

VIOLENCE VICTORIOUS.

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NOTE.

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* V I O L E N C E VICTORIOUS:

In two Sermons,

By the late Reverend and Learned
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GEN. 32. 26.

I will not let thee goe except thou blesse mee.

1 COR. 15. 57.

*Thankes be unto God which giveth us the victory through
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

L O N D O N,

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VIOLENCE VICTORIOUS.

From the days of John Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.—MAT. XI. 12.

JOHN BAPTIST and our blessed Saviour gave mutual testimonies one of another. He witnessed of Christ before he came, and our Saviour Christ gives witness of him here. The occasion of this you have in the second verse. John being in prison, sends two of his disciples to Christ, to know whether he were the Christ or no; not that John did doubt, but to confirm his disciples. Christ returns a real and a verbal answer. 'Tell John,' saith he, 'what ye have seen and heard,' &c.; and then he closeth up all, 'Blessed is he that is not offended with me.' Upon this occasion Christ enters into a commendation of blessed St John Baptist, even unto a comparative commendation, 'Amongst them that were born of women there had not yet risen a greater than John the Baptist;' not so much in eminency of grace, though that may have a truth, as in regard of the dispensation of his ministry, John living in more glorious times. For the excellency of the church is from Christ. He doth ennoble and advance times, and places, and persons. Bethlehem, a little city, yet not a little city in regard that Christ was born there; and saith Christ, 'Happy are the eyes that see that which your eyes see,' Luke x. 23. Everything is advanced by Christ. So John Baptist, in regard of his office, being the immediate forerunner of Christ, was greater than all that were before him; yet he saith, 'The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he;' not in grace, but in prerogative, in regard of the revelation and manifestation of more things. For John Baptist died before he saw the death, and resurrection, and ascension of Christ accomplished, before he was glorified. Therefore in regard of these prerogatives, the least in the kingdom of heaven, that is, in the church of the New Testament, is greater than he. It is a rule that the least of the greater is greater than the greatest of the less. John was greater than the greatest of them that were before him, but lesser than the least of those that were after him.

Then Christ commends John from the efficacy of his ministry: 'From the days of John Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' So you see how the words depend upon the former. For the points we are to consider in them.

First, Here you have the state of the church in the New Testament. It is

a kingdom, and the kingdom of heaven; together with the quality of the means whereby it comes to be a kingdom, the means of grace, the gospel. The gospel and the people that are wrought on by the gospel in the New Testament, they are both called the 'kingdom of heaven.'

Then, secondly, here is set down *the affection of those people that seek this kingdom at that time, and so forward to the end of the world.* The disposition of the persons is, 'They are violent.'

The third is, *the issue or success of this eagerness and violence.* Though the manner be violent, yet the success is good. 'The violent take it by force.'

The fourth is, *the date or time when it begins, and how long it continues.* It bears date from the preaching of Saint John Baptist to the end of the world. 'Until now;' that is, to the end of the world. As it was said, 'till now,' in the evangelist's time, so posterity may say, 'Until now,' from the first coming of Christ till his second coming. While there is a gospel preached, which is the ministry of the Spirit, the Spirit will be working; and there are such glorious things in the gospel, that there will be violence offered. So while there is a people to be gathered, and a gospel to be preached to gather them, and a Spirit that works by that gospel, there will be violence in the church offered to the means of salvation.

Doct. 1. First, The state of the church, together with the means, the gospel preached, it is called the kingdom of heaven.

Besides others, there are three main significations of these words, 'The kingdom of heaven.'

