

SERMON IX.*

THE

ADVANTAGE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

IN THE

SHAKING OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD :

OR,

PROVIDENTIAL ALTERATIONS IN THEIR SUBSERVIENCY TO
CHRIST'S EXALTATION.

* This sermon was preached to the Parliament, Oct. 24, 1651. being a solemn day of thanksgiving for the destruction of the Scots' army at Worcester, with sundry other mercies.

TO THE
SUPREME AUTHORITY OF THE NATION,
THE
COMMONS ASSEMBLED IN PARLIAMENT.

RIGHT HONOURABLE,

OF all the times which the Holy One of Israel hath caused to pass over the nations of the world, there hath not any from the days of old been so filled with eminent discoveries of his presence, power, and providence, in disposing of all affairs here below according to the counsel of his own will, as the season wherein he hath made you a spectacle unto men and angels, being the instrument in his hand to perform all his pleasure. Neither in this season hath he upon any opportunity so gloriously laid hold upon his own strength and goodness, to manifest the fixedness of his eye on those, who are as the apple of it; as in that mighty deliverance, the high praises whereof, according to his good hand upon you, you lately rendered unto him.

The more beauty and desirableness any design against the Lord Christ is clothed withal, the more power and subtilty it is supported with, the greater is the brightness of his coming for its wasting and desolation. With what deceivableness of unrighteousness, and lies in hypocrisy, the late grand attempt of those in Scotland, with their adherents (which also was of the former, and is gone into destruction), was carried on, is in some measure now made naked to the loathing of its

abominations. In digging deep to lay a foundation for blood and revenge, in covering private and sordid ends with a pretence of things public and glorious, in limning a face of religion upon a worldly stock, in concealing distant aims, and bloody animosities, to compass one common end, that a theatre might be provided to act several parts upon, in pleading a necessity from an oath of God, unto most desperate undertakings against God, and such like things as these, perhaps it gives not place to any which former ages have been acquainted withal. Now to reject all the claims of the authors and abettors thereof to any commission from above, to divest them of all pretences to religion and zeal thereof, to disappoint them in their expected associations, and to make all their strength to become as tow that hath smelt the fire, hath been his work alone, who takes to himself his great power, to carry on the interest of his kingdom against all opposers. Under the shadow of this mercy, composed of as many branches of wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness, as any outward dispensation hath brought forth since the name of Christian was known, do you now sit in council, and the residue of the nation in peace. What obligations from the Lord, what cords of love are upon us? The returnal and improvement of all his dealings with us, which he requireth and expecteth from us, I have pointed you unto in the following sermon. For the present, I shall only add, that as whatever there hath been, of beauty, glory, or advantage unto the people of God in the late transactions, hath been eminently of undeserved grace; so the dreadful vengeance which the Lord hath executed against the men of his enmity and warfare, hath been most righteously procured, by their clothing cursed designs of revenge, persecution, bondage in soul and body, spoil and rapine, with the most glorious pretences of zeal, covenant,

reformation, and such like things, which never came into their hearts. Therefore that the God of all our mercies and deliverances would for ever keep alive in your hearts a faithful acknowledgment of his grace, and a practical detestation of those ways which are such a provocation to the eyes of his glory, shall be the constant prayer of,

Your most humble Servant

In our dearest Lord,

J. OWEN.

From my Study, Ch. Ch, Oxon. Nov. 7.

SERMON IX.

And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken it and have done it.—Ezek. xvii. 24.

ALTHOUGH all the works of God's providence, which are 'great, and sought out of all that have pleasure in them,' Psal. cxi. 2. have such a stamp and impress of his own image on them, his wisdom, goodness, power, love, that they declare their author, and reveal from heaven his kindness, and wrath towards the children of men;^a yet such are the prejudices, lusts, inordinacy of affections and interest of many, that it hath always been a long and difficult task to convince them of his presence in them, when it hath been most uncontrollably evident. The Egyptians will wrestle with many a plague, by thinking the 'magicians can do so;'^b and the Philistines will try to the utmost whether it be his hand, or a chance that happened to them:^c 'Lord,' saith the prophet, 'when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see;' Isa. xxvi. 11. Yea oftentimes (especially when judicial blindness is gone forth upon them^d), though they cannot but see his 'arm awaked as of old and made bare,' they will not rest in his sovereign disposal of things, but rise up against the works of his revenge and holiness; like wild beasts that are pursued, when all ways of escape and turning are shut up, they fly in the face of him that follows them: 'They repent not of their evil deeds, but bite their tongues for anger, and blaspheme the God of heaven;' Rev. xvi. 10, 11. Yea, such is the power of deceiveable lusts, that many will admire at the blindness of others in former generations who considered not the works of God (as the Jews in the wilderness), when themselves are under actual contempt of no less glorious dispensations; like the Pharisees, who bewailed the folly of their fathers 'in persecuting the prophets,' when themselves were endeavouring to 'kill the Son of God;' Matt. xxiii. 29, 30. To bring then upon the spirits of men, a conviction

^a Psal. xix. 1, 2. Rom. i. 18. Acts xxvii. 26, 27.

^b Exod. vii. 11, 12.

^c 1 Sam. vi. 9.

^d Isa. vi. 11, 12.

of the works of God and his righteousness therein, so as to prevail with them to rest in his determination of things, is a task meet only for him, who knows all their hearts within them, and can carry on the issues of his providence, until to a man they shall say, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God who judgeth in the earth;' Psal. lviii. 11. And this is that which the Lord here undertakes to accomplish. 'And,' saith he, 'all the trees,' &c.

In the preaching and prophesying of Ezekiel, this one thing among others is eminent, that he was 'artifex parabolarum,' a wonderful 'framer of similitudes and parables;'^e a way of teaching attended with much evidence, clearness, and power.

In particular, he frequently compares the world to a field, or a forest, and the inhabitants of it to the trees therein: an allusion exceedingly proper, considering the great variety, and difference of condition both of the one and the other. The trees of the field are some high, some low, some green, some dry, some strong, some weak, some lofty, some contemptible, some fruitful, some barren, some useful, some altogether useless: so that you have all sorts of persons, high and low, of what condition, relation, or interest soever, clearly represented by the trees of the field, and these are the trees in my text.

This chapter unto ver. 22. is taken up in a riddle, a parable, with the exposition of it.^f The time being come, that God would destroy the outward visible monarchy of the Jews, for their false worship, tyranny, persecution, and oppression, he employs the king of Babylon in that work,^g who subdues the nation, takes away two kings one after another, and appoints Zedekiah a titular governor under him.^h But the wrath of God being to come upon them to the uttermost, he also closes with Egypt, rebels against him,ⁱ by whose appointment alone he had any right to be a ruler, ver. 16. so way is made by his ruin, to put an end to the kingly reign of the house of David in Jerusalem; Jer. xxix. 16, 17. The Lord had of old, erected a kingly government in the house of David, 1 Sam. xvi. 1. 2 Sam. xii. 10. not for any eminency in the government itself, or for the civil

^e Ezek. xx. 45.

^f xvii. 2.

^g 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17.

^h 2 Kings xiv. 1—3.

