers of the world, to make way for the establishment

^a Heb. xii. 26, 27. Dan. vii. 27. *Ego nisi tumultus istos viderem, verbum Dei in mundo non esse dicerem.* Luth.

of that kingdom, which shall not be given to another people (the great expectation of the saints of the ~~Most~~ High before the consummation of all); so tumults, troubles, vexations, and disquietness, must certainly grow and increase among the sons of men.

A dead woman (says the proverb) will not be carried out of her house under four men. Much less will living men of wisdom and power be easily and quietly dispossessed of that share and interest in the things of Christ, which long-continued usurpation hath deluded them into an imagination of being their own inheritance. This then being shortly to be effected, and the scale being ready to turn against the man of sin, notwithstanding his balancing it, in opposition to the witness of Jesus, with the weight and poise of earthly power; no wonder if heaven, earth, sea, and dry land, be shaken, in their giving place to the things that cannot be moved. God Almighty having called you forth, Right Honourable, at his entrance to the rolling up of the nation's heavens like a scroll,^b to serve him in your generation in the high places of Armageddon,^c you shall be sure not to want experience of that opposition, which is raised against the great work of the Lord, which generally swells most against the visible instruments thereof.

And would to God, you had only the devoted sons of Babel to contend withal, that the men of this shaking earth were your only antagonists; that the malignity of the dragon's tail had had no influence on the stars of heaven, to prevail with them to fight in their courses against you.^d But 'jacta est alea,' the providence of God must be served, according to the discovery made of his own unchangeable will, and not the mutable interests and passions of the sons of men. For verily 'the Lord of hosts hath purposed to pollute the pride of all

^b Isa. xxxiv. 4, 5.

^c Rev. xvi. 16.

^d Rev. xii. 4.

glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth ;' Isa. xxiii. 9.

The contradictions of sinners against all that walk in the paths of righteousness and peace, with the supportment which their spirits may receive (as being promised) who pursue those ways, notwithstanding those contradictions, are in part discovered in the ensuing sermon : the foundation of that whole transaction of things, which is therein held out, in reference to the present dispensations of providence (being nothing but an entrance into the unravelling of the whole web of iniquity, interwoven of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, in opposition to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus), I chose not to mention. Neither shall I at present add any thing thereabout, but only my desire that it may be eyed as the granted basis of the following discourse. Only by your very favourable acceptance of the making out those thoughts, which were the hasty conception, and like Jonah's gourd, the child of a night or two (which with prayer for a rooting in the hearts of them to whom they were delivered, had certainly withered in their own leaves, had they not received warmth and moisture from your commands in general, and the particular desires of many of you, to give them a life of a few days longer), I am encouraged to the annexing of a few lines, as a free-will offering to attend the following product of obedience.

Now this shall not be to the opposition which you do, and shall yet farther meet withal ; but as to the causes, real or pretended, which are held forth as the bottom of that contradiction, wherewith on every side you are encompassed.

The things in reference whereunto your procedence is laden with such criminations, as these sad days of recompense have found to be comets portending no less than blood, are first civil, then religious.

For the first, as their being beyond the bounds of my calling gives them sanctuary from being called forth to my consideration; so neither have I the least thoughts with Absalom of a more orderly carrying on of affairs, might my desires have any influence into their disposal. Waiting at the throne of grace, that those whom God hath intrusted with, and enabled for, the transaction of these things, may be directed and supported in their employment, is the utmost of my undertaking herein.

For the other, or religious things, the general interest I have in them as a Christian being improved by the superadded title of a minister of the gospel (though unworthy the one name, and the other), gives me not only such boldness as accrueth from enjoyed favour, but also such a right as will support me to plead concerning them, before the most impartial judicature.

And this I shall do (as I said before), merely in reference to those criminations, which are laid by conjectural presumptions on your honourable assembly, and made a cause of much of that opposition and contradiction you meet withal. Now in particular, it is the toleration of all religions, or invented ways of worship, wherein your constitutions are confidently antedated in many places of the nation, the thing itself withal being held out as the most enormous apprehension and desperate endeavour, for the destruction of truth and godliness, that ever entered the thoughts of men professing the one and the other. The contest hereabout being '*adhuc sub judice*,' and there being no doubt but that the whole matter, commonly phrased as above, hath (like other things) sinful and dangerous extremes: I deemed it not amiss to endeavour the pouring a little cold water upon the common flames, which are kindled in the breasts of men about this thing. And who knows whether the words of a weak nothing may not, by the power of the fountain of beings, give

some light into the determination and establishment of a thing of so great concernment and consequence, as this is generally conceived to be? What is in this my weak undertaking of the Lord, I shall beg of him that it may be received; what is of myself, I beg of you that it may be pardoned. That God Almighty would give you to prove all things that come unto you in his way, and to hold fast that which is good, granting you unconquerable assistance, in constant perseverance, is the prayer of,

Your devoted Servant

In our dearest Lord,

JOHN OWEN.

Coggeshall, Feb. 28.

SERMON III.

Let them return to thee, but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall, and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the Lord.—JER. xv. 19, 20.

THE words of my text having a full dependance upon, and flowing out from, the main subject matter of the whole chapter, I must of necessity take a view thereof, and hold out unto you the mind of God contained therein, before I enter upon the part thereof chiefly intended. And this I shall do with very brief observations, that I may not anticipate myself from a full opening and application of the words of my text.

And this the rather are my thoughts led unto, because the whole transaction of things between the Lord and a stubbornly sinful nation, exceedingly accommodated to the carrying on of the controversy he is now pleading with that wherein we live, is set out (as we say) to the life therein.

Of the whole chapter, there be these five parts :

First, The denunciation of fearful wasting, destroying judgments against Judah and Jerusalem, ver. 3. and so on to ver. 10.

Secondly, The procuring deserving cause of these overwhelming calamities, ver. 4. and 6.

Thirdly, The inevitableness of those judgments, and the inexorableness of the Lord, as to the accomplishment of all the evils denounced, ver. 1.

Fourthly, The state and condition of the prophet, with the frame and deportment of his spirit, under those bitter dispensations of providence, ver. 10. and 15—18.

Fifthly, The answer and appearance of God unto him upon the making out of his complaint, ver. 11—14. and 19—21.

My text lieth in the last part, but yet with such dependance on the former, as enforceth to a consideration of them.

First, There is the denunciation of fearful wasting, destroying judgments to sinful Jerusalem, ver. 2. and so onwards, with some interposed ejaculations, concerning her inevitable ruin, as ver. 5, 6.

Here's death, sword, famine, captivity, ver. 2. banishment, ver. 4. unpitied desolation, ver. 5. redoubled destruction, bereaving, fanning, spoiling, &c. ver. 6—9. That universal devastation of the whole people, which came upon them in the Babylonish captivity, is the thing here intended, the means of its accomplishment by particular plagues and judgments, in their several kinds (for the greater dread and terror) being at large annumerated; the faithfulness of God also being made hereby to shine more clear, in the dispersion of that people; doing, not only for the main, what before he had threatened, but in particular, executing the judgments recorded, Luke xxvi. 14, &c. Deut. xxviii. 15, &c. 'Fulfilling hereby what he had devised, accomplishing the word he had commanded in the days of old;' Lam. ii. 17.

That which hence I shall observe is only from the variety of these particulars, which are held out as the means of the intended desolation.

Observation. God's treasures of wrath against a sinful people, have sundry and various issues for the accomplishment of the appointed end.

When God walks contrary to a people, it is not always in one path, he hath seven ways to do it, and will do it seven times; Lev. xxvi. 24. He strikes not always with one weapon, nor in one place. As there is with him ποικίλη χάρις, 'manifold and various grace;' 1 Pet. iv. 10. love and compassion making out itself in choice variety, suited to our manifold indigencies; so there is, ὀργὴ τεθεισαυρισμένη; Rom. ii. 5. stored, treasured wrath, suiting itself in its flowings out to the provocations of stubborn sinners.

The first emblem of God's wrath against man, was a 'flaming sword turning itself every way;' Gen. iii. 24. Not only in one or two, but in all their paths, he meeteth them with his flaming sword. As a wild beast in a net,^e so are sinners under inexorable judgments; the more they strive, the more they are inwrapped and entangled; they shuffle themselves from under one calamity, and fall into another: 'as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand upon the wall, and a serpent bit him;' Amos v. 19. Oh, remove this one plague, saith Pharaoh;^f if he can escape from under this pressure, he thinks

^e Isa. li. 20.

^f Exod. x. 17.

he shall be free: but, when he fled from the lion, still the bear met him, and when he went into the house, the serpent bit him. And as the flaming sword turns every way, so God can put it into every thing. To those that cry, Give me a king, God can give him in his anger; and from those that cry, Take him away, he can take him away in his wrath; Hosea xiii. 10, 11.