First, The famous, leading, proper signification is the state and place where God himself and his people are most glorious, 'the kingdom of heaven.' All the other significations end in that. But, secondly, because all that shall come into that glorious kingdom, they must be kings here first, in the state of the kingdom of grace, which consists 'in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,' Gal. v. 22, in the graces and comforts of the Spirit, therefore the state of grace comes to have the name too of 'the kingdom of heaven.' And thirdly, Because grace in this world cannot be attained without an order, and means, and dispensations from God, hereupon the dispensation of the means whereby we come to have grace is also called 'the kingdom.' The unfolding the mysteries of salvation in the gospel is called the kingdom of God. As Christ saith, 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you;' that is, the preaching of the gospel; therefore 'the gospel' is called 'the gospel of the kingdom,' and 'the word of the kingdom,' because by this word we come to have grace, and by grace, glory. There is no glory without grace, and no grace without the word. One makes way for another. The preaching of the gospel doth cause a church, which is the kingdom of Christ, wherein he rules by the sceptre of his word; by which word Christ and all his riches, and glory, and prerogatives are unfolded; and thereby grace is wrought, and grace leads to glory. This connection and subordination is to be observed,

1. First, *For the conviction of those who do not indeed belong to the kingdom of heaven.* Every man is ready to talk of the kingdom of heaven, and the glory there; ay, but there is a subordination of grace, and of the means of grace. How standest thou affected to the means of salvation, to the 'word of the kingdom,' the 'word of life,' the 'word of reconciliation'? for it hath the name from all the excellencies to which it brings us; to shew that as we value life, a kingdom, reconciliation, and all that is good, so we must value this gospel, or else it is a presumptuous confidence. If the

privileges of grace and glory belong to us, we must come to them by these steps. Those that regard not the gospel and means of salvation, they have nothing to do with grace nor glory. They are hereby convinced of arrogant folly.

2. Again, It is a ground to comfort weak Christians that regard the means of salvation, and yet fear their falling away. Be of good comfort whosoever thou art. God hath knit and linked these together; all the power of earth and hell cannot break one link of this chain. Conscionable* attending upon the means, and grace, and glory, will go together. Therefore hold on, attend upon the means of salvation, and wait with comfort. The gospel of the kingdom will bring thee to grace; and grace, though it be but a little measure, will bring thee to glory. Where God hath begun a good work he will finish it; he will second one benefit with another; diligent attending on the means with grace, and grace with glory.

In Scripture, works have their denomination from that they aim at, as the apostle saith, 'Ye have crucified the old man,' Rom. vi. 6, and 'ye are crucified with Christ,' Gal. ii. 20, because ye are in doing it, and ye shall do it perfectly. So we are saints, because we shall be so. We are kings now, because we are in part so, and we shall be so fully hereafter. So grace is called the kingdom of heaven, because it is the undoubted way to the kingdom of heaven and glory. God would help our faith by the very title; for we are not elected to the beginnings only of glory, but to the perfection, as it is excellently set down Eph. i. 6, 'We are elected to glory by means and beginnings.' Therefore undoubtedly we may hope for the accomplishment when we see the beginnings.

Quest. Why is the state of grace, and the means of grace, and glory itself, called 'the kingdom of heaven'?

Ans. Because they are all of and from heaven. The one is in heaven the kingdom of glory, and the other the kingdom of the word here; and truth and grace which are by it are from heaven. The truth we have and grace from that truth come from heaven; yea, and Christ, the author of all, is from heaven, and they all lead to heaven.

Which should teach us with what minds to converse in the hearing and reading of these things with heavenly affections. And it shews likewise why worldlings and base people are no more affected with the things of the gospel, because it is 'the kingdom of heaven.' If it were of the world, we should have it sought with eagerness enough, though it were a less matter than a kingdom; but it is a 'kingdom of heaven' remote from flesh and blood. There must be a new Spirit to work a new sight and a new taste, to work a change in the heart of man, and then he shall know the things of 'the kingdom of heaven.' He must come out of the world that will see this kingdom, as in Rev. xviii. 4, 'Come out of Babylon.' A man must come out of antichrist's kingdom to see the baseness of it. He cannot see it in the midst of it. So we must come out of the world if we would see the glorious kingdom of Christ. It is a heavenly kingdom. Therefore the greatest potentates of the world must abase themselves. There is no greatness in the world can help them to this heavenly kingdom.

Quest. But why should the gospel and the state of the church in the New Testament be called the kingdom of heaven, and receive the date *now*? was it not the kingdom of heaven before?

Ans. I answer, It is the manner of the Scripture to give titles to things from the glorious manifestation of them. Things are said to be when they

* That is, 'conscientious.'—G.

are gloriously manifested. The mystery of Christ is said to be revealed now in the time of the gospel. It was known before to Adam and Abraham and the rest. But now there was a more apparent glorious manifestation of it. Therefore now the manifestation of Christ, and the good things by him, they are called 'a kingdom.' Before it was kept enclosed in the pale of the Jewish church, it was veiled under types, it was hid in promises that were dark and obscure. But when Christ came, all was taken off and Christ was unveiled. It is said in the gospel, 'The Holy Ghost was not given yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified,' John vii. 39. The Holy Ghost was given before, but not so fully and plentifully. So there was a state of heaven before men were saved, before the coming of Christ; but it was not called 'the kingdom of heaven.' It was not a state of liberty and freedom from the bondage of ceremonies, &c.

And there is reason that there should be violence offered to this state, and means, and grace wrought by it. It is a kingdom. It is no great wonder that a kingdom should suffer violence, especially such a kingdom as 'the kingdom of heaven.' What is in a kingdom?

There is, first of all, *freedom from slavery and danger*. A kingdom is an independent state. There is none above it. He that is a king is free, independent, and supreme.

Then again, a kingdom is a *full state*. There is abundance and plenty of people and good things in a kingdom.

Again, In a kingdom there is *glory and excellency*—where is it to be had else?—all the glory, and sufficiency, and contentment that earth can afford.

Now in that the state of the church by reason of the glorious gospel is called a kingdom.

First, It is a free state, as indeed the 'word doth make us free' from former bondage. In particular, the gospel of Christ it frees us from Jewish bondage, and from all kind of bondage spiritual. 'If the Son make you free, ye are free indeed,' John viii. 36. A Christian is above all. He is over sin, and Satan, and the law. He is free, and supreme, and independent. All are under him. A Christian, as a Christian, he is under none but Christ, under no creature. 'The spiritual man judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man,' 1 Cor. ii. 15. I speak not of civil differences; but as a Christian is a member of Christ, and a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, he hath a kind of independent state. His conscience is only subject to God and Christ. But all earthly things he commands, they are under him.

And *second, The state of a Christian is a full state*. God is his, Christ is his, 'all things are his,' 1 Cor. iii. 21, so much as shall serve to bring him to heaven. That which is truly good is directly his, and indirectly all other things are made his by Christ, who hath the authority, and power, and strength of a king to command all things to work together for his good, Rom. viii. 28. Death, and sin, and all that befalls him, are thus his. And then he hath a spirit of contentment in the want of good, and of patience in the suffering of ill, that he 'can do all things,' as St Paul saith, 'through Christ that strengtheneth him,' Phil. iv. 13. What he wants in outward things he can fetch supply from the promises of the gospel, he can fetch supply from Christ, and from the state to come; and what he wants in other things he hath in grace, which is better.

Third, It is a state likewise of glory and excellency. But it is a spiritual glory, and therefore it consists together with outward baseness and meanness. It is a glorious state to be the 'Son of God,' to be 'heirs of heaven,'

heirs of all things in Christ; by the Spirit of Christ in him he rules over all. How glorious is the Spirit of God in a Christian in the time of temptation and affliction, when he hath a Spirit ruling in him that is stronger than the world and all oppositions whatsoever? 1 John iv. 4. The state of a Christian is glorious even in this world in the beginnings of it. What then is the glory that is to be revealed on the sons of God 'in the day of revelation?' Rom. ii. 5. It cannot enter into our thoughts, it is above our expression, nay, it is above our imagination and conceit. Thus you see there is great cause why 'the kingdom of heaven should suffer violence.' When crowns and kingdoms are laid open to people with hope of getting them, especially such an one as 'the kingdom of heaven is,' it is no wonder if there be 'violence' offered to get them.

The next thing is the affection of those that seek after this kingdom. It is violent.

'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.'

How doth the 'kingdom of heaven,' the gospel and means of grace, 'suffer violence.'

1. First, *Because when these good things were revealed by John Baptist, and then by Christ, and after by the disciples and apostles, many thronged into the church, which is the gate of 'the kingdom of heaven.'* They all pressed to be of the church, to hear the word of God. They hung, as it were, upon the word of Christ, upon his mouth. They pressed so, that 'they trod one upon another,' Luke xii. 1; and it is said they all came out to hear John Baptist: 'Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,' Matt. iii. 5. So that in regard of the multitude there was violence.

2. And then in regard of *their affections*, their zeal to the good things of the gospel was eager and earnest. To be citizens of a kingdom, to partake of the means of salvation, to come to grace and so to glory, it made them wondrous violent.

3. In regard likewise of *the persons*, 'the kingdom of heaven suffered violence,' the persons being such as might be judged to have no right unto it. Alas! for poor wretched sinful men and women, that had been notorious sinners, to come to receive a kingdom, to become kings, this was strange! What had sinners to do with grace? This doctrine was not heard of in the law, that there should be hope for such wretched persons as these. If such might be admitted, surely there must needs be great violence.

Then again, they were poor and mean people. 'The poor receive the gospel,' Luke vii. 22. For beggars to become kings; poor men that were advantaged by their outward abasement to come to spiritual poverty!

4. Again, they were *Gentiles*, 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise,' Eph. ii. 12, heathen people. 'The Jews were the children of the kingdom,' Mat. viii. 12, the Gentiles were foreigners and strangers. Now for these to come in, and 'the children of the kingdom' to be shut out, it must needs suppose violence. Where there is no apparent right, there is force. Now what right had the Gentiles, that were little better than dogs? Could they have anything to do with the kingdom? Ay, saith Christ, they take it by violence; and the Jews, and the proud scribes and Pharisees that seem to be the apparent 'children of the kingdom,' shall at length be shut out. 'They that were first,' in outward prerogatives, 'shall be last; and they that were last,' the Gentiles, sinners, mean people, that take the advantage of their baseness and sinfulness, to see their unworthiness, and to magnify the grace of God in Christ, 'shall be first,' Mat. xx. 16. In these respects the kingdom of

heaven is said to suffer violence.' People will to heaven, whatever come of it; when these good things are discovered they will have no nay. Hence, we may learn this,

Doct. That it is the disposition of those that are the true members of the church of God to be eager and violent.

Those that intend to enter into the kingdom, they must throng and strive to enter; and when they are in, they must keep the fort, and keep it with violence.

There is indeed a violence of iniquity and injustice; and so the people of God, of all others, ought not to be a violent people. 'Do violence to no man,' saith the Baptist to the soldiers, Luke iii. 14. Violence rather debars out of the kingdom of heaven than is any qualification for it. But this is another manner of violence which our Saviour here speaks of, necessary for all that desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven; and that for these reasons:

I. First, *Between us and the blessed state we aim at there is much opposition*; and therefore there must be violence. The state of the church here, the state of grace and the enjoyment of the means of grace, it is a state of opposition. Good persons and good things they are opposed in the world. Christ rules in this world, 'in the midst of his enemies.' He must have enemies therefore to rule in the midst of; he must be opposed; and where there is opposition between us and the good things that we must of necessity have, we must break through the opposition, which cannot be done without violence. Now the means and graces of salvation they are opposed every way, within us and without us.

(1.) They are opposed from *within us*; and that is the worst opposition. For Satan hath a party within us that holds correspondency with him, our own traitorous flesh. In all the degrees of salvation there is violence. Hence, in effectual calling, when we are called out of the kingdom of Satan, he is not willing to let us go; he will keep us there still; and when we come to have our sins forgiven in justification, there is opposition; proud flesh