



SERMON III.*

—*Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones, &c.*—Zechariah xiii. 7, 8, 9.

WHAT is the Kirk like when the Shepherd is stricken, the head all black with strokes, the members all chased away, and hiding themselves in this hole and that hole? The case is dolorous enough.

Indeed Christ's back is at the wall now. The great Shepherd (if we may say so) has gotten such a bite on the heel, by that great hell's hound, the devil, that he cannot walk. He is under God's wrath, and death has given him the stakes† to keep. Dogs have come in among the sheep, and scattered them; and stout fair-tongued Peter has taken a backside. The enemy is saying, Take up holy Christ now! for all His holiness He is slain! and His disciples have taken to their heels for it, fled to the hills, and are gone.

Christ might now say, as it is in Psalm lxi. 20, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Now might Christ say, Where are all my friends and mother's sons? Ken ye where Christ dwells with His wife in this world? I say, Just in a cot-house; they lie

* Preached at a Communion, in Kirkmabreck, in the year 1630.

† A proverb—left nothing worth having.

on a straw bed, and even on the floor. They are in a silly smoky house, all full of reek. Here is the man "whom the nation abhorreth" (Isai. lxix. 7). And his kirk is like a gardener's lodge, a cot-house, or a shepherd's tent. Ken ye not Christ's word, "The kingdom of God comes not with observation." His noise is not heard in the street; he comes not with coaches rattling on the causeway, and many men with him. It is said, Zech. ix. 9, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee." How comes he then? In truth not very king like, "Lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." No mantle, nor yet a saddle; but they laid their garments on the ass, and the foolish children about him, crying, Hosanna. Yet there is the Kings of kings. He was Christ, for as simple and despicable as they took Him to be. And what are His own poor folks? Even esteemed in all ages the off-scourings of the world. See what a word the apostle has, 1 Cor. i. 25, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of God is stronger than men." When Christ came, each one said, Is this He? A scorn! This is not the Messiah, the King who Jeremiah said shall reign and prosper? (Jer. xxiii. 5). And who Daniel said, should have an everlasting dominion? (Dan. vii. 14). Is this the Messiah? the son of a carpenter, a beggar's son! O fy! Ye disgrace the nation of the Jews, if ye say this is your king. This man looks not like a king. I recollect a story of a man, who had no genteel fashions, who came in amongst a number of nobles; he shoots him, and he shoots him,* saying, Where away is the ill-bred body going? So was Christ tossed from side to

* This man and that man pushes him aside contemptuously.

side ; they all hissed at Him, and scorned Him ; and yet He was their King !

This condemns a proud lordly faith. The repenting thief had a humble faith ; he believed that crucified Christ was Christ, and the King of the Jews ; although he saw Him a despised man. I say, there is a humble faith, and a lordly faith. The disciples had a proud faith when they thought Christ should have restored the kingdom to Israel, and made them like kings on the earth ; but they were all mistaken. We have a proud high-looking faith if we will not have Christ to be Christ, unless He come in clothes all of gold, with much noise and rumbling coaches on the causeway, with six thousand chariots, and many horsemen. Because we see rulers, princes, and nobles against Christ, our proud faith saith, It is not He. Nay, but our faith must learn to look to Christ as low as the grave, and to His kirk in prison.

“ I will turn Mine hand upon the little ones.”—That is, I will turn My hand, and gather the scattered flock. Now, “ turning of the hand ” is a speech, in allusion to shearers, or mowers in a meadow, who fetch in a great roll of hay, or corn, with the scythe and hook. Christ takes not in all His corn in one day ; He comes and drives in one flock this day to the kingdom of grace, and some day another. Christ’s house is daily growing ; and, indeed, it will cost Him many turnings of His hand ere He set us all in His Father’s barn-yard. For we are over fond to be in Satan’s broad fields, in following the sinful fashions and customs of the times. We have itching ears after new guises.* See what outbreakings are in Noah, David, Peter, and the rest of the Aposles, who ran

* Fashions.

away from Christ when He suffered ; but He turned His hand upon them and brought them back. He will take many shifts before He lose one of His little ones. He is hunting and seeking after them by every sermon, and at every communion. He must of necessity, from His redeeming love and election in the covenant of redemption, bring them all in. "All that the Father giveth Me, shall come unto Me ; and him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). And what more? He says, verse 39, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." His Father said, Son, bring them all in with Thee, they shall all be welcome for Thy sake. "That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27). The Lord Jesus (if we may so speak) shall take all His little ones in His arms at the last day, and say, Father, take, there's them all. And then He shall give up the kingdom to the Father, when all things shall be subdued, and made subject unto Him ; "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians xv. 28). May a poor conscience think, alas ! What will Christ do with me? *Answer.* Nay, thou shalt not fall by* in the telling.† If one of His, thou shalt be among the rest ; Christ will turn His hand upon thee also.

"*Little ones.*"—Who be these? Those who are learning to speak, and can cry little more than Abba, Father. It is true, except ye be born again, and be as little children who are learning to speak, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Little children who are but learning to speak, have not high spirits, nor ken

* Aside.

† The counting over.

what pride is. Never one of them seeks to be a lord, a prince, or a king; though they be King's children. If they be but learning to speak and walk, there is no striving for place among them, as among the old, who must have a place in Parliament. So are all those who are Christ's; they are humble, and not high-minded. But the proud man is a broad and high man, he casts up his heart to look above both God and man. Habakkuk ii. 5. The king of Babylon's appetite was as wide as hell, and the grave. These creatures, greatly swelled with pride, must have much driven off them before they enter heaven's gates. For the porch door of the palace of the King of glory is low, and narrow; so strait, that, ere Christ-man could win in, and get a new room to be Prince and Lord, He became a little one. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8). Then, big men, ye will not win to heaven. If ye say, Who is the big man? Even the proud man, who is so long and so broad, and the door of heaven so low and narrow, that there must be much clipped off him before he win in there. Pride gets up to be at the throne in heaven, the country where it was first conceived in the breast of the proud devils, those fallen stars who were driven out of heaven for their pride. But God will not let pride in there again; it is for ever debarred. Then woe to the proud man, for he shall not enter in there. Amongst all sins, pride takes most room: it is a cumbersome neighbour to God, and would be in upon His bounds. The prince of Tyrus saith, "I am a God, I sit in the feet of God, in the midst of the seas" (Ezekiel xxviii. 2). The man who is not given up to the love of the world but dead and crucified to it is one of Christ's little one's.

Then the covetous man cannot enter into heaven; there is strange tatters of clay hanging on him. He cannot enter until the bunch be driven off his back. Ye might as well put a ship's tow^o through a needle's eye. Worldly men are too great to win through the strait gate. Adam, ere he sinned, was a little one. But O! how big doth sin make men. In a word, we could be content with heaven if we could win there with our predominant lusts. We have no will to want anything in length and breadth.

“And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord; two parts therein shall be cut off, and die, but the third part shall be left therein.”—Here is an universal trial: all the land shall be divided into three parts, two parts shall be cut off and die, and the third part shall come into the fire, come out as they will again. All must go through God's fire, to see whether they stand it or not. All must be winnowed, to try whether they are corn, or chaff, Isaiah xxxi. 9, “He is called the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem.” God cannot want fire in His house, He has aye something to do with it. And because the case is thus with us, What will ye do when the Lord's fire is kindled in Zion? Then let the wicked now laugh at the righteous for adhering to God's cause as they will, we will one day see who will laugh best and longest. For, when the trial comes, the wicked—two parts—shall die; and the godly—one part—shall be left alive.

“The third part shall be left.”—When all goeth to all, the Lord's third part shall be left, and His kirk spared. God winnoweth the kirk, but let the hardest world come that can come, He will aye have a kirk,

* Cable.

and not want a witness. This is it that the enemies continually hunt after, that the Lord may not have a kirk on the earth. The gates of hell are opened, and armies are come from hell against the kirk of God. And armies from Rome, Antichrist, and the Dragon, follow the woman near to be delivered of a man-child: but God provides a place for her in the wilderness. And, howbeit, the dragon spew out of his mouth a flood after the woman; yet the earth openeth her mouth, and swalloweth up the flood. So let the enemies rage, let the devil mount on horseback, and let all his vassals put on their armour and follow him, they shall as soon put Christ out of heaven, as utterly destroy the kirk of God. The gates of hell cannot prevail there; nay, the devil and all his emissaries shall be finally overcome at last. "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about." A cup of cold poison; it is said that those who drink cold poison tremble to death with cold. So will the enemies of the kirk. "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut to pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (Zech. xii. 2, 3). Let them be doing, then, and dash hard heads * with Christ, and see whose head is hardest. When God sets the house on fire, He takes out His children, His jewels, and His gold; and lets the fire take the rest, though they were silks and satins.

"And shall bring the third part through the fire."— There is a necessity for us to go once through the fire. Can our Lord not get a kirk from among the dross, but by fire? No, indeed. Christ plucks His

* Job xv. 26.

own out of hell, and from 'among the rest of the world, by fire and sword, as it were by the hair of the head. It is not with our will that Christ gets us. To be short—those who come to Christ, first or last, are chased upon life and death. Christ wins all His at the point of the sword ere He get them. Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this of Christ here is with burning and fuel of fire. What a battle had the Lord with Jonah, when He fought with him in the sea, and in the whale's belly. Also, David, near ten months' time, held out a castle against God; and our Lord behoved to fall on, both with word and sword, before He would yield. We are indeed a piece of hard metal, and ill to work. Christ will spare no pains to gain His own.

"I will bring the third part through the fire."—There is a sweet word. God, says he, will take His bride by the hand in the furnace; He will tell them each step they have to go in trouble. "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (Psalm xci. 14, 15). "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isaiah xliii. 2). Would ye ken where the Lord is? Even at the bed-side of a groaning child. Yea, when His people are in a swoon, He is under their head, bearing them up; and when in trouble, He has them by the hand, and sustains them. Trow ye not but a hold of His hand would be heartening to them though they were in hell? He has a

hold of you by the hand, and ye may be His, though ye know it not. Ye may truly believe in Him, and not have the sensible assurance thereof. He may be leading you with faith, and hope of light and direction, though, for the present, ye want His sensible presence. Ye may be raving and in a fever, and your heavenly Father at your bed-side, howbeit ye see Him not. Because ye droop, and have not a joyful sense of His presence, ye say, "He is not with you." Ye cry with the kirk, "For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me" (Lam. i. 16). How far from you? Even standing at the furnace, blowing the bellows, and looking on whilst His gold melts. Ye will not believe that your sense can make a lie of God. Indeed, it were easy to prove that ye are seeking a plea* with God, and fancying a fault in Him, because ye get not a feast of joy and comfort. May it not satisfy you, that He leads you in trouble, howbeit He kiss you not.

"And will refine them as silver is refined; and will try them as gold is tried."—Then, if there be any good metal in you, as silver and gold, make ready for the furnace of the children of God. When trouble comes through the land, His people are ready to think that, because they have true grace, they shall be kept from the scourge. Nay, but your gold must go to the fire as well as the devil's dross. Peter says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than the gold which perisheth, though it be tried in the fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter i. 7; Jer. i. 18). There, says the Lord, "I have made thee a defenced

* A quarrel.

city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land," &c. But for what end? Not that Jeremiah might go and lay himself down in the sun. No. Verse 19, "And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." When Jesus is full of the Holy Ghost, the devil shoots three of his arrows at Him, one after another. (Luke iv. 1, 13.) So it is with God's children. When Paul was converted, he had an enemy in every town. God's gold is made for the fire, and not to be laid up in the corner of a chest, or hidden in the earth as the wretch's pose.* Then make you for the fire, I say, make you for it. The devil will blow until he sweat, and yoke to † his hammer-men to batter you, and his plough to make long furrows on your souls. The enemies of the kirk are the devil's under-smiths, to mend the fire and blow the bellows. Nay, if God be sending a trial on this land, ye are to thank Him for it. Blessed be God, because He hath silver and gold in Scotland! Yea, ye say ye are never tempted. Alas! it is very possible, ye are but deaf nuts, ‡ and so God thinks He will not lose His elding and fire-wood for you. A city or town that the devil sets not on, to take it in, has little luck in it: or else he has the keys of the port at his belt already. What said James, chapter i. 2, he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;" but ye are ready to count it all sorrow. Christ says, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James i. 12). Then, beware ye be not all dross, for the fire

* The miser's hoard. † Set on. ‡ No kernel in them.

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will burn you into white ashes, a blast will blow ye away, and ye will be cast out like dung, and turned into hell. For would ye know what men are not gold? The men who are all soft dross; and when the burnt dross and ashes are cast out, the wind blows them away through the air. The wicked are as soft ashes, and a blast will blow them all away. They are as soft dross: a temptation wins into the soul, prevails at the first knock, and the devil goes through it as a feal<sup>o</sup> dyke. Let Balaam hear tell of gold! because he was but dross that temptation went through him: he saddled his ass, and would go and try the market. When the High Priest came athwart with thirty pieces of silver, then Judas is blown away with it. When Absalom sees an appearance of the people's hearts being towards him, he yields incontinent and makes to it. Nay, I think when the temptation comes to the wicked man's soul, and knocks, he knows a friend's tongue at the door, and opens and lets him in; whereas the children of God are hardened against troubles and temptations, and can give the devil three nay-says.†

“*And they shall say, The Lord is my God.*”—Then the people were at a feast of sense and joy, when they answered God. We see then there is a time when you get your sense full; as much joy as you can hold. So was the Church, Cant. ii. 3, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” But gets Christ aye an answer? No; He knocks and better knocks, ‡ Cant. v. 5, but she is more concerned about a good sleep, and a warm bed, than all her beloved's love. Yea, ye may say, Why is it not aye so? Nay, but a feast of sense is a feast

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* A turf-fence. † Denials. ‡ Knocks over and over.

appointed for a high time. Send up faith, hope, and love, to God, for it. What ails you at your meat? Nothing; but ye have a lordly stomach, like a servant that is offended if he be not as well fed as his master. Sense and joy are kings' meat, to be enjoyed in heaven. Your weak stomach is like the children's, who love to eat meat that they are not able to bear, but would be death to them.

"They shall call on My name."—The people of God claim kindness to Him even in the fire, and though they think that they are cast off. Nay, the children of God will not fall out with Him for strokes: they cannot be driven away from Him. When the children of this world are put away from God, they take their leave and seek another master. When a servant is put out of the house, and gets his leave, he will not break his heart; he goes and seeks another master, and cares as little for the former one as he does for him. But a son cannot do so; he may not quit the inheritance so, but will stay about the house till his father repent, and take him in again. The wicked are like the shipwrecked man, who quits the ship, and betakes himself to swimming, and resolves to make legs and arms serve him for a ship. So do the wicked, when God seems to be a wrecked ship, they quit Him; for they cannot pray in trouble, and therefore resolve to swim. I do not love it when men resolve to seek another refuge than God. David could say, 2 Sam. xv. 26, "But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." He is showing there how little the Lord is obliged to him, and that he is patient, and willing to submit to the Lord's chastening, as both just and wise.

But is it not presumption to lay claim to God when

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He denies us? No. Ye desire to claim kindness to Him, and dare not give up with Him? I say that is a hold of the covenant which ye have. Allowing, but not granting, that God has given up with you, yet ye have no warrant to lose your hold of Him. Although you may think that God has given you up, yet keep the earnest and love tokens ye got at the communion; for if ye begin to question the work of God, that is to return again the earnest of the bargain betwixt you.

*"I will say, It is My people."*—Here a sweet meeting, a sweeter agreement between God and His people than if they had never fallen out. Hence we see that after a sore outcast there is greater love betwixt Christ and His people than before. The forlorn\* son came home, loved his father, and his father's house and bread, better than ever he did before. So it is with the people of God. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go and seek the Lord their God: they shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten" (Jer. l. 4, 5). And He says in the sixth verse, "My people hath been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to go astray; they have turned them away on the mountains." He afterwards promiseth a free forgiveness, verse 20, and foretells the destruction of their enemies, the Babylonians, verse 35. Read another sweet place, Jer. xxxi. 20, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him."

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* Lost prodigal.

Then the Lord says, Dear, silly Ephraim, My dear child, has a broken heart that he has grieved Me, and I tell you I have a sore heart and troubled bowels that I was so rough to him, and cast him off. And so there is a new embracing betwixt the Lord and His people (Ezekiel xvi. 60), &c. There God, after a new agreement, remembers His covenant towards them. Then marvel not; though there be new out-casts betwixt Christ and Scotland, I hope that the end of it shall be, that Christ and Scotland shall yet weep in one another's arms; and the poor people, after they have come through the trial, shall go towards Zion, and say, Which is the way to Zion? Where shall we find the Lord? When the Lord shall again take in this land anew. As after a wood is cut, there appears a fair young green wood, so the Lord will have a numerous seed yet to serve Him in Scotland. Scotland will have a new growth, like a second growth, that grows after a long hot drought. There will be many sweet calm showers, summer showers, which will make our withered garden grow green again; and so become a fair green garden with many pleasant flowers. Seek to be among Christ's little ones, and covenant yourself away to Him, that so ye may be able to say, the Lord is your God; and that He may acknowledge you to be His people. And, if you are His, there is no fear of a happy out-gate, though you should have ever so many straits, trials, and difficulties in the way. The Lord enable you to close with Him. Amen.