ⁱ Jer. xxxvii. 1

^g 2 Kings xxiv. 17. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10.

advantage of that people; for he had long before chosen and established another, consisting of ‘seventy elders of the people,’ Numb. xi. 24. to whom he added prophets and judges extraordinarily raised up in several generations, according to his promise, Deut. xviii. 18. which when the people rejected, he said, they rejected him, or his institution, 1 Sam. viii. 7. but that it might be a type of the spiritual dominion of their Messiah,^k and so was a part of their pedagogy and bondage, as were the residue of their types every one of them; yea, the most glorious enjoyments whatsoever, which were granted them, which did yet represent something that was afterward to be brought in, was part of that servile estate wherein God kept that people, that without us they should not be made perfect. But now this carnal people beholding the outward beauty, lustre, and glory of the type, they began to rest in it, to the neglect of the spiritual kingdom of Christ represented thereby.¹ And thus did they with the rest of their types, until the Lord destroyed all their outward pomp and glory; Isa. i. 11, 12. Jer. vii. 4. 14, 15. So in particular dealt he with their kingly government, when once they begin to account their bondage their glory, and to embrace the shadow instead of the substance. And this did he to recall them to a serious consideration of the tendency of all typical institutions, and the design he was carrying on concerning the kingdom of Christ.

Hence ver. 22. of this chapter he calls them from their thoughtfulness about the destructions, desolations, and contentions that were amongst them in reference to their civil rule, to the consideration of that design, which he was secretly and silently carrying on under all these dispensations. ‘I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it, I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it, and it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar, and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing: in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they

^k Psal. xlv. 6. Hos. iii. 5. Isa. ix. 7. xvi. 5. xxii. 22. Jer. xxiii. 5. Amos ix. 11. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. xxxvii. 24, 25.

¹ 1 Cor. x. 11. Acts xv. 10. Gal. iii. 4.

dwell.' As if the Lord should say, There is a great noise in the world about setting up, and plucking down of kings, in this their carnal rule, and many of you see nothing else, you will look no farther; but I also have my work in hand, my design is not bounded within these limits and outward appearances, I am setting up a king that shall have another manner of dominion and rule, than these worms of the earth. He shall stand, as Micah v. 4.

The setting up then of this kingdom of Christ, 'who is the highest branch of the high cedar,' and planting it in the church, the 'mountain of Israel,' with the prosperity hereof, and safety of him that shall dwell therein, is the subject of ver. 22, 23. This being that, to the consideration whereof God here calls his people at such a season, I shall name one or two observations from this connexion of the words.

Observation 1. In the midst of all the tumults and embroilments of the nations, that which the Lord takes peculiarly as his own design, into his own management, is the carrying on of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

You are about your work, saith the Lord, I also am about mine; you have your branches and cedars, I also have one to plant, that shall flourish. Dan. ii. 44. 'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed,' &c. Were not those kings and kingdoms also of his setting up, that it is said, In their days he shall set up one of his own? Yea doubtless, 'He changeth the times and the seasons, he setteth up kings and removeth kings;' Dan. ii. 21. 'He ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will;' chap. iv. 25. There is not a persecuting Pharaoh, but 'he raises him up for his own purpose;' Exod. ix. 16. But yet, in respect of the kingdom of his Son, he speaks of them, as if he had nothing to do with them: In their days I will do my own work, advance the kingdom of the Lord Christ.

There are great and mighty works in hand in this nation, tyrants are punished, the jaws of oppressors are broken, bloody revengeful persecutors disappointed, and, we hope, governors set up that may be 'just, ruling in the fear of the Lord, that they may be as the light of the morning,' &c.

2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4. The hand of the Lord hath been wonderfully exalted in all these things; but yet should we rest in them, should they not be brought into an immediate subserviency to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, the Lord will quickly distinguish between them, and his own peculiar design, and say, 'In the days of these changes' I will do so, and so; speak of them, as if he had nothing to do with them. The carrying on of the interest of Christ, is his peculiar aim; he of his goodness make it ours also.

Observation 2. Among all the designs that are on foot in the world, there is none that hath either stability, fixedness, or final success, but only the design of God concerning the kingdom of Christ.

Other branches may be set, but the branch of the Lord only prospers.^m The likeliest appearances of other undertakings, are but as the glorious rising of the sun in the morning, quickly clouded. The interest of Christ is like Joseph, Gen. xlix. 23, 24. Ofttimes the archers shoot at it, and grieve it; but in the close the bow thereof abides in strength; and therefore this is the issue of all these dispensations, that the kingdoms and nations are at length to be possessed by the Lord Christ,ⁿ his sheaf standing up, and all others bowing thereunto.

And unto the consideration of these things, in the midst of all the tumults in the world, doth God effectually recall his people, and withal tells them, how he will carry it on, in the words of my text: 'And all the trees,' &c.

In the words three things are to be observed.

First, The works that God ascribes to himself.

And that he sets down under a twofold similitude: of pulling down the 'high tree,' and setting up the 'low tree:' and of drying up the 'green tree,' and making the 'dry tree' to flourish. And both these similitudes are coincident, serving only in this redoubling, for the clearer illustration of that, which they shadow out.

Secondly, There is the issue that God will carry this out unto in respect of others: 'All the trees of the field shall know.'

Thirdly, A particular assurance that the Lord gives for

^m Hag. ii. 6, 7. Heb. xii. 26, 27. Isa. viii. 9, 10. ix. 7. xlv. 10. liii. 10. Psal. xxxiii. 11. Prov. xix. 21. xxi. 30. Job xxiii. 15.

ⁿ Isa. lx. 12, 13. Rev. xi. 15.

the accomplishment of all this, from the engagement of his name: 'I the Lord,' &c.

First, For the first, the expression of the work of the Lord may be taken two ways: 1. Strictly and properly; 2. Largely, and by the way of analogy and proportion.

1. In the first way you may consider,

(1.) The tree that is to be cast down and withered, and that is the 'high tree,' and the 'green tree;' a tree that in their eyes had both beauty and vigour, high and green: this was the Judaical kingdom, admired and delighted in by the Jews. This, says God, I will reject; as also he will many a tall Eliab, that even some Samuels may think to be his anointed.

(2.) The tree that is to be exalted and made to flourish, and that is the 'low tree,' the 'dry tree,' contemptible for growth; it is low, useless for fruit, it is dry. And this is the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, contemned, despised; this, says God, I will exalt, carry on, and make glorious; for though the interest of Christ and the gospel may seem low; and dry for a season, in comparison of the glory of other flourishing interests, yet, in the issue, it shall be exalted above them all.

2. As taken more largely, and by the way of analogy; and so,

(1.) The high and the green tree are the things of the most glorious appearance in the world; persons and states, that seem to be exceedingly suited for the work that God hath to do; that are in the greatest probability to be eminently instrumental in his hand: but alas, says God, these I will pull down and cause to wither. Perhaps you will think it strange, that a mighty monarchy, a triumphing prelacy, a thriving conformity, should all be brought down; but so it shall be, 'Every mountain shall be made a plain.'

(2.) The 'low tree,' and the 'dry tree,' are things, persons, assemblies, outwardly weak and contemptible, such as wise men do verily believe that God will never use; they will not understand, that such Moses's shall be deliverers, but cry, Who made them judges and rulers?^o But even these will God exalt and cause to flourish: 'Every valley shall be exalted.'

^o Exod. ii. 14. Acts vii. 25.

Two observations flow from hence, which I shall insist upon.

I. In the carrying on of the interest of Christ and the gospel, God will work wonderful providential alterations.

II. The actings of God's providence in carrying on the interest of Christ, shall be exceedingly unsuited to the reasonings and expectations of the most of the sons of men.

Some trees must be plucked down, and some raised up; yea, high trees thrown down, and the low caused to flourish. There is the issue of God's thus dealing in respect of others, 'all the trees of the field,' &c. By the 'trees of the field' are meant men of all sorts, that are concerned in these transactions.

And herein you may observe two things: something intimated, and that is, an unwillingness in men to own these dispensations of God; hence the Lord undertakes himself to set on a conviction upon them, as a thing of great difficulty: and something expressed, which is the conviction itself, that shall in the issue fall upon them, notwithstanding all their reluctancy. Hence also are these two observations:

Observation 1. Men are exceeding unwilling to see and own the hand of God in those works of his providence, which answer not their reasonings, interests, and expectations.

Observation 2. The Lord will not cease walking contrary to the carnal reasonings of men in his mighty works, for the carrying on the interest of the Lord Jesus, until his hand be seen, owned, and confessed.

For what remains concerning the assurance of the accomplishment of all this from the engagement of his name, I shall only add, That the power and faithfulness of God are engaged in the carrying on the things of the kingdom of Christ, to the conviction of the most stubborn opposers.

I begin with the first.

I. In the carrying on the interest of Christ and the gospel, God will work wonderful providential alterations.

Alterations among the trees of the field, nations, states, and men on earth. When the beginning of the saints' departure from under the dominion of antichrist was followed with wars, tumults, and destructions, it was objected to Luther, That that doctrine could not be of God, which was

attended with such desolations: he replied, according to the vigour of his spirit, ‘Ego nisi tumultus istos viderem, Christum in mundo esse non crederem;’ ‘Did he not see those tumults, he would not believe that Christ was come forth into the world.’ The Lord tells you how he will bring on his kingdom, Hag. ii. 6, 7. ‘I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.’ And, ‘I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come,’ &c. The ‘desire of the nations,’ is to be brought in by the ‘shaking of the nations.’ They are to be civilly moved, that they may be spiritually established. Neither are they only to be shaken, but also to undergo great alterations in their shakings. Heb. xii. 27. ‘This word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain.’ They must have a removal, as well as a shaking; *μετάθεσιν*, ‘a change,’ a translation. Most nations in their civil constitution lie out of order, for the bringing in of the interest of Christ; they must be shaken up, and new disposed of, that all obstacles may be taken away. The day of the gospel is not only terrible in its discovering light, and as it is a ‘trying furnace;’ Mal. iii. 2. but also in its devouring fury, as it is a ‘consuming oven;’ chap. iv. 1.

There are three principal seasons of the Lord’s eminent appearance to carry on the kingdom of Christ and the gospel, and all attended with dreadful providential alterations: and unto one of these heads may all particular actings be reduced.

1. The first is, the promulgation of the gospel among the Jews by the Lord Christ himself, and his apostles: what this was attended withal is graphically described, Matt. xxiv. 6, 7. ‘And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars; for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places.’ And the close of it you have, ver. 29. ‘Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken.’ The Judaical state in all the height and glory of it was utterly consumed, so that all flesh, all the Jews, were in danger of utter destruction,

ver. 22. Their own historian himself, a Jew, affirming, that from the foundation of the world never was there such destruction and desolation brought upon any nation. Which words of his are a comment on that prediction of our Saviour, Matt. xxiv. 21. and the reason of this eminent desolation you have; Isa. ix. 5, 6.

2. The second is, in the farther carrying on of the gospel, after the destruction of Jerusalem, throughout the world of the Gentiles, subject then in a great proportion to the Roman empire. And what is the issue hereof? The opening of the six seals immediately follows thereon; Rev. vi. Which after manifold and various alterations, end in that dreadful dissolution of theⁿ pagan empire, which you have described from ver. 14. to the end.

3. The most signal is the coming of the Lord Christ to recover his people from antichristian idolatry and oppression; which of all others is and shall be attended with the most astonishing alterations and desolations, pulling down of high trees, and exalting them that are low: thence is that war, described Rev. xvii. 14. and that mighty vengeance poured out by the Lord Christ on the nations, their kings, and captains; chap. xix. 11. to the end; which the Holy Ghost describes by a collection of all the most dreadful expressions, which are any where used to set out great devastations in the Old Testament.

And this is the head whereunto the present actings of Providence in this nation are to be referred, they all tend to the accomplishment of his main design therein. He that thinks Babylon is confined to Rome, and its open idolatry, knows nothing of Babylon, nor of the new Jerusalem: the depth of a subtle mystery doth not lie in gross visible folly: it hath been insinuating itself into all the nations for sixteen hundred years, and to most of them is now become as the marrow in their bones: before it be wholly shaken out, these heavens must be dissolved, and the earth shaken; their tall trees hewed down, and set a howling; Rev. xviii. and the residue of them transplanted from one end of the earth to another. This I say then is the work that the Lord hath now in hand; and this is a day of thankfulness in reference to what he hath done for us in this nation. I know no better way of praising God for any work, than the finding out of

his design therein, and closing with him in it. God hath gone with you, I hope, now to the end of your work, leave him not until he comes to the end of his. He hath compelled you 'to go with him one mile' for your own good, go with him two for his glory. The two tribes and a half sat not down in their own possessions, until the whole work of the Lord was done. I speak not with respect to any engagements of war with foreign nations; what have I to do with things that are above me? You will find work enough for your zeal to the kingdom of Christ at home; and this is the work of thankfulness which you are called unto.

Now the reasons of this are,

(1.) Because amongst all men, where the kingdom of Christ is to be set up, there is something or other possessed, that he alone must and will have; and therefore the Lord giving Jesus Christ but his own inheritance, it must needs be attended with great alterations. I dare say, until of late (whatever now is) there was not any state or nation in the world, where the name of Christ is known, but that there was an intrenchment upon that which is the pure portion and inheritance of the Lord Christ, and that detained with falsehood and force. Yea, such is the folly and blindness of the most of men, that they think their greatest interest lies in holding that fast, which Christ will take from them: Pharaoh-like, that thought it the great advantage of his kingdom not to let the people go, when it proved the ruin of him and his land. This I dare say will in the issue be the ruin of all, or most of the tall trees of Europe; they have grasped much of the power of Christ, and endeavour to impose on the consciences of his in the worship of God, or otherwise oppress them in what he hath purchased for them; and, by a dreadful mistake, they suppose their own interest lies therein, which makes them hold fast, until Christ hath shaken them all to pieces, and taken away even that also which was their own. The late king had learned a saying from his predecessor, No bishop, no king: Hence he supposes his main interest to lie in holding fast prelacy; whatever he seems to part withal, that he will not let go, that is his main interest; and what is this prelacy? A mere Antichristian encroachment upon the inheritance of Christ. Christ coming to take his own, shakes the other to pieces;

those who would have been our oppressors in Scotland, but that God hath crushed the cockatrice in the shell, and filled the pit with their dead bodies which they had digged for us; they also had prepared a procruster bed, a heavy yoke, a beast that had it grown to perfection, would have had horns and hoofs, and in maintaining this, they think their great interest to lie. And in holding this fast, are they after all their associations, broken in pieces, and this is one cause.

(2.) The works that God hath to do in such a season, require it: God hath three great works to do, in the day of his carrying on the interest of Christ and the gospel:

[1.] He hath great revenges to take.

[2.] He hath great deliverances to work.

[3.] He hath great discoveries to make.

I shall but touch on each.

[1.] He hath great revenges to take, and that on three sorts of persons:

1st. On oppressing Babylonians; false worshippers and persecutors; whilst the bride is preparing for the Lord Christ, he goes forth, with the armies of heaven following him, to take vengeance on these his enemies; Rev. xix. 11. These are the Absaloms, the usurpers of his throne, the Hamans, the forcers of his spouse, the chiefest adversaries of his kingdom: ^p 'He shall fill places with dead bodies' of these, and upon this account, 'wound the heads over many countries;' Psal. cx. 6. The axe is laid to the root of many a tall tree on this score, even in this nation where he is reckoning for blood, and imposition of yokes; and he hath found out men inheriting this spirit from one generation to another.

2dly. Scoffing Edomites: there is a twofold quarrel that God hath with that generation of men. Their rejoicing at Zion's distress, and desiring its increase; Psal. clvii. 6. and their endeavour to destroy the residue, when at any time straitened; Obad. 14. How many in the late trial rejoiced in the straits of Zion? that sat expecting our destruction, that they might have risen to stand in the cross ways to have cut off them that escaped, wherewith should they have reconciled themselves to their master, but with the heads of

^p Isa. xliii. 14. Jer. xxv. 12. li. 35. Rev. xvi. 19.

the servants of Christ? God hath vengeance in such a day as this for Edom also.

3dly. Lukewarm Laodiceans, neutralists, that 'drink wine in bowls,' and are no way moved at the suffering of Joseph. Gallios that care for none of these things. There is not a generation in the world with whom the Lord is more provoked, than with this Meroz generation: when God is jealous for Zion, he is 'displeased with them that are at ease;' Zech. i. 14, 15. Now considering how many persons of all these sorts are fixed in the nation, and you will see that vengeance cannot be taken on them, without great alterations.

[2.] He hath deliverances to work. It is the time of 'visiting the prisoners of hope:' the prey must be taken out of the jaws of the terrible; every 'staff of the oppressor broken in pieces;' yea, he delivers his saints, not only from all that they have suffered, but from all that was in the contrivance of their enemies to bring upon them, which is greater than they can execute; and this will cost something before the Pharaohs of the nation will let his people go.

[3.] He hath great trials to make.

1st. Of his own, that they may be purged.

2dly. Of hypocrites, that they may be discovered.

1st. The day of carrying on the interest of Christ, is a day of purifying and purging; Dan. xii. 10. 'Many shall be purified and made white and tried;' that is a day like a furnace; Mal. iii. 3. that will consume dross and tin. The remainder of the 'people must be brought through the fire;' Zech. xiii. 9. Joshua's garments are defiled by dwelling in Babylon:^a many of Christ's own have contracted rust and soil, have got carnal interests and engagements that must be scoured from them.

2dly. Of the discovery of hypocrites. It is emphatically said of the saints, that they 'follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.'^r All sorts of professors will follow him in some paths; in such as are consistent with their power, dominion, and advantages, they are even ready to run before him: but he hath some paths that are displeasing to flesh and blood, paths that he gives no loaves in; here men that say they are Jews, and are not, but lie, give quite out from him. Now

^a Zech. iii. 3.

^r Rev. xiv. 4. John, vi. 26.

upon all these several accounts, must that day of the gospel of necessity be attended with great providential alteration.

Use 1. To discover where dwells that spirit that actuates all the great alterations that have been in these nations. Such things have been brought to pass as have filled the world with amazement. A monarchy of some hundred years' continuance, always affecting, and at length wholly degenerated into tyranny, destroyed, pulled down, swallowed up, a great and mighty potentate that had caused 'terror in the land of the living, and laid his sword under his head,' brought to punishment for blood. Hypocrites and selfish men abundantly discovered, wise men made fools, and the strong as water; a nation, that of Scotland, engaging for and against the same cause, backward and forward, twice or thrice, always seeking where to find their own gain and interest in it, at length totally broken in opposition to that cause, wherewith at first they closed: multitudes of professors, one year praying, fasting, mightily rejoicing upon the least success, bearing it out as a sign of the presence of God; another year whilst the same work is carried on, cursing, repining, slighting the marvellous appearance of God in answer unto prayers and most solemn appeals, being very angry at the deliverances of Zion: on the other side, all the mighty successes that God hath followed poor despised ones withal, being with them as with those in days of old; Heb. xi. 33. 'Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.' He, I say, that shall consider all this, may well inquire after that principle which being regularly carried on, yet meeting with the corruption and lusts of men, should so wheel them about, and work so many mighty alterations. Now what is this, but the most effectual design of the Lord to carry on the interest of Christ and the gospel, whatever stands in the way. This bears down all before it, wraps up some in blood, some in hardness, and is most eminently straight and holy in all these transactions. Isa. xiv. 32. 'What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Sion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.'

Use 2. To magnify the goodness of God, who unto us hath sweetened and seasoned all his dreadful dispensations, and all the alterations in those nations, with this his gracious design running through them all: this is that which puts all their beauty and lustre on them, being outwardly dreadful and horrible. The carrying on of this (which is hidden from the men of the world, who have therefore no joy), is the only thing we have to rejoice at in this day, our victories have no glory but what they receive from hence; Isa. iv. 2. That blood which is an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord, is the blood of the enemies of this design of his: the vengeance that is to be delighted in, is the vengeance of the temple: heaven, and all that is in it, is called to rejoice, when Babylon 'is destroyed with violence and fury;' Rom. xx. 21. when those who would not have the king of saints reign, are brought forth and slain before his face: and in this, God makes distinguishing work, and calls to rejoicing; Isa. lxxv. 13, 14. 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God, My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit.'

Thus the saints are called to sing the 'song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb;' Rev. xv. 3. The deliverance by Moses was a temporal deliverance from outward yokes and bondage: the deliverance of the Lamb was a spiritual deliverance, from spiritual bondage: the deliverance that God will give his saints from this oppression shall be mixed; as their bondage partakes of both, so shall their deliverance be: and therefore they shall 'sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.' If ever any persons in the world had cause to 'sing the song of Moses and the Lamb,' we have this day; the bondage prepared for us was both in spirituals and temporals; about a tyrant full of revenge, and a discipline full of persecution, hath been our contest: whether the yoke of the one and the other should by the sword and violence be put upon our necks, and consciences, is our controversy: there was both Egypt and Babel in the bondage prepared; and both these enraged: Pharaoh doubled the task of the Israelites when they did speak of liberty; What

would he have done had he recovered them under his hand after they were escaped? What would the thoughts of that man of blood have been, and his ways, had he prevailed after so many provocations? ‘Cæde ac sanguine, quisquis ab exilio.’ And what would their ways have been, who thought to sit on his right hand and his left in his kingdom? But of this afterward. Now God having broken both the one snare and the other, surely we have cause to ‘sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb’ this day: when others are in the condition mentioned Isa. viii. 21, 22.

It is true, all things are not clear to all perhaps that serve the Lord: some cannot rejoice in the works of our God, but they are not the first on whom that sin hath been charged: nothing more frequent in the Scripture, than the laying this sin at the door of professors, ‘that they set not their hearts to the work of the Lord:’ if they are of the armies in heaven, they will at length learn to follow the Lamb: and for the present, music with some discords, may make melody for the Lord: the song of Deborah is full of complaint: ‘division of Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Ashur, slow in their helps: Meroz wholly neutral: though we have of all these sorts, yet may we make a song to the Lord, that in Jesus Christ may be acceptable this day. And the Lord I hope will open the eyes of them amongst us, and give them to cry for mercy when his righteous judgments have driven them from all their holds. When the mighty army was destroyed in the north about three years ago, many would see nothing in it, but that they had not the blessing of the church. Hence they began to think of it as Balak did of Balaam, ‘Whom he blessed, they were blessed, and whom he cursed, they were cursed.’ God could not bear the robbing him of his glory, and giving it unto selfish men: they shall bless and bless again, and be no more heard than the Baalists’ cry: even to the Lord shall they cry, but he will not regard them: the Lord, I say, will drive them from such holds as these, that they may acknowledge his hand. Let then the great work of the Lord be owned, be rejoiced in, for it will certainly bear down all that stand in the way of it: neither is

* Isa. xliii. 18. Psal. xlviii. 42—44. Judges v. 15. 17. 23.

† Numb. xxii. 6. 1 Kings xviii. 26.

there the least true consolation in any of these alterations, but what arises from a closing with it.

Come we to the second observation.

II. The actings of God's providence in carrying on the interest of Christ, are and shall be exceedingly unsuited to the reasonings and expectations of the most of men.

He hath a glorious work here to be accomplished: of whom should he now make use? surely the high tree, the green tree will be employed. If one be to be anointed in the family of Jesse, will it not be goodly Eliab? if the king will honour any, who should it be but I, says Haman? but all on the contrary, the low dry tree is taken; David from the flock, and Mordecai from the gate: 'the thoughts of God are not as our thoughts,' neither doth he look on outward appearances.

To give some instances in his most signal actings in this kind.

The Jews knew that God had a great work to do in giving of a Messiah, the Saviour of the world: they are raised up to expectation of it: upon every considerable appearance, they cry, Is this he? And what withal did they expect? Outward glory, beauty, deliverance, carnal power and dominion: God at length comes to do his work, and bringeth forth a poor man, that had not where to lay his head, followed by a few fishermen and simple women, that had 'neither form nor comeliness that he should be desired;' persecuted, despised, crucified from the beginning to the end, quite another thing than what they looked for.^a Thus lays he the foundation of the gospel, in the person of his Son, by frustrating the expectations of the most of men; 'the stone which the builders refused,' &c. Again, seeing salvation is of the Jews, 'the rod of Christ's strength, being to be sent out of Zion,' and that living waters were to flow forth from Jerusalem; the gospel being from thence to be published through the world, who should the Lord choose to do it? Surely the great, the wise, the learned of that nation; the high priests, learned scribes, devout Pharisees, that might have won their message some repute and credit in the

^a Luke iii. 15. John i. 19, 20. Acts i. 6. Matt. xx. 21, 22. xiii. 55. viii. 20. John iv. 48, 49. Isa. liii. 2, 3. Phil. ii. 7, 8, &c.

world.* But contrary to all the wisdom of the flesh, he takes a few ignorant, weak, unlearned fishermen, despised upon all accounts, and commits this great work unto them: and accordingly out they go, friendless, helpless, harbourless, unto their great employment. The like instruments for the most part, did he employ to make an entrance upon the great work of casting down false worship and idolatry. Moreover, in that great work for the Lord Christ, which is to be accomplished in the ruin and destruction of Babel, when it must be done with might, power, and strength, with armies and blood, will not now the Lord use the ‘high and green tree?’ Many kings and potentates having in profession embraced the doctrine of the gospel; nobles and great ones having given up their names in appearance unto Christ, who but they, shall now be used in this work of the Lord? But yet plainly the Lord tells them the contrary; Rev. xviii. 9. all these persons bewail the judgments of God that are executed on Babel, which shall be done by low dry trees.

To give one instance in the mighty works which God hath lately wrought in these nations, a work of reformation and carrying on the interest of Christ is here undertaken: what upon this are the thoughts of the most of men? whether were their eyes turned? ‘Tall trees, green trees are pitched on. This and that great lord, popular with the multitude, Eliabs in their eyes, they must do it; the Scots shall certainly effect it: the king shall be taken from his evil counsel, he shall be active in it. A church government shall be set up, and no man suffered to live in the nation that will not submit unto it. Some like the sons of Zebedee shall sit on the right and left hand of Christ, in the kingdom they were setting up for him; these, and those sound good men shall be next the king, then all will be great and glorious indeed. What now I pray? Do all things indeed suit and answer these expectations and reasonings of men? Doth God accomplish the thoughts of their hearts? Alas, the high trees rested on, proved for the most part ‘broken reeds that run into our hands,’ and let out our blood in abundance to no purpose; the top bough, hoped for, fallen

* John iv. 22. Psal. cx. 2. Ezek. xlvii. 1. Zech. xiv. 8. Acts iv. 13. 1 Cor. i. 20. 26—28.

as an abominable branch; the Scots shaken and broken with unparalleled destruction, in the maintenance of the interest and cause, which at first they prosperously opposed; the iron yoke, pretended to be that of Christ (though it be fleshly, carnal, and cruel, suited to the wisdom of a man, and his rule be spiritual, meek, and gentle), cast off and thrown away: low trees, dry trees, despised ones, contemned ones, without form or comeliness, exalted, used, employed, and the hand of the Lord evidently lifted up, in all these transactions.

Some reasons of this may be given, and,

1. The first is taken from the corruptions of the hearts of men squaring the works of God to their fleshly reasonings, corrupt interests, and principles. They are bold with the wisdom of God, and conclude, thus and thus things ought to be, ordering their thoughts for the most part, according to their corrupt and carnal advantages. I shall instance both as to carnal advantages, and principles.

(1.) Carnal power and glory seem excellent to the Jews: hence think they, When God gives us our Messiah, all this must be accomplished: their affections are disordered by corrupt lusts and desires, and that enslaves their minds to strange apprehensions: God comes in his own way, and how cross do things run to their expectations: What was the corrupt design of many in Scotland? That they might set up a son of Tabeal in England, and themselves be great under him; that they and their partakers might impose on the residue of the nation, especially in the things of God: their great desire that things should be thus, corrupts their minds to think that it ought to be so, and shall be so. Hence ambition to rule, and to have all under their power, even in conscience, is quickly mistaken for zeal to the kingdom of Christ, re-enthroning of tyranny is loyalty, and all according to covenant. As if men had sworn to be good to themselves, and to be true to their own interests all their days, which surely few need to be sworn to. Thus men's minds and judgments are distempered by their lusts and interests, which makes them frame a way for God to proceed in, which when he doth not, how are they surprised?

(2.) For principles. Men take up principles that they

will adhere unto: wise principles forsooth, yea and very righteous too: all things whatever that fall out, must be squared unto their principles; they expect that nothing must be done but what suits unto them; and if any thing contrary be wrought, even of God himself, how deceived, how disappointed are they? The most tremendous judgment of God in this world is the hardening of the hearts of men; this seals them up for the most part to destruction: a thing it is often mentioned in the Scripture, and many subtle disputes there are, how it should come forth from him, who is most holy, seeing it is the greatest sin of the creature.

I shall give you my thoughts in a most eminent instance or two, as to one particular of it. Look on Pharaoh, of whom it is most signally spoken, that God 'hardened his heart:' how did the Lord accomplish this? Pharaoh settles himself upon as righteous principles as ever any of the sons of men could do: one is, 'That it belongs to the chief ruler of a nation to see to the profit and glory of the nation.' What more righteous principle is there in the world? You that talk of your principles, give me one more righteous than this. Hence he concludes, that if it be incumbent on him to see that the realm receive no detriment, he must not let the people go, by whom they received so many great advantages: God confirms his heart in these principles, which are good in themselves, but abominable when taken up against the mind and providence of God: hence he and his perished in their principles acting against the appearance of God. It is also said of Sihon, the king of the Amorites, that 'his heart was hardened that he would not let the people go through his land.' How I pray? Even by adhering to that wise principle, that 'it is not meet to let a potent enemy into the bowels of a people;' and this made way for his ruin.

Thus is it with many; they fix on principles, good in general, and in their season. Old bounds must not be broken up; order must not be disturbed: let God appear never so eminently, so mightily, they will keep to their principle; what is this, but judicial hardness. And this, I say, is one reason why the actings of God in such a day as this, are so unsuited to the expectations of men; they square

his works to the interests and principles, which it will not answer.

2. God chooseth thus to do things above and besides the expectations of men, that his presence, and the presence of the Lord Christ, may be the more conspicuous in the world. Did the Lord always walk in paths that men had rationally, that is, foolishly (for such is our wisdom in the ways of God), allot to him, the appearances of his glory would be exceedingly eclipsed. It is hard for men to have a clear and naked view of the power of God^x in effecting any thing, when there is great help of means to do it: but it is much harder to discern the wisdom of God in an affair, when men's own wisdom and designing is all accomplished. But now, when the way of God is like 'the way of an eagle in the air; when his paths are in the deep, and his footsteps are not known:' then is he glorious in his goings. Men think all things would be very glorious, if they might be done according to their mind; perhaps indeed they would, but with their glory, not the glory of God.

3. God will do it for the hardening of many false empty professors, and others in the world, that the judgments appointed may come upon them to the uttermost.^y The hardening of men to their destruction, being a close and inward work, is one of the most eminent acts of the providence of God in governing the world: by this, he accomplisheth most of the judgments that he hath threatened. Now there is not any dispensation of God towards man, but he can, and doth sometimes cause it to be so managed, and ordered, that it shall be a way and means of hardening such as he hath appointed thereunto: some are hardened by the word, some by the mercies, some by judgments. Amongst other ways that he useth for this purpose, this is one, the disposal of the works of his providence contrary to the reasonings of men, doing things unlikely and unfitly in the eyes of flesh and blood, that so they may despise those ways of his, and be broken in opposition unto them. Take an instance in Pharaoh's last hardening for destruction: when he brought the people out of Egypt, he did not lead them the direct way to

^x Judges vii. 4.

^y Rom. ix. 18. Deut. ii. 30. Psal. lxxxix. 12. Isa. 22. Josh. xi. 20. Isa. vi. 9—12. John xii. 40—43. Deut. xxxii. 15.

Canaan, but carries them into the wilderness, and shuts them up between the mountains and the sea : Pharaoh justly concludes that they are entangled beyond escape, and that he shall surely overtake them and destroy them ; this draws him out to his ruin : had God led them in the straight path, probably he had not pursued after them, but the Lord lays this as a plot for his destruction. God will harden Jeroboam, and therefore a lion shall slay the prophet that preached against his idolatry. So was it with the Jews, they expect all glory to attend the coming of the Messiah ; and after the coming of him indeed, God follows them with judgments to a total desolation ; which being so unsuited unto the dispensation they expected, hardness thereby is come upon them to the uttermost. Tertullian says, he dares say, That ‘ the Scriptures were on purpose framed in many things to give occasion to proud and curious, unhumbled wits, to stumble and fall.’ And I dare say, that the Lord doth order many of his works in the world, in ‘ ways past finding out,’ on purpose to give occasion to many to stumble and fall. God fulfilleth many mighty works, that could not otherwise be brought about, by hardening the hearts of men : the hardening of the late king’s heart was an engine whereby he wrought mighty things and alterations : had not God laid obdurateness and stubbornness upon his spirit, we had long since in all probability been ruined. To accomplish this end then God will so order the works of his providence, that men shall reason themselves into unreasonable and brutish hardness and stupidity. Thus God hath done, in the days wherein we live ; his mighty acts that he hath wrought, both for the matter of the things done, and the manner of their doing, have been so contrary to men’s principles, interest, expectations, and reasons, that they have slighted them to such a degree of hardening, that they seem to have no reason left at all ; and when it comes to that, God will fall judicially upon the very faculties of their souls ; he will blind their eyes, deprive them of their judgment and insight into things, that they shall be as incapable of God’s mind as fools, and give them up to vile affections, to do the things that are not seemly, as it hath fallen out with too many amongst us.

Let us now make some use of this point.

Use. It serves then, to discover the vanity of those men, who because the works of God have not been carried on in ways suitable to their reasonings and expectations, do utterly reject them, disown them, and oppose him in them. Can these men give any one instance, of any one eminent work of God, that he hath brought about by such ways and means, as men would rationally allot thereunto, especially in things that are in immediate subserviency to the kingdom of the Lord Christ? Can they instance that they have been so managed? Nay, hath not this been a means to harden multitudes to their destruction, that have limited the Holy One, and chalked out paths for him to walk in? I cannot but fear, that it was a great provocation of the eyes of God's glory, that at the beginning, and in the carrying on the great alterations that have been wrought by his providence among us, we did speak of confirming and continuing under any condition whatsoever, any things, or persons, which it was in his design to avert: we must be promising to keep up the high tree, and to keep down the low tree, which was not at all in his thoughts, neither ever came it into his heart. I hope he hath taught us (though with thorns) to follow him sometimes, like 'Abraham, not knowing whither we go.' Now the Lord convince them who are yet under this darkness; that think the ways of God not equal, because not measured by their line; that bring their crooked rules unto that which is really straight, and cast it away, as abominable. The children of Israel had got a proverb against the ways of God;" it was so taken for granted that the ways of his providence were not right and straight, that it was grown into a common by-word: a little discovery of the pride and hypocrisy of their own hearts undeceived them at last.

I shall not say to our brethren, that they have shewed this day, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had been slain, it would have been well pleasing to them: but this I shall say, that it is a sad sign, that our ways please not God, when his ways please not us at all.

There being not space for handling the two remaining propositions contained in the text, I shall go forth to one general use, and so conclude.

" Ezek. xviii. 2.

Use. Now this I shall take from that of the prophet Amos, chap. iv. 12; the generality of the people being exercised with various judgments, the residue of them are said to be saved ‘as a firebrand out of the burning;’ that is, powerfully, effectually, from a very terrible, and a very near destruction. After all the Lord’s great dispensations of providence, in carrying on his own design, this being the condition of the people of this nation, many being destroyed by foregoing judgments, and the residue now saved like a firebrand out of the burning, God having given us this issue of his mighty works, in pulling down the high tree, and exalting the low tree, it cannot but be our wisdom to close with the counsel which God gives in such a condition; and that you have, I say, Amos iv. 12. ‘Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.’ Seeing that all this is done, prepare to meet thy God, O England: prepare to meet thy God, O parliament: prepare to meet thy God, O army.

To lead you a little towards the performance of this duty, it being that, and that alone, which is incumbent on you, I shall shew you these two things.

1. What it is wherein we are to meet our God.

2. How we must meet him therein.

1. For the first, there are three ways wherein we must meet the Lord, if we desire to answer his mind in any of these dispensations.

- (1.) In the way of his providence.

- (2.) In the way of his worship.

- (3.) In the way of his holiness.

- (1.) The eminent ways of the providence of God in these days may be referred unto three heads.

- [1.] His general design to pull down all those high oppositions to the kingdom of his Son which I have mentioned.

- [2.] His peculiar aim to stain the glory of all flesh, to pull down high trees, that no flesh may glory.

- [3.] His shaking of all endearments and enjoyments here below, that the hearts of his may be fixed only on the things that cannot be shaken.

And these upon all accounts and considerations whatever, appear to be the main tendencies of the actings of providence in these our days.

(2.) There is the way of his worship, wherein also he will be met. It is most remote from my thoughts to enter into contests concerning that peculiar way of gospel worship which Christ hath appointed. It sufficeth me, that seeing God hath promised, that in these days he will have his tabernacle with men; and that 'barrenness and drought shall be on every soul that comes not up to his feast of tabernacles,' it is bottom sufficient to press men to meet him in that way, according as he shall graciously make out light into them.

(3.) There is the way of his holiness; as he is holy, so are all his ways holy; so he will be met and walked with, in all ways of holiness and obedience to Jesus Christ; and these are the ways wherein God will be met by his remnant, his delivered remnant.

2. What then is it to meet the Lord in any of these ways? What is it to meet him in the way of his providence, his worship, his holiness? To meet one in any thing, is to close with him in that thing: we say, herein, I meet you, when we are of one mind. To meet the Lord in these things, is to close with the will and mind of God in them; this is that which I would exhort you unto, yea, lay the charge of God upon you this day, even on you and your companions, who are as a brand snatched out of the burning.

(1.) To meet God in the way of his providence.

[1.] Meet him in his general design of casting down all combined opposition to the kingdom of his Son; that God in his appointed time will bring forth the kingdom of the Lord Christ unto more glory and power, than in former days, I presume you are persuaded: whatever will be more, these six things are clearly promised.

1st. Fulness of peace unto the gospel and the professors thereof; Isa. xi. 6, 7. liv. 23. xxxiii. 20, 21. Rev. xxi. 25.

2dly. Purity and beauty of ordinances, and gospel worship; Rev. xi. 1. xxi. 5. the tabernacle was wholly made by appointment; Mal. iii. 3, 4. Zech. xiv. 16. Rev. xxi. 27. Zech. xiv. 23. Isa. xxxv. 8.

3dly. Multitudes of converts, many persons, yea, nations; Isa. lx. 7, 8. lxvi. 8. xlix. 18—22. Rev. vii. 9.

4thly. The full casting out and rejectng of all will-worship, and their attendant abominations; Rev. xi. 2.

5thly. Professed subjection of the nations throughout the whole world unto the Lord Christ; Dan. ii. 44. vii. 28. Isa. lx. 6—8. the kingdoms become, &c. amongst whom his appearance shall be so glorious, that David himself shall be said to reign.

6thly. A most glorious and dreadful breaking of all that rise in opposition unto him; Isa. lx. 12. never such desolations; Rev. xvi. 17—19.

Now in order to the bringing in of this his rule and kingdom, with its attendances, the Lord Christ goes forth in the first place to cast down the things that stand in his way, ‘dashing his enemies in pieces like a potter’s vessel:’ this is a part of the design of providence, wherein we are to meet him in these days.

I shall speak a word, (1st.) Unto them who are enabled to look through the clouds and darkness, whereby his paths are encompassed. (2dly.) Unto them who cannot.

(1st.) For the former, be you persuaded to meet the Lord in this his design, yet to continue steadfast in helping him against the mighty: I speak not only to you who are in authority, nor unto you to whom the sword is girded: but unto all that wish well to Zion. We have every one our mite that we may cast into this treasury: we may be all princes in this case, all Israel’s, prevailers with God and men. There be three things whereby even you, who are but as the number, the common soldiers of Christ, may meet the Lord in this design.

[1st.] By faith; believe the promises, close with them, act faith upon them, and you will believe the beast unto destruction, antichrist into the pit, and magog to ruin; believe that^w the enemies of Christ shall be made his footstool, that the nations shall be his inheritance, that he shall reign gloriously in beauty, that he shall smite in pieces the heads over divers nations; live in the faith of these things, and as it will give you the sweetness of them before they come, so it will hasten their coming beyond the endeavours of thousands, yea, millions of armed men.

[2dly.] Meet him with your supplications; cry unto him, as Psal. xlv. 3—5. ‘Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty

^w Psal. cx. 1. 4. ii. 7, 8. Micah v. 3, 4. Isa. lx. 12.

ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.' This will make you be the 'armies of heaven,' that follow him in his great undertakings; Rev. xix. 14. It is his praying people, that are his conquering armies that follow him: now you find it coming, leave not pulling with all your strength, lest it roll back again, shoot not two or three arrows, and so give over, but never leave shooting until the enemies of the Lord be all destroyed.

[3dly.] Seeing it is his gospel whose advancement the Lord Jesus aimeth at in all these dispensations, and whose quarrel alone he revengeth (whatever men may do), help on to the advancement of that gospel of his, which as formerly it was oppressed by the height and tyranny of the tower of Babel, so for the present, is exceedingly defiled and cumbered by the rubbish of it being in some measure cast down.

[4thly.] Whereas in these dispensations, it is most eminently and frequently in the praise of Christ, said, that he is just and righteous in all his ways, as you may see in all the acclamations of the saints upon the execution of his judgments on his enemies ('just and righteous art thou'); which is signally done on this account, because the ways whereby he doth it are counted most unrighteous in the world, in this then also is he to be met, even in the administration of justice and judgment: you will otherwise certainly be found in a cross path unto him, and be borne down before him. This is that wisdom which he calls for among the judges of the earth, when he is set to reign on his holy hill; Psal. ii. 10, 11.

(2dly.) I shall add one word or two unto them, who either from the darkness of the things themselves, or from the prejudices and temptations of their own spirits, are not able to discern the righteousness of the ways of God, but rather lift up themselves against him.

[1st.] Then, consider the constant appearing of God against every party, that under any colour or pretence whatever have lifted up themselves for the reinforcement of things, as in former days; what colour or pretence soever they have put on, or which way soever they have turned themselves,

God hath still appeared against them : can you not discern his leavening their councils with folly and madness, weakening their hearts and hands, making the strong become as tow, and the successful a reproach ? Though they have gone from mountain to mountain to seek for divination, and changed their pretences as often as Laban did Jacob's wages, yet they find neither fraud nor enchantment that will prevail : and doth not this proclaim, that the design which God had in hand, is as yet marvellously above you ?

[2.] Consider the constant answer of prayers which those which have waited on God in these dispensations, to their unspeakable consolations, have received ; finding God to be nigh unto them in all that they call upon him for : if in this thing, ' they regarded iniquity in their hearts, surely God would not have heard them : ' others also cry, ' even to the Lord do they cry, ' but he will not bear witness to the abomination of their hearts : oh ! that upon these and the like considerations, you would at last take the counsel of the psalmist, Psal. xli. 10. ' Be still and know that he is God : ' be silent before him, for he is risen out of his holy habitation ; say, ' God hath done great things for these ; who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered ? ' And this is the first particular.

(2.) The second design of providence in these dispensations, is evidently to ' stain the glory of all flesh ; ' so Isa. xxiii. 9. never did the Lord any work more eminently, what sort of men is there amongst us, whose glory God hath not stained ? I had rather leave this unto a silent thought, than to give you particular instances of it : otherwise it were very easy to make it as clear as the sun, that God hath left neither self-honour nor glory to any of the sons of men : meet him then in this also.

1st. Cease putting confidence in man, say he is a worm, and ' the son of man is but a worm, his breath is in his nostrils, and wherein is he to be accounted of ? ' This use doth the church make of mercies, Psal. xx. 6, 7. Some trust in horses, and some in chariots, but we will remember the name of the Lord : ' we will not trust in parliaments or armies ; all flesh is grass ; Isa. xl. let it have its withering time and away : see no wisdom but the wisdom of God, no strength but the strength of God, no glory but his.

2dly. Have any of us any glory, any crowns, any gifts, any graces, any wisdom or valour, any useful endowments, let us cast them all down at the feet of Jesus Christ; if we look on them, if we keep them as our own, God withers all their beauty, and their glory. Thus do the 'elders who worship the Lamb for ever,' Rev. iv. 10, 11. say to him, 'Lord Jesus, thine is the glory;' thine are all the mighty works which have been wrought in our days; thine are all the means whereby they have been accomplished; we are nothing, we can do nothing, thou art all, and in all: and this is the second.

[3.] He aims at the shaking of all these things here below: he is taking down the rate and price of all things here below; on that which was worth a thousand pounds, he takes his bill and writes down scarce the thousandth part: he hath laid his hand upon the nests of the nation, and hath fitted wings unto all their treasures; and so eminently written vanity and uncertainty on them all, as must needs lessen their esteem, were not men blinded by the god of this world: in this also are we to meet the Lord.

1st. By getting a low esteem of the things that God is thus shaking, and that upon this account, that he shakes them for this very end and purpose, that we should find neither rest nor peace in them: perhaps thou hast had a desire to be somebody in the world, thou seest thyself come short of what thou aimest at: say now with Mephibosheth upon the return of David, not only half, but let all go, seeing that the Lord Jesus shall reign with glory. A man may sometimes beat a servant, for the instruction of his son: God hath shaken the enjoyments of his enemies, to lead his friends to disesteem them: God forbid, the quite contrary should be found upon any of us.

2dly. By labouring to find all riches and treasures in the Lord Christ: the earth staggers like a drunken man; the princes of it are reduced to a morsel of bread; all that is seen is of no value: doth not God direct us to the hidden paths, to the treasures that cannot be destroyed? Many say, 'Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.'

(2.) We are to meet the Lord in the way of his ordinances, in the way of gospel worship, the exalting of the

Lord Christ herein is the issue of all the mighty works of God: this is given in as the end of all, Rev. xxi. 3. 'The tabernacles of God,' &c. after great shakings, the promise still is of a new heaven and earth, Isa. lxxv. 17. Rev. xxi. 1. and this is that the people of God put themselves upon in the days wherein Babylon is to be destroyed, Jer. l. 4—8. that is the work they then take in hand: the end of all is the building of the temple, Ezek. xlvii. and this is the conclusion that the people of God do make, Isa. ii. 3, 4. and if this be neglected, the Lord will say of us, as David of Nabal; 'Surely in vain have I kept these men and all that they have.' To meet the Lord in this also,

[1.] Inquire diligently into his mind and will, that you may know his paths, and be acquainted with his statutes. I dare say, no temptation in the world presses with more colour and violence upon men under mercies, than that to a neglect of walking and holding communion with God in his ordinances: the devil thinks thus to revenge himself of the Lord Jesus: his own yoke being broken, he thinks to prevail to the casting away of his: Christ hath a yoke though it be gentle and easy.

[2.] You that do enjoy holy ordinances, labour to have holy hearts answerable thereunto: you have heavenly institutions, labour to have heavenly conversations: if we be like the world in our walking, it is no great matter if we be like the world in our worship: it is sad walking contrary to God in his own paths; shew out the power and efficacy of all gospel institutions, in a frame of spirit, course of life, and equability of spiritual temper all your days.

[3.] Keep up the power of private worship, both personal and family. I have seen many good laws for the sabbath, and hope I shall see some good examples: look what the roots are in the family, such will the fruit be in the church and commonwealth: if your spirits are not well manured there, you will be utterly barren elsewhere: that is done most clearly to God, which is done within doors.

(3.) Meet him in the way of his holiness; in the cry of the saints unto the Lord for the execution of his judgments and vengeance, they in an especial manner invoke his holiness. Rev. vi. 10. 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that

dwell on the earth?' And in their rendering praises to him, they still make mention of his holiness and righteousness in all his ways. Though the ways of God are commonly traduced as unequal and unholy ways, yet in the close there is no property of his, that he will more vindicate in all his works, than that of his holiness; in this then we are also to meet the Lord in this day of our deliverance, the day wherein he hath wrought such great and wonderful alterations.

This use the Holy Ghost maketh upon such like dispensations, 2 Pet. iii. 11. 'Seeing that all these things,' &c. and so also, Heb. xii. 27, 28. 'And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of these things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that these things which cannot be shaken, may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' All things opposing removed, a freedom established, therefore let us have grace: God is the thrice holy one, holy in his nature, holy in his word, and holy in all his works; and he requires that his people be a holy people. To this he still urged his ancient people, from the argument of his presence amongst them: oh, that the Spirit of the Lord would bring forth this one fruit of all his dealing with us, that we might be a holy people! If we put God's pure and clean mercies into impure and unclean vessels they will to us be defiled. Let us take heed of prostrating the mighty works of God to the service of our lusts. Should we now make such conclusions to ourselves, as the rich fool in the gospel, and say, Well, we have now peace and prosperity laid up for some years; soul, take thy ease, eat, drink, and be merry, grow rich and great, follow after vanity, pride, folly, uncleanness, enjoy with delight the things which we have and heap up thereto. Why, as this is to labour to draw the Lord God into a partnership with our abominations, and to enforce his mighty works to bear witness to our lusts, so certainly it is such a frame as he will surely and speedily revenge. The end why God delivers us from all our enemies, is, not that we may serve our lusts and ourselves without fear, but that we may serve him without fear in righteousness and holiness all the days of our lives. Let then this be the issue upon our hearts, of all the victories,

and successes, and returns of prayers, that we have received; that we give up ourselves to the Lord in all manner of holiness; this is that which the Lord's voice calls us unto: let not now him that is filthy be filthy still; let not him that is worldly be worldly still; let not him that is loose, and hath cast off the yoke of Christ, be so still; let not him that hath sought himself, do so still; let not him who hath contemned the institutions of Christ, do so still; let not him that hath been lifted up above his brethren, be so still; but let every one forsake his evil way, and the iniquity that is in his hand, that we who were not a people at all, may be a people to the praise of the God of all: that you who rule over men may be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord, that you may be as the light of the morning when the sun is risen, even as a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain: that we who are under rule, may sit under our vines and fig-trees, speaking well of the name of God, and labouring to carry on the kingdom of the Prince of peace, even every one as we are called, and abiding therein with God; that as when you sought this mercy of God which we rejoice in, in solemn humbling of yourselves before the Lord, I made it appear unto you, that it was the remnant of Jacob, God's secret and holy ones, lying in the bowels of the nation, that must be the rise of all our deliverances, so we would now every one strive to be of that number, for they alone enjoy the sweetness of this and every mercy.