Oh that this might seal up instruction to our own souls! What variety of calamities have we been exercised withal, for sundry years? What Pharaoh-like spirits have we had under them? Oh, that we were delivered this once, and then all were well! How do we spend all our thoughts to extricate ourselves from our present pressures? If this hedge, this pit were passed, we should have smooth ground to walk in: not considering that God can fill our safest paths with snares and serpents. Give us peace, give us wealth, give us as we were, with our own, in quietness. Poor creatures! Suppose all these desires were in sincerity, and not as with the most they are, fair colours of foul and bloody designs; yet if peace were, and wealth were, and former things were, and God were not, what would it avail you? Cannot he poison your peace, and canker your wealth? And when you were escaped out of the field from the lion and the bear, appoint a serpent to bite you, leaning upon the walls of your own house? In vain do you seek to stop the streams, while the fountains are open; turn yourselves whitheryou will, bring yourselves into what condition you can, nothing but peace and reconciliation with the God of all these judgments, can give you rest in the day of visitation. You see what variety of plagues are in his hand, changing of condition will do no more to the avoiding of them, than a sick man's turning himself from one side of the bed to another; during his turning, he forgets his pain by striving to move, being laid down again, he finds his condition the same as before.

This is the first thing, we are under various judgments, from which by ourselves there is no deliverance.

Secondly, The second thing here expressed, is the procuring cause of these various judgments, set down ver. 4. 'Because of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.'

The sins of Manasseh filled the epha of Judah's wick-

edness, and caused the talent of lead to be laid on the mouth thereof.^a Oftentimes in the relation of his story doth the Holy Ghost emphatically express this, that for his sin Judah should be destroyed; 2 Kings xxi. 11. Yea, when they had a little reviving under Josiah, and the bowels of the Lord began to work in compassion towards them; yet as it were remembering the provocation of this Manasseh, he recalls his thoughts of mercy; 2 Kings xxiii. 26, 27. The deposing of divine and human things is oftentimes very opposite.^b God himself proceeds with them in a diverse dispensation. In the spiritual body the members offend, and the head is punished: 'The iniquity of us all did meet on him;' Isa. liii. In the civil politic body the head offends, and the members rue it: Manasseh sins, and Judah must go captive.

Three things present themselves for the vindication of the equity of God's righteous judgments, in the recompensing the sins of the king upon the people.

1. The concurrence and influence of the people's power into their rule and government: they that set him up, may justly be called to answer for his miscarriage. The Lord himself had before made the sole bottom of that political administration to be their own wills: 'If thou wilt have a king after the manner of the nations;' Deut. xvii. 14. 1 Sam. viii. 7. Though for particulars, himself (according to his supreme sovereignty) placed in many, by peculiar exemption, otherwise his providence was served by their plenary consent, or by such dispensation of things as you have related, 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; so Tibni died, and Omri reigned.' Now they who place men in authority to be God's vicegerents, do undertake to God for their deportment in that authority, and therefore may justly bear the sad effects of their sinful miscarriages.

2. Because for fear of Manasseh's cruelty, or to flatter him in his tyranny for their own advantage, the greatest part of the people had apostatized from the ways and worship of Hezekiah, to comply with him in his sin. As at another

^a Zech. v. 7, 8.

^b Est quædam æmulatio divinæ rei, et humanæ. Tertul. Apol.

time 'they willingly walked after the commandment;' Hos. v. 11. And this is plainly expressed, 2 Kings xxi. 9. 'Manasseh seduced the people to do more evil than the nations.' When kings turn seducers, they seldom want good store of followers. Now if the blind lead the blind, both will, and both justly may, fall into the ditch. When kings command unrighteous things, and people suit them with willing compliance, none doubts but the destruction of them both is just and righteous. See ver. 6. of this chapter.

3. Because the people, by virtue of their retained sovereignty, did not restrain him in his provoking ways. So Zuinglius, Artic. 42. 'Qui non vetat, cum potest, jubet.' When Saul would have put Jonathan to death, the people would not suffer him so to do, but delivered Jonathan that he died not; 1 Sam. xiv. When David proposed the reducing of the ark, his speech to the people was: 'If it please you, let us send abroad to our brethren everywhere, that they may assemble themselves to us; and all the congregation said, that they would do so, because the thing was right in their eyes;' 2 Chron. xiii. 2. So they bargain with Rehoboam about their subjection, upon condition of a moderate rule; 1 Kings xii. By virtue of which power also they delivered Jeremiah from the prophets and priests that would have put him to death; Jer. xxvi. 16. And on this ground might they justly feed on the fruit of their own neglected duty. See Bilson of Obed. part 3. page 271.

Be it thus, or otherwise, by what way soever the people had their interest therein, certain it is, that for the sins of Manasseh, one way or other made their own, they were destroyed. And therefore these things being written for our example, it cannot but be of great concernment to us to know what were those sins which wrapped up the people of God in irrevocable destruction. Now these the Holy Ghost fully manifesteth in the story of the life and reign of this Manasseh, and they may all be reduced unto two chief heads.

(1.) False worship or superstition: 'He built high places, made altars for Baal, and a grove, as did Ahab;' 2 Kings xxv. 2.

(2.) Cruelty: 'He shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem with blood from one end of it to another;' ver. 16.

Whether this cruelty be to be ascribed to his tyranny in civil affairs, and so the blood shed is called innocent, because not of malefactors; or to his persecution, in subordination to his false worship instituted as before (as the pope and his adherents have devoured whole nations 'in ordine ad spiritualia'), is not apparent: but this is from hence, and other places, most evident; that superstition and persecution, will-worship and tyranny, are inseparable concomitants.¹

Nebuchadnezzar sets up this great image and the next news you hear, the saints are in the furnace; Dan. iii. 20. You seldom see a fabric of human-invented worship, but either the foundation or top-stone is laid in the blood of God's people. 'The wisdom (religion, or way of worship) that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy;' James iii. 17. when the other is 'earthly, sensual, devilish, bringing along envying, strife, contention, and every evil work;' ver. 16. Persecution and blood is the genuine product of all invented worship. I might from hence name, and pursue other observations, but I shall only name one, and proceed.

Observation. When false worship with injustice by cruelty have possessed the governors of a nation, and wrapped in the consent of the greatest part of the people, who have been acquainted with the mind of God; that people and nation, without unprecedented mercy, is obnoxious to remediless ruin.

Those two are the bell and dragon, that, what by their actings, what by their deservings, have swallowed that ocean of blood, which have flowed from the veins of millions slain upon the face of the earth. Give me the number of the witnesses of Jesus, whose souls under the altar cry for revenge against their false worshipping murderers;^k and the tale of them, whose lives have been sacrificed to the insatiable ambition and tyranny of blood-thirsty potentates, with the issues of God's just vengeance on the sons of men, for compliance in these two things; and you will have gathered in the whole harvest of blood, leaving but a few straggling gleanings upon other occasions. And if these things have been found in England, and the present administration

¹ See the Appendix at the end of this sermon.

^k Rev. vi. 9, 10.

with sincere humiliation do not run across to unravel this close woven web of destruction, all thoughts of recovery will quickly be too late. And thus far, sin and providence drive on a parallel.

Thirdly, The inevitableness of the desolation threatened, and the inexorableness of God in the execution of it, ver. 1. is the third thing considerable; ‘Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people.’

Should I insist upon this, it would draw me out unto Scripture evidences, of a nation’s travelling in sin, beyond the line of God’s patience, and so not to be exempted from ruin; but instead thereof I shall make it a part of my daily supplications, that they may be to our enemies, if God’s enemies, and the interpretation of them to those that hate us.

In brief, the words contain an impossible supposition, and yet a negation of the thing for whose sake it is supposed. Moses and Samuel were men, who in the days of their flesh offered up strong supplications, and averted many imminent judgments from a sinful people. As if the Lord should say: All that I can do in such a case as this, I would grant at the intercession of Moses and Samuel, or others interceding in their spirit and zeal; but now the state of things is come to that pass, the time of treaty being expired, the black flag hung out, and the ‘decree having brought forth,’ Zeph. ii. 2. that upon their utmost entreaty it cannot, it shall not, be reversed.

Observation. There is a time when sin grows ripe for ruin: ‘For three transgressions, and for four, the Lord will not turn away the iniquity of a people;’ Amos i. 9.

When the sin of the Amorites hath filled the cup of vengeance, they must drink it; Gen. xv. 15. England, under several administrations of civil government, hath fallen twice, yea thrice, into nation-destroying sins. Providence hath once more given it another bottom; if you should stumble (which the Lord avert) at the same block of impiety and cruelty, there is not another sifting to be made, to reserve any grains from the ground. I doubt not but our three transgressions and four will end in total desolation; the Lord be your guide, poor England lieth at stake.

Observation. The greatest difficulty that lieth in bringing of total destruction upon a sinful people, is in the interposition of Moses and Samuel.

If Moses would but have stood out of the gap, and let the Almighty go, he had broken in upon the whole host of Israel; *Exod.* xxxii. 9, 10. And let it by the way be observed of the spirit of Samuel, that when the people of God were most exorbitant, he crieth, ‘As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you;’ *1 Sam.* xii. 23. Scarce answered by those, who, if their interest be not served, or at best their reason satisfied, will scarce yield a prayer for, yea, pour out curses against their choicest deliverers; the Lord lay it not to their charge. For us, seeing that praying deliverers are more prevalent than fighting deliverers (it is though Moses and Samuel, not Gideon and Samson, stood before me), as some decay, let us gather strength in the Lord, that he may have never the more rest for their giving over, until he establish mount Zion a praise in the earth.

Fourthly, Come we now to the fourth thing in this chapter, the prophet’s state and condition, with the frame and deportment of [his heart and spirit under these dispensations; and here we find him expressing two things of himself.

1. What he found from others; ver 10.

2. What he wrestled withal in his own spirit; ver. 15—18.

1. What he found from others. He telleth you, it was cursing and reproach, &c. ‘I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury, yet every one of them doth curse me;’ ver. 10.

Now this return may be considered two ways.

(1.) In itself; ‘Every one (saith he) of this people curse me.’

(2.) In reference to his deportment; ‘I have neither borrowed nor lent on usury, yet they curse me.’

(1.) From the first, observe:

Observation. Instruments of God’s greatest works and glory are oftentimes the chiefest objects of a professing people’s cursings and revenges.

The return which God’s labourers meet withal in this

generation, is in the number of those things, whereof there is none new under the sun. Men that under God deliver a kingdom, may have the kingdom's curses for their pains.

When Moses had brought the people of Israel out of bondage, by that wonderful and unparalleled deliverance, being forced to appear with the Lord for the destruction of Korah and his associates, who would have seduced the congregation to its utter ruin, he receives at length this reward of all his travel, labour, and pains; 'all the congregations gathered themselves against him and Aaron,' laying murder and sedition to their charge, telling them they had 'killed the people of the Lord;' Numb. xvi. 41, 42. a goodly reward for all their travels. If God's works do not suit with the lusts, prejudices, and interests of men, they will labour to give his instruments the devil's ways. Let not upright hearts sink, because they meet with thankless men. '*Bona agere, et mala pati, Christianorum est.*' A man may have the blessing of God, and the curse of a professing people at the same time. 'Behold I and the children whom God hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel;' Isa. viii. 15. '*Cum ab hominibus damnamur, a Deo absolvimur.*' Man's condemnation, and God's absolution, do not seldom meet upon the same persons, for the same things. If you labour to do the work of the Lord, pray think it not strange, if among men curses be your reward, and detestation your wages.

(2.) In reference to the prophet's deportment: 'He had neither lent, nor had any lent to him upon usury.' He was free from blame among them, had no dealings with them, in those things which are usually attended with reproaches; as he shews by an instance in usury, a thing that a long time hath heard very ill.

Observation. Men every way blameless, and to be embraced in their own ways, are oftentimes abhorred and laden with curses, for following the Lord in his ways.

'*Bonus vir Caius Sejus, sed malus quia Christianus.*' What precious men should many be, would they let go the work of God in this generation? No advantage against them but in the matter of their God, and that is enough

¹ Tertul. Apol.

to have them to the lions; Dan. vi. 5. He that might be honoured for compassing the ends suiting his own worldly interest, and will cheerfully undergo dishonour for going beyond, to suit the design of God, hath surely some impression upon his spirit that is from above.

2. You have the prophet's deportment, and the frame of his spirit during those transactions between the Lord and that sinful people. And this he holds out in many pathetical complaints, to be fainting, decaying, perplexed, weary of his burden, not knowing how to ease himself, as you may see at large; ver. 15—18.

Observation. In dark and difficult dispensations of providence, God's choicest servants are oftentimes ready to faint under the burden of them.

How weary was David when he cried out in such a condition, 'O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest;' Psal. lv. 6. Long had he waited for a desired issue of his perplexed state, and had perhaps oftentimes been frustrated of his hope of drawing to a period of his miseries, and now finding one disappointment to follow on the neck of another, he is weary and cries: What nothing but this trouble and confusion still? 'O that I had wings like a dove!' a ship to sail to a foreign nation (or the like) there to be at peace. In the like strait another time, see what a miserable conclusion he draws of all his being exercised under the hand of God, Psal. lxxiii. 13. 'Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' And again, Psal. cxvi. 11. he saith, in the perturbation of his mind, 'All men are liars:' that all the promises, all the encouragements, which in his way he had received from God, should fail of their accomplishment.

It is not with them, as it was with that wicked king of Israel, who being disappointed of peace and deliverance in his own time, cries out, 'This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait upon him any longer?' 2 Kings xvi. 33. The season of deliverance suited not his expectation; therefore he quite throweth off the Lord, and his protection. Not unlike many among ourselves, whose desires and expectations being not satisfied in the closing of our distractions, according to the way which themselves had framed for the Lord to walk in, are ready to cast off his cause, his protection, to comply

with the enemies of his name, ‘*Si Deus homini non placuerit, Deus non erit.*’ But it may be observed, that deliverance came not to that people until Jehoram was weary of waiting, and then instantly God gives it in. When God hath tired the patience of corrupted men, he will speak peace to them that wait for him. Thus it is not with the saints of God, only being perplexed in their spirits, dark in their apprehensions, and fainting in their strength, they break out oftentimes into passionate complaints (as Jeremiah for a cottage in the wilderness), but yet for the main holding firm to the Lord.

And the reasons of this quailing are,

(1.) The weakness of faith, when the methods of God’s proceedings are unfathomable to our apprehensions. While men see the paths wherein the Lord walketh, they can follow him through some difficulties; but when that is hid from them, though providence so shut up all other ways, that it is impossible God should be in them, yet if they cannot discern (so proud are they) how he goeth in that wherein he is, they are ready to faint and give over. God is pleased sometimes to make darkness his pavilion and his secret place, ‘*A fire devours before him, and it is very tempestuous round about him;*’ Psal. l. 3. When once God is attended with fire, darkness, and tempest, because we cannot so easily see him, we are ready to leave him. Now this the Lord usually doth in the execution of his judgments; ‘*Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, thy judgments are a great deep;*’ Psal. xxxvi. 6. His righteousness, his kindness, is like a great mountain that is easy to be seen, a man cannot overlook it, unless he wilfully shut his eyes; but his judgments are like the great deep. Who can look into the bottom of the sea, or know what is done in the depths thereof? God’s works in their accomplishment are oftentimes so unsuited to the reasons and apprehensions of men, that very many who have been strong in their desires, and great in expectation of them, upon their bringing forth to light, have quite rejected and opposed them as none of his, because distant from what they had framed to themselves. It is evident from the gospel, that the people of the Jews were full of expectation and longing for the great work of the coming of the Messiah, just at the season wherein he came, yet being

come, because not accommodated to their pre-imaginings, they rejected him, 'as having neither form nor comeliness in him to be desired;' Isa. liii. 2. And the prophet Amos telleth many, 'who desired the day of the Lord, that, that day should be darkness to them and not light;' Amos v. 18. 20. So in every generation many desires of the accomplishment of God's work are shaken off from any share therein, by finding it unsuited to their reasons and expectations.

Now when the Lord is pleased thus to walk in darkness, many not being able to trace him in his dispensations, are ready to lie down and sink under the burden. David seems to profess, that he had nothing at such a time to uphold him but this, that God must be there or nowhere. 'I had said (saith he) that it was in vain to walk as I do, but that I should have condemned the generation of thy children;' Psal. lxxiii. 15. And truly God never leaves us without so much light, but that we may see clearly where he is not, and so by recounting particulars we may be rolled where he is, though his goings there be not so clear. Ask if God be in the counsels of men who seek themselves, and in the ways of those who make it their design to ruin the generation of the just. If you find him there, seek no farther; if not, let that give you light to discern where he makes his abode, that you turn not aside to the flocks of others.

(2.) A reducing the works of providence to inbred rules of their own. But this I cannot pursue.

Be tender toward fainters in difficult seasons. If they leave waiting on the Lord, because the evil is of him; if they cast in their lot with the portion of the ungodly, they will in the end perish in their gainsaying; but as for such, as what for want of light, what for want of faith, sit down and sigh in darkness, be not too hasty in laying farther burdens on them. When first the confederacy was entered into, by the Protestant princes in Germany, against Charles the Fifth, Luther himself for a season was bewildered, and knew not what to do, until being instructed in the fundamental laws of the empire, he sat down fully in that undertaking, though the Lord gave it not the desired issue.^m Our Saviour Christ asks, 'if, when he comes, he shall find faith on the earth;' Luke xviii. 8. It is his coming with the spirit of judgment

^m Sleid. Com. lib. 8.

and burning, a day of trial and visitation, he there speaks of. Now what faith shall he want which will not be found in that day? Not the faith of adherence to himself for spiritual life and justification, but of actual closing with him in the things he then doth, that shall be rare, many shall be staggered and faint in that day.

And thus by the several heads of this chapter, have I led you through the very state and condition of this nation at this time.

First, Variety of judgments are threatened to us, and incumbent on us, as in the first part. Secondly, Of these, false worship, superstition, tyranny, and cruelty, lie in the bottom, as their procuring causes, which is the second. Thirdly, These, if renewed under your hand, will certainly bring inevitable ruin upon the whole nation, which is the third. Fourthly, All which, make many precious hearts, what for want of light, what for want of faith, to fail, and cry out, for 'the wings of a dove,' which is the fourth.

Fifthly, I come in the fifth place to God's direction to you for the future, in this state and condition, which being spread in diverse verses, as the Lord gives it to the prophet, I shall meddle with no more of it, than is contained in the words, which at our entrance I read unto you; 'Let them return,' &c.

In the words, observe four things:

I. God's direction to the prophet, and in him to all that do his work in such a season as this described; 'Let them return to thee, return not thou to them.'

II. Their assistance and supportment in pursuance of that direction; 'I will make thee to this people a brazen fenced wall.'

III. The opposition, with its success and issue, which in that way they should meet withal; 'They shall fight against thee, and shall not prevail.'

IV. Their consolation and success from the presence of the Lord; 'For I am with thee to deliver thee,' &c.

I. There is God's direction.

Many difficulties in this troublesome season was the prophet intricated withal. The people would not be prevailed with to come up to the mind of God; they continuing in their stubbornness, the Lord would not be prevailed with to

avert the threatened desolation. What now shall he do? To stand out against the bulk of the people suits not his earthly interest; to couple with them answers not the discharge of his office; to wait upon them any longer is fruitless; to give up himself to their ways comfortless; hence his complaints, hence his moanings; better lie down and sink under the burden, than always to swim against the stream of an unreformable multitude. In this strait the Lord comes in with his direction: 'Let them return unto thee,' &c. Keep thy station, perform thy duty, comply not with the children of backsliding. But whatever be the issue, if there be any closing wrought, let it be by working them off from their ways of folly. All condescension on thy part, where the work of God is to be done, is in opposition to him; if they return, embrace them freely; if not, do thy duty constantly.

That which is spoken immediately to the prophet, I shall hold out to all, acting in the name and authority of God, in this general proposition.

Observation. Plausible compliances of men in authority, with those against whom they are employed, are treacherous contrivances against the God of heaven, by whom they are employed.

If God be so provoked, that he curseth him, who doth his work negligently, what is he by them that do it treacherously? When he gives a sword into the hands of men, and they thrust it into his own bowels, his glory and honour, those things so dear to him? He that is intrusted with it, and dares not do justice on every one, that dares do injustice, is afraid of the creature, but makes very bold with the Creator. Prov. xxv. 2. 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but it is the glory of a king to find out a matter.' That which God aimeth to be glorious in, to manifest his attributes by, is the concealing and covering our iniquities in Christ; but if the magistrate will have glory, if he will not bring upon himself dishonour by dishonouring God, he is to search and find out the transgressions, with whose cognizance he is intrusted, and to give unto them condign retribution. If the Lord curse them, 'Who come not forth to his help against the mighty;' Judg. v. 23. What is their due, who being called forth by him, do yet help the mighty

against him? For a man to take part with the kingdom's enemies is no small crime; but for a commission officer to run from them by whom he is commissioned, to take part with the adversary, is death without mercy. Yet have not some in our days arrived at that stupendous impudence, that when as private persons they have declaimed against the enemies of the nation, and by that means got themselves into authority, they have made use of that authority to comply with, and uphold those, by an opposition to whom they got into their authority? Which is no less than an atheistical attempt to personate the Almighty, unto such iniquities as without his appearance they dare not own. But 'he that justifieth the wicked and condemneth the just, are both an abomination to the Lord;' Prov. xvii. 15. and not only to the Lord, but to good men also: 'He that saith to the wicked, Thou art righteous, him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him;' Prov. xxiv. 24.

I speak only as to the general (for me, let all particulars find mercy) with a sad remembrance of the late workings of things amongst us, with those vile, sordid compliances which grew upon the spirits of magistrates and ministers with those, whose garments were died with the blood of God's saints and precious ones, as formerly they were called, for now these names are become terms of reproach. And would this complying went alone, but pretences and accusations must be found out against such as follow with them. When they begin to call darkness light, they will ere long call light darkness; by which means our eyes have seen men of their own accord laying down the weapons wherewith at first they fought against opposers, and taking up them which were used against themselves, as hath happened more than once, to penmen both in our own, and our neighbour nation.

Now this revolting from principles of religion and righteousness, to a compliance with any sinful way or person, is a treacherous opposition to the God of heaven. For,

1. It cannot be done but by preferring the creature before the Creator, especially in those things which are the proximate causes of deviation.

Two principal causes I have observed of this crooked walking.

(1.) Fear.

(2.) That desire of perishing things, which hath a mixture of covetousness and ambition.

The first maketh men wary, what they do against men; the other maketh them weary of doing any thing for God, as whereby their sordid ends are not like to be accomplished.

(1.) Fear. When once magistrates begin to listen after ‘quid sequitur’s,’ and so to withdraw from doing good, for fear of suffering evil, paths of wickedness are quickly returned unto, and the authority of God despised. ‘Let this man go, and take heed of Cæsar,’ John xix. 12. did more prevail on Pilate’s treacherous heart, than all the other clamours of the Jews. Yea, was not the whole Sanhedrim swayed to desperate villany, ‘for fear the Romans should come and take away their kingdom?’ John xi. 48. When men begin once to distrust that God will leave them in the briers, to wrestle it out themselves (for unbelief lieth at the bottom of carnal fear), they quickly turn themselves to contrivances of their own, for their own safety, their own prosperity, which commonly is by obliging those unto them by compliances, in an opposition to whom they might oblige the Almighty to their assistance; surely they conclude he wants either truth, or power to support them in his employment.

If a prince should send an ambassador to a foreign state to treat about peace, or to denounce war; who, when he comes there, distrusting his master’s power to make good his undertaking, should comply and wind up his interest with them to whom he was sent, suffering his sovereign’s errand to fall to the ground, would he not be esteemed as arrant a traitor as ever lived? And yet, though this be clipped coin among men, it is put upon the Lord every day as current.

From this principle of carnal fear and unbelief, ‘trembling for a man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be as grass, forgetting the Lord our Maker;’ Isa. li. 12. are all those prudential follies, which exercise the minds of most men in authority, making them, especially in times of difficulties, to regulate and square all their proceedings by what suits their own safety and particular interests, counselling, advising, working for themselves, quite forgetting

by whom they are intrusted, and whose business they should do.

(2.) A desire of perishing things tempered with covetousness and ambition. Hence was the sparing of the fat cattle, and of Agag by Saul; 1 Sam. xv.

When those two qualifications close on any, they are diametrically opposed to that frame which of God is required in them, viz. 'That they should be men fearing God, and hating covetousness.' The first will go far, being only a contrivance for safety; but if this latter take hold of any, being a consultation to exalt themselves, it quickly carrieth them beyond all bounds whatsoever. The Lord grant, that hereafter there may be no such complaints in this nation, or may be causeless, as have been heretofore, viz. That we have poured out our prayers, jeopardied our lives, wasted our estates, spent our blood, to serve the lusts, and compass the designs of ambitious ungodly men.

The many ways whereby these things intrench upon the spirits of men, to bias them from the paths of the Lord, I shall not insist upon, it is enough that I have touched upon the obvious causes of deviation, and manifested them to be treacheries against the God of all authority.

Use. Be exhorted to beware of relapses, with all their causes and inducements; and to be constant to the way of righteousness, and this I shall hold out unto you in two particulars.

1. Labour to recover others, even all that were ever distinguished and called by the name of the Lord, from their late fearful returning to sinful compliances with the enemies of God and the nation. I speak not of men's persons, but of their ways. For three years this people have been eminently sick of the folly of backsliding, and without some special cordial are like to perish in it, as far as I know.

Look upon the estate of this people, as they were differed seven years ago, so for some continuance, and as they are now, and you shall find in how many things we have returned to others, and not one instance to be given of their return to us. That this may be clear, take some particulars.

(1.) In words and expressions, those are 'index animi.' Turn them over, and you may find what is in the whole heart: 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth

speaketh.' Now is not that language, are not those very expressions which filled the mouths of the common adversaries only, grown also terms of reproach upon the tongues of men, that suffered sometimes under them, and counted it their honour so to do? Hence that common exprobration, A parliament of saints, an army of saints, and such-like derisions of God's ways, now plentiful with them, who sat sometimes, and took sweet counsel with us. Ah! had it not been more for the honour of God, that we had kept our station, until others had come to us, so to have exalted the name and profession of the gospel; than that we should so return to them, as to join with them in making the paths of Christ a reproach? Had it not been better for us with Judah to continue 'ruling with God, and to be faithful with the saints,' Hos. xi. 12. than 'to stand in the congregation of the mockers, and to sit in the seat of the scornful?' What shall we say, when the saints of God 'are as signs and wonders to be spoken against in Israel?' Isa. viii. 18. Oh, that men would remember how they have left their first station; when themselves use those reproaches unto others, which for the same cause themselves formerly bare with comfort! It is bitterness to consider, how the gospel is scandalized by this woful return of ministers and people, by casting scriptural expressions by way of scorn, on those, with whom they were sometimes in the like kind companions of contempt. Surely in this we are returned to them, and not they to us.

(2.) In actions, and those,

[1.] Of religion, not only in opinion, but practice also, are we here under a vile return. We are become the lions, and the very same thoughts entertained by us against others, as were exercised towards ourselves. Are not others as unworthy to live upon their native soil in our judgments, as we ourselves in the judgments of them formerly over us? Are not groans for liberty, by the warmth of favour, in a few years hatched into attempts for tyranny? And for practice, what hold hath former superstition in observing days and times, laid hold upon the many of the people again? Witness the late solemn superstition, and many things of the like nature.

[2.] For civil things, the closing of so many, formerly

otherwise engaged, with the adverse party in the late rebellion, with the lukewarm deportment of others at the same time, is a sufficient demonstration of it. And may not the Lord justly complain of all this? ‘What iniquity have you seen in me, or my ways, that you are gone far from me, and walked after vanity, and are become vain?’ Jer. ii. 4. ‘Why have you changed your glory, for that which doth not profit?’ ver. 11. ‘Have I been a dry heath, or a barren wilderness to you?’ Oh, that men should find no more sweetness in following the Lamb under wonderful protections, but that they should thus turn aside into every wilderness! What indignity is this to the ways of God? I could give you many reasons of it; but I have done what I intended, a little hinted, that we are a returning people, that so you might be exhorted to help for a recovery. And how shall that be?

2. By your own keeping close to the paths of righteousness. If you return not, others will look about again. This breach, this evil is of you, within your own walls was the fountain of our backsliding. Would you be the repairers of breaches, the restorers of paths for men to walk in? Do these two things.

(1.) Turn not to the ways of such as the Lord hath blasted under your eyes. And these may be referred to three heads.

[1.] Oppression; [2.] Self-seeking; [3.] Contrivances for persecution.

[1.] Oppression. How detestable a crime it is in the eyes of the Almighty; what effects it hath upon men, ‘making wise men mad;’ Eccles. vii. 7. how frequently it closeth in the calamitous ruin of the oppressors themselves, are things known to all. Whether it hath not been exercised in this nation, both in general by unnecessary impositions, and in particular by unwarrantable pressures, let the mournful cries of all sorts of people testify. Should you now return to such ways as these, would not the anger of the Lord smoke against you? Make it, I beseech you, your design to relieve the whole, by all means possible, and to relieve particulars, yea, even of the adverse party where too much overborne. Oh, let it be considered by you, that it be not considered upon you. I know the things you are necessitated to are

not to be supported by the air. It is only what is unnecessary as to you, or insupportable as to others, that requires your speedy reforming; that so it may be said of you as of Nehemiah, chap. v. 14, 15. And for particulars (pray pardon my folly and boldness), I heartily desire a committee of your honourable house might sit once a week to relieve poor men, that have been oppressed by men, sometimes enjoying parliamentary authority.

[2.] Self-seeking. When men can be content to lay a nation low, that they may set up themselves upon the heaps and ruins thereof. Have not some sought to advance themselves under that power, which with the lives and blood of the people they have opposed, seeming to be troubled at former things, not because they were done, but because they were not done by them? But innocent blood will be found a tottering foundation for men to build their honours, greatness, and preferments upon. O return not in this unto any. If men serve themselves of the nation, they must expect that the nation will serve itself upon them. The best security you can possibly have, that the people will perform their duty in obedience, is the witness of your own consciences, that you have discharged your duty towards them, in seeking their good, by your own trouble, and not your own advantages in their trouble. I doubt not but that in this, your practice makes the admonition a commendation, otherwise the word spoken will certainly witness against you.

[3.] Contrivances for persecution. How were the hearts of all men hardened like the nether mill-stone, and their thoughts did grind blood and revenge against their brethren? What colours, what pretences had men invented to prepare a way for the rolling of their garments in the tears, yea, blood of Christians? The Lord so keep your spirits from a compliance herein, that withal the bow be not too much bent on the other side, which is not impossible.

Be there a backsliding upon your spirit to these, or such-like things as these, the Lord will walk contrary to you, and were you 'as the signet upon his hand,' he would pluck you off.

(2.) Return not to the open enemies of our peace. I could here enlarge myself, to support your spirits in the work

mentioned, Job xxix. 14, 15. but I must go on to the following parts of my text: and therefore,

II. I pass from the direction given, to the supportment and assistance promised: 'I will make thee to this people a brazen and a fenced wall.'

An implied objection, which the prophet might put in, upon his charge to keep so close to the rule of righteousness, is here removed. If I must thus abide by it, to execute whatsoever the Lord calls me out unto, not shrinking, nor staggering at the greatest undertakings, what will become of me in the issue? Will it not be destructive to stand out against a confirmed people? No, saith the Lord, it shall not be, 'I will make thee,' &c.

Observation. God will certainly give in prevailing strength, and unconquerable defence unto persons constantly discharging the duties of righteousness, especially when undertaken in times of difficulty and opposition.

The like engagement to this you have made to Ezekiel, chap. iii. 8, 9. Neither was it so to the prophets alone, but to magistrates also. When Joshua undertook the regency of Israel in a difficult time, he takes off his fear and diffidence with this very encouragement; Josh. i. 5. He saith, he will make them a wall, the best defence against opposition, and that not a weak tottering wall, that might easily be cast down, but a brazen wall, that must needs be impregnable. What engines can possibly prevail against a wall of brass? And to make it more secure, this brazen wall shall be fenced with all manner of fortifications and ammunition; so that the veriest coward in the world, being behind such a wall, may, without dread or terror, apply himself to that which he findeth to do. God will so secure the instruments of his glory against a backsliding people, in holding up the ways of his truth and righteousness, that all attempts against them shall be vain, and the most timorous spirit may be secure, provided he go not out of the Lord's way: for if they be found beyond the line, the brazen wall, they may easily be surprised. And, indeed, who but a fool would run from the shelter of a brazen wall, to hide himself in a little stubble? And yet so do all, who run to their own wisdom, from the most hazardous engagement that any of the ways of God can possibly lead them unto. It is a sure word, and for

ever to be rested upon, which the Lord gives in to Asa, 2 Chron. xv. 2. 'The Lord is with you while ye be with him.' An unbiassed magistracy shall never want God's continued presence. Very Jeroboam himself receives a promise, upon condition of close walking with God in righteous administrations, of having 'a house built him like the house of David;' 1 Kings xi. 38. What a wall was God to Moses in that great undertaking, of being instrumental for the delivery of Israel from a bondage and slavery of four hundred years' continuance? Pharaoh was against him, whom he had deprived of his sovereignty and dominion over the people. And what a provocation the depriving of sovereignty is unto potentates, needs no demonstration: to the corruption of nature which inclines to heights and exaltations, in imitation of the fountain whence it flows, they have also the corruption of state and condition, which hath always inclined to absoluteness and tyranny. All Egypt was against him, as being by him visibly destroyed, wasted, spoiled, robbed, and at length smitten in the apple of the eye, by the loss of their first-born. And if this be not enough, that the king and people whom he opposed, were his enemies; the very people, for whose sakes he set himself to oppose the others, they also rise up against him, yea, seek to destroy him. One time they appeal to God for justice against him; Exod. v. 21. 'The Lord look upon you and judge.' They appeal to the righteous God to witness, that he had not fulfilled what he promised them, to wit, liberty, safety, and freedom from oppression, but that rather by his means their burdens were increased: and in this they were so confident (like some amongst us), that they appealed unto God for the equity of their complaints. Afterward being reduced to a strait, such as they could not see how possibly they should be extricated from, without utter ruin (like our present condition in the apprehension of some), they cry out upon him for the whole design of bringing them into the wilderness, and affirm positively, that though they had perished in their former slavery, it had been better for them, than to have followed him in this new and dangerous engagement; Exod. xiv. 11—13. That generation being, as Calvin observes,ⁿ so inured to bondage, that they were altogether unfit to bear

ⁿ In Num. cap. 4.

with the workings and pangs of their approaching liberty. Afterward, do they want drink? Moses is the cause. Do they want meat? this Moses would starve them; *Exod. xv. 24. xvi. 7.* He could not let them alone by the fleshpots of Egypt; for this they are ready to stone him; *Exod. xvii. 3.* At this day, have we too much rain? or too short a harvest? it is laid on the shoulders of the present government. It was no otherwise of old. At length this people came to that height, as being frightened by the opposition they heard of, and framed to themselves, in that place whither Moses would carry them, they presently enter into a conspiracy and revolt, consulting to cast off his government, and choose new commanders, and with a violent hand to return to their former condition, *Numb. xiv. 4.* an attempt as frequent as fruitless among ourselves. When this would not do, at length, upon the occasion of taking off Korah and his company, they assemble themselves together, and lay (not imprisonment, but) murder to his charge, and 'that of the people of the Lord;' *Numb. xvi. 41.* Now what was the issue of all those oppositions? What effect had they? How did the power of Pharaoh, the revenge of Egypt, the backsliding of Israel prevail? Why God made this one Moses a fenced brazen wall to them all, he was never in the least measure prevailed against; so long as he was with God, God was with him, no matter who was against him.

One thing only would I commend to your considerations, viz. That this Moses, thus preserved, thus delivered, thus protected, falling into one deviation, in one thing, from close following the Lord, was taken off from enjoying the closure and fruit of all his labour; *Numb. xx. 12.* Otherwise he followed the Lord in a difficult season, and did not want unconquerable supportment. Take heed of the smallest turning aside from God. Oh, lose not the fruit of all your labour for self, for a lust, or any thing that may turn you aside.

Now the Lord will do this,

1. Because of his own engagement.

2. For our encouragement.

1. Because of his own engagement. And that is two-fold.

(1.) Of truth and fidelity.

(2.) Of honour and glory.

(1.) His truth and veracity is engaged in it. 'Those that honour him, he will honour;' 1 Sam. ii. 30. If men honour him with obedience, he will honour them with preservation. 'He will be with them, while they are with him;' 2 Chron. xv. 2. While they are with him in constancy of duty, he will be with them to keep them in safety. 'He will never leave them nor forsake them;' Josh. i. 5. 'No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper;' Isa. liv. 17. Now God is never as the waters that fail to any, that upon his engagements wait for him; he will not shame the faces of them that put their trust in him. Why should our unbelieving spirits charge that upon the God of truth, which we dare not impute to a man that is a worm, a liar? Will a man fail in his engagement unto him, who upon that engagement undertakes a difficult employment for his sake? The truth is, it is either want of sincerity in our working, or want of faith in dependance, that makes us at any time come short of the utmost tittle, that is in any of the Lord's engagements.

[1.] We want sincerity, and do the Lord's work, but with our own aims and ends, like Jehu: no wonder, if we be left to ourselves for our wages and defence.

[2.] We want faith also in the Lord's work, turn to our own counsels for supportment: no marvel, if we come short of assistance. 'If we will not believe, we shall not be established.'

Look to sincerity in working, and faith in dependance, God's truth and fidelity will carry him out to give you unconquerable supportment: deflexion from these will be your destruction. You that are working on a new bottom, work also on new principles; put not new wine into old bottles, new desigus into old hearts.

(2.) He is engaged in point of honour. If they miscarry in his way, what will he do for his great name? Yea, so tender is the Lord herein of his glory, that when he hath been exceedingly provoked to remove men out of his presence, yet because they have been called by his name, and have visibly held forth a following after him, he would not suffer them to be trodden down, lest the enemy should exalt themselves, and say, Where is now their God? They shall not take from him the honour of former deliverances and protections. In such a nation as this, if the Lord now upon manifold provo-

cations should give up parliament, people, army, to calamity and ruin, would not the glory of former counsels, successes, deliverances, be utterly lost? would not men say it was not the Lord, but chance that happened to them?

2. For our encouragement. The ways of God are oftentimes attended with so many difficulties, so much opposition, that they must be embraced merely because his; no other motive in the world can suit them to us. I mean, for such as keep them immixed from their own carnal and corrupt interests. Now because the Lord will not take off the hardship and difficulty of them, lest he should not have the honour of carrying on his work against tumultuating opposition, he secures poor weaklings of comfortable assistance, and answerable success, lest his work should be wholly neglected. It is true, the Lord, as our sovereign master, may justly require a close labouring in all his ways, without the least sweetening endearments put upon them, only as they are his, whose we are, who hath a dominion over us. But yet, as a tender father, in which relation he delights to exercise his will towards his own in Christ, 'he pitieth our infirmities, knowing that we are but dust;' and therefore to invite us into the dark, into ways laboursome and toilsome to flesh and blood, he gives us in this security, that we shall be as a fenced brazen wall to the opposing sons of men.

Use 1. To discover the vanity and folly of all opposition to men called forth of God to his work, and walking in his ways, would you not think him mad, that should strike with his fist, and run with his head against a fenced brazen wall to cast it down? Is he like to have any success, but the battering of his flesh, and the beating out of his brains? What do the waves obtain by dashing themselves with noise and dread against a rock, but their own beating to pieces? What prevails a man by shooting his arrows against the sky, but a return upon his own head? Nor is the most powerful opposition to the ways of God like to meet with better success. God looks no otherwise upon opposers, than you would do upon a man attempting to thrust down a fenced brazen wall with his fingers. Therefore it is said, that in their proudest attempts, strongest assaults, deepest counsels, combinations, and associations, 'he laughs them to scorn,' derides their folly, contemns their fury, lets them sweat in vain, until their

day be come; Psal. ii. How birthless in our own, as well as other generations, have been their swelling conceptions? What then is it that prevails upon men to break through so many disappointments against the Lord, as they do? doubtless that of Isa. xxiii. 9. 'Surely the Lord of hosts hath a purpose to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.' God gives up men unto it, that he may leave no earthly glory or honour without pollution or contempt. And therefore hath opposition in our days been turned upon so many hands, that God might leave no glory without contempt: yet with this difference, that if the Lord will own them, he will recover them from their opposition, as have happened of late to the ministry of one, and will happen ere long to the ministry of another nation. When the Lord hath a little stained the pride of their glory, they shall be brought home again by the spirit of judgment and burning; but if he own them not, they shall perish under the opposition. And when it hath been wheeled about on all sorts of men, the end will be.

Use 2. 'Be wise now therefore, O ye rulers; be instructed, ye that are judges of the earth; serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling;' Psal. ii. 10, 11. See whence your assistance cometh; see where lie the hills of your salvation, and say, 'Ashur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, Ye are our Gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy;' Hos. xiv. 3. It is God alone who is 'a sun and a shield: his ways do good to the upright in heart.' Behold, here is a way to encompass England with a brazen wall: let the rulers of it walk in right ways, with upright hearts. Others have been careful to preserve the people to them, and the city to them; oh, be you careful to preserve your God unto you, he alone can make you a fenced wall; if he departs, your wall departs, your shade departs. Give me leave to insist a little on one particular, which I choose out among many others. When God leads out his people to any great things, the angel of his presence is still among them: see at large, Exod. xxiii. 20—22. The angel of the covenant, in whom is the name of God, that hath power of pardoning or retaining transgressions, Jesus Christ, the 'angel that redeemeth his out of all their troubles;' Gen.

xlvi. 16. he is in the midst of them, and amongst them. And God gives this special caution, if we would have his assistance, that we should beware of him, and obey him, and provoke him not. Would you then have God's assistance continued? Take heed of provoking the angel of his presence: provoke him not by slighting of his ways, provoke him not by contemning his ordinances; if you leave him to deal for himself, he will leave you to shift for yourselves. What though his followers are at some difference^o (the best knowing but in part), about the administration of some things in his kingdom; the envious one having also sown some bitter seeds of persecution, strife, envy, and contention among them? What though some poor creatures are captivated by Satan, the prince of pride, to a contempt of all his ordinances, whose souls I hope the Lord will one day free from the snare of the devil? Yet I pray give me leave (it is no time to contest or dispute it) to bear witness in the behalf of my master to this one truth, that if by your own personal practice and observance, your protection, countenance, authority, laws, you do not assert, maintain, uphold the order of the gospel, and administration of the ordinances of Christ, notwithstanding the noise and clamours of novel fancies, which like Jonah's gourd have sprung up in a night, and will wither in a day; you will be forsaken by the angel of God's presence, and you will become an astonishment to all the inhabitants of the earth. And herein I do not speak as one hesitating, or dubious, but positively assert it, as the known mind of God, and whereof he will not suffer any long to doubt; Psal. ii. 12.

Use 3. 'Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even your God with a recompence; he will come and save you;' Isa. xxxv. 3, 4. Let the most weak and fearful, the fainting heart, the trembling spirit, and the doubting mind know, that full and plenary security, perfect peace, attends the upright in the ways of God. You that are in God's way, do God's work, and take this cordial for all your distempers, return not to former provoking ways, and he will make you 'a fenced brazen wall.'

^o See the appendix about Toleration.

And so I come to the third thing, which I proposed to consider.

III. The opposition which men cleaving to the Lord in all his ways shall find, with the issue and success of it: 'They shall fight against thee, but shall not prevail.'

The words may be considered either as a prediction depending on God's prescience of what will be; or a commination from his just judgment, of what shall be.

In the first sense the Lord tells the prophet, from the corruption, apostacy, stubbornness, of that people, what would come to pass. In the second, what for their sins and provocations, by his just judgment, should come to pass. Time will not allow me to handle the words in both acceptations, wherefore I shall take up the latter only, viz. That it is a commination of what shall be for the farther misery of that wretched people; they shall judicially be given up to a fighting against him.

Observation. God oftentimes gives up a sinful people to a fruitless contention, and fighting with their only supporters, and means of deliverance.

Jeremiah had laboured with God for them, and with them for God, that if possible, peace being made, they might be delivered, and to consummate their sins, they are given up to fight against him.

I cannot now insist upon particular instances; consult the history of the church in all ages, you shall find it continually upon all occasions verified. From the Israelites opposing Moses, to the Ephraimites' contest with Jephthah, the rejecting of Samuel, and so on to the kings of the earth, giving their power to the beast to wage war with the Lamb, with the inhabitants of the world combining against the witnesses of Christ, is this assertion held out. In following story, no sooner did any plague or judgment break out against the Roman empire, but instantly, 'Christianos ad leones,' their fury must be spent upon them, who were the only supporters of it from irrecoverable ruin.

Now the Lord doth this,

1. To seal up a sinful people's destruction. Eli's sons hearkened not, because the Lord would slay them; 1 Sam. ii. 25. When God intends ruin to a people, they shall walk in ways that tend thereunto. Now is there a readier way for a man

to have a house on his head, than by pulling away the pillars whereby it is supported? If by Moses standing in the gap, the fury of the Lord be turned away; certainly if the people contend to remove him, their desolation sleepeth not. When therefore the Lord intends to lay cities waste without inhabitant, and houses without men, to make a land utterly desolate, the way of its accomplishment is by making the hearts of the people fat, and their ears heavy, and shutting their eyes that they should not see, and attend to the means of their recovery, Isa. vi. 10, 11. so gathering in his peace and mercies from a provoking people; Jer. xvi. 15.

2. To manifest his own power and sovereignty in maintaining a small handful, oftentimes a few single persons, a Moses, a Samuel, two witnesses against the opposing rage of a hardened multitude. If those who undertake his work and business in their several generations, should have withal the concurrent obedience and assistance of others, whose good is intended, neither would his name be so seen, nor his ways so honoured, as now, when he bears them up against all opposition. Had not the people of this land been given up (many of them) to fight against the deliverers of the nation, and were it not so with them even at this time, how dark would have been the workings of providence, which now by wrestling through all opposition are so conspicuous and clear? When then a people, or any part of a people, have made themselves unworthy of the good things intended to be accomplished by the instruments of righteousness and peace, the Lord will blow upon their waves, that with rage and fury they shall dash themselves against them, whom he will strengthen with the munition of rocks, not to be prevailed against. So that God's glory and their own ruin lie at the bottom of this close working of providence, in giving up a sinful people to a fruitless contending with their own deliverers, if ever they be delivered.

Obj. But is not a people's contending with the instruments by whom God worketh amongst them, and for them, a sin and provocation to the eyes of his glory? How then can the Lord be said to give them up unto it?

Ans. Avoiding all scholastical discourses, as unsuited to the work of this day, I shall briefly give in unto you, how

this is a sinful thing, yet sinners given up unto it, without the least extenuation of their guilt, or colour for charge on the justice and goodness of God.

(1.) Then to give up men unto a thing in itself sinful, is no more, but so to dispose and order things, that sinners may exercise and draw out their sinful principles in such a way. This that the Lord doth, the Scripture is full of examples, and hath testimonies innumerable. That herein the Holy One of Israel is no ways co-partner with the guilt of the sons of men, will appear by observing the difference of these several agents in these four things :

[1.] The principle by which they work.

[2.] The rule by which they proceed.

[3.] The means which they use.

[4.] The end at which they aim.

[1.] The principle of operation in God is his own sovereign will, and good pleasure. ‘He doth whatsoever he pleaseth;’ Psal. cxv. 3. ‘He saith his purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure;’ Isa. xlv. 10. ‘He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth;’ Rom. ix. 13. ‘Giving no account of his matters;’ Job. xxxiii. 18. This our Saviour rendereth the only principle and reason of his hidden operations: ‘O Father, so it seemed good in thy sight;’ Matt. xi. 26. His sovereignty in doing what he will with his own, as the potter with his clay, is the rise of his operations. So that whatever he doth, ‘who can say unto him, what doest thou?’ Job ix. 12. ‘Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?’ Rom. ix. 20. And hence two things will follow :

1st. That what he doth is just and righteous; for so must all acts of supreme and absolute dominion be.

2dly. That he can be author of nothing, but what hath existence and being itself; for he works as the fountain of beings. This sin hath not. So that though every action, whether good or bad, receives its specification from the working of providence, and to that is their existence, in their several kinds, to be ascribed; yet an evil action, in the evilness of it, depends not upon divine concurrence and influence; for good and evil make not sundry kinds of actions, but only a distinction of a subject in respect of its adjuncts and accidents.

But now the principle of operation in man is nature vitiated and corrupted: I say nature, not that he worketh naturally, being a free agent, but that these faculties, will, and understanding, which are the principles of operation, are in nature corrupted, and from thence can nothing flow but evil. 'An evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Men do not gather figs from thistles. A bitter fountain sends not forth sweet waters. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' If the fountain be poisoned, can the streams be wholesome? What can you expect of light and truth from a mind possessed with vanity and darkness? what from a will averted from the chiefest good, and fixed upon present appearances? what from a heart, the figment of whose imagination is only evil?

[2.] Consider the difference in the rule of operation. Every thing that works hath a rule to work by, this is called a law. In that thing which to man is sinful, God worketh as it is a thing only, man as it is a sinful thing. And how so? Why every one's sin is his aberration from his rule of operation or working. 'Αμαρτάνειν is, 'aberrare à scopo:' to sin is, not to collime aright at the end proposed: ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία, is a most exact definition of it; irregularity is its form, if it may be said to have a form; a privation's form is deformity. Look then in any action, wherein an agent exorbitates from its rule, that is sin. Now what is God's rule in operation? His own infinite wise will alone: he takes neither motive, rise, nor occasion for any internal acts, from any thing without himself; 'he doth whatever he pleaseth;' Psal. cxv. 3. 'He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will;' Eph. i. 11. That is his own law of operation, and the rule of righteousness unto others: working them agreeably to his own will, which he always must do, he is free from the obliquity of any action. What now is the rule of the sons of men? Why, the revealed will of God: 'Revealed things belong to us that we may do them;' Deut. xxix. 29. God's revealed will is the rule of our walking, our working; whatever suits not, answers not this, is evil. 'Sin is the transgression of the law;' 1 John iii. 4. Here then comes in the deformity, the obliquity, the ataxy of any thing; God works, and man worketh; those agents have several rules. God works according to his rule, hence

the action is good, as an action ; man deviates from his rule, hence it is sinful in respect of its qualifications and adjuncts. Man writes fair letters upon a wet paper, and they run all into one blot ; not the skill of the scribe, but the defect in the paper is the cause of the deformity. He that makes a lame horse go, is the cause of his going ; but the defect in his joints, is the cause of his going lame. The sun exhales a steam from the dunghill ; the sun is the cause of the exhalation, but the dunghill of the unwholesome savour. The first cause is the proper cause of a thing's being, but the second of its being evil.

[3.] Consider the several operations and actings of God and man : for instance, in a rebellious people's fighting against their helpers under him.

Now the acts of God herein may be referred to six heads :

1st. A continuance of the creature's being and life : 'upholding him by the word of his power,' Heb. i. 3. when he might take him off in a moment : 'Enduring them with much long-suffering,' Rom. ix. 22. when he might cut him off, as he did the opposers of Elijah, 'with fire from heaven ;' 2 Kings i. 12.

2dly. A continuance of power of operation to them, when he could make their hands to wither like Jeroboam's, when they go about to strike ; 1 Kings xiii. 4. or their hearts to die within them like Nabal's, when they intend to be churlish ; 1 Sam. xxv. 37. But he raiseth them up, or makes them to stand, that they may oppose ; Rom. ix. 11.

3dly. Laying before them a suitable object for the drawing forth their corruption unto opposition, giving them such helpers as shall in many things cross their lusts, and exasperate them thereunto ; as Elijah, a man of a fiery zeal, for a lukewarm Abab.

4thly. Withholding from them that effectual grace, by which alone that sin might be avoided ; a not actually keeping them from that sin, by the might of his Spirit and grace. That alone is effectual grace, which is actual. 'He suffers them to walk in their own ways.'

And this the Lord may do,

(1st.) In respect of them, judicially ; they deserve to be forsaken. Ahab is left to fill up the measure of his iniquities, 'add iniquity to iniquity ;' Psal. lxxix. 27.

(2dly.) In respect of himself, by way of sovereignty, doing what he will with his own, 'hardening whom he will;' Rom. ix. 15.

5thly. He positively sends upon their understandings that, which the Scripture sets out under the terms of blindness, darkness, folly, delusion, slumber, a spirit of giddiness, and the like: the places are too many to rehearse. What secret actings in, and upon, the minds of men; what disturbing of their advices, what mingling of corrupt affections with false, carnal reasonings, what givings up to the power of darkness, in Satan the prince thereof, this judicial act doth contain, I cannot insist upon; let it suffice, God will not help them to discern, yea, he will cause that they shall not discern, but hide from their eyes the things that concern their peace, and so give them up to contend with their only helpers.

6thly. Suitably upon the will and affections he hath several acts, obfirming the one in corruption, and giving up the other to vileness, Rom. i. 24, 26. until the heart become thoroughly hardened, and the conscience seared; not forcing the one, but leaving it to follow the judgment of practical reason, which being a blind, yea, a blinded guide, whether can it lead a blind follower, but into the ditch? not defiling the other with infused sensuality, but provoking them to act according to inbred, native corruption, and by suffering frequent vile actings to confirm them in ways of vileness.

Take an instance of the whole: God gives helpers and deliverers to a sinful people, because of their provocations, some or all of them shall not taste of the deliverance, by them to be procured: wherefore, though he sustains their lives in being, whereby they might have opportunity to know his mind, and their own peace; yet he gives them a power to contend with their helpers, causing their helpers to act such things, as under consideration of circumstances, shall exceedingly provoke these sinners: being so exasperated and provoked, the Lord, who is free in all his dispensations, refuseth to make out to them that healing grace, whereby they might be kept from a sinful opposition: yea, being justly provoked, and resolved that they should not taste of the plenty to come, he makes them foolish and giddy

in their reasonings and counsels, blinds them in their understandings, that they shall not be able to discern plain and evident things, tending to their own good, but in all their ways shall err like a drunken man in his vomit; whence that they may not be recovered, because he will destroy them, he gives in hardness and obstinacy upon their hearts and spirits, leaving them to suitable affections, to contend for their own ruin.

Now what are the ways and methods of sinful man's working in such opposition, would be too long for me to declare; what prejudices are erected, what lusts pursued, what corrupt interests acted, and followed; how self is honoured, what false pretences coined, how God is slighted, if I should go about to lay open, I must look into the hell of these times, than which nothing can be more loathsome and abominable. Let it suffice, that sinful self, sinful lusts, sinful prejudices, sinful blindness, sinful carnal fears, sinful corrupt interests, sinful fleshly reasonings, sinful passions, and vile affections do all concur in such a work, are all woven up together in such a web.

[4.] See the distance of their aims. God's aim is only the manifestation of his own glory (than which nothing but himself is so infinitely good, nothing so righteous that it should be), and this by the way of goodness and severity; Rom. xi. 22. Goodness in faithfulness and mercy, preserving his who are opposed, whereby his glory is exceedingly advanced; severity towards the opposers, that by a sinful cursed opposition they may fill up the measure of their iniquities, and receive this at the hand of the Lord, that they lie down in sorrow, wherein also he is glorious.

God forbid that I should speak this of all, that for any time, or under any temptation, may be carried to an opposition in any kind, or degree, to the instruments of God's glory amongst them. Many for a season may do it, and yet belong to God, who shall be recovered in due time. It is only of men given up, forsaken, opposing all the appearances of God with his saints and people in all his ways, of whom I speak.

Now what are the ends of this generation of fighters against this brazen wall, and how distant from those of the Lord's? 'They consult to cast him down from his excellency,

whom God will exalt ;' Psal. lxii. 4. ' They think not as the Lord, neither doth their heart mean so, but it is in their heart to destroy and to cut off ;' Isa. x. 7. To satisfy their own corrupt lusts, ambition, avarice, revenge, superstition, contempt of God's people, because his, hatred of the yoke of the Lord, fleshly interests, even for these, and such-like ends as these, is their undertaking.

Thus though there be a concurrence of God and man in the same thing, yet considering the distance of their principles, rules, actings, and ends, it is apparent that man doth sinfully, what the Lord doth judicially ; which being an answer to the former objection, I return to give in some uses to the point.

Use 1. Let men, constant, sincere, upright in the ways of God, especially in difficult times, know what they are to expect from many, yea, the most of the generation, whose good they intend, and among whom they live ; opposition and fighting is like to be their lot ; and that not only it will be so because of men's lusts, corruptions, prejudices ; but also it shall be so, from God's righteous judgments against a stubborn people ; they harden their hearts that it may be so, to compass their ends ; and God hardens their hearts that it shall be so to bring about his aims ; they will do it to execute their revenge upon others, they shall do it to execute God's vengeance upon themselves. This may be for consolation, that in their contending there is nothing but the wrath of man against them, whom they oppose (which God will restrain, or cause it to turn to his praise) but there is the wrath of God against themselves, which who can bear ? This then let all expect, who engage their hearts to God, and follow the Lamb whither he goeth.

Men walking in the sincerity of their hearts are very apt to conceive that all sheaves should bow to theirs, that all men should cry, ' grace, grace,' to their proceedings. Why should any oppose ? ' Quid meruere ?' Alas ! the more upright they are, the fitter for the Lord by them to break a gainsaying people. Let men keep close to those ways of God whereto protection is annexed, and let not their hearts fail them because of the people of the land ; the storm of their fury will be like the plague of hail in Egypt, it smote only the cattle that were in the field ; those, who upon the

word of Moses drove them into the houses, preserved them alive. If men wander in the field of their own ways, of self-seeking, oppression, ambition, and the like, doubtless the storm will carry them away; but for those who keep house, who keep close to the Lord, though it may have much noise, terror, and dread with it, it shall not come nigh them. And if the Lord for causes best known, known only to his infinite wisdom, should take off any Josiahs in the opposition, he will certainly effect two things by it.

(1.) To give them rest and peace.

(2.) Further his cause and truth, by drawing out the prayers and appeals of the residue, and this living they valued above their lives.

All you then that are the Lord's workmen, be always prepared for a storm; wonder not that men see not the ways of the Lord, nor the judgments of our God, many are blinded. Admire not that they will so endlessly engage themselves into fruitless oppositions; they are hardened. Be not amazed that evidence of truth and righteousness will not affect them; they are corrupted. But this do; 'Come and enter into the chambers of God, and you shall be safe until this whole indignation be overpast.' I speak of all them, and only them who follow the Lord in all his ways with upright hearts, and single minds, if the Lord will have you to be a rock and a brazen wall for men to dash themselves against, and to break in pieces, though the service be grievous to flesh and blood, yet it is his, whose you are; be prepared, the wind blows, a storm may come.

Use 2. Let men set upon opposition make a diligent inquiry, whether there be no hand in the business, but their own? whether their counsels be not leavened with the wrath of God, and their thoughts mixed with a spirit of giddiness, and themselves carried on to their own destruction? Let me see the opposer of the present ways of God, who, upon his opposition is made more humble, more self-denying, more empty of self-wisdom, more fervent in supplications and waiting upon God, than formerly; and I will certainly blot him out of the roll of men judicially hardened. But if therewith men become also proud, selfish, carnally wise, revengeful, furious upon earthly interests, full, impatient; doubtless God is departed, and an evil spirit from the Lord

prevaileth on them. O that men would look about them before it be too late, see the Lord disturbing them, before the waves return upon them ; know that they may pull down some antics that make a great shew of supporting the church, and yet indeed are pargetted posts supported by it ! The foundation is on a rock that shall not be prevailed against.

Use 3. See the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of Almighty God, that is able to bring light out of darkness, and to compass his own righteous judgments by the sinful advisings and undertakings of men. Indeed the Lord's sovereignty and dominion over the creature, doth not in any thing more exalt itself, than in working in all the reasonings, debates, consultations of men, to bring about his own counsels, through their free workings. That men should use, improve their wisdom, freedom, choice ; yea, lusts, not once thinking of God ; yet all that while do his work more than their own ; ' This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.'

Of the last part of my text I shall not speak at all, neither indeed did I intend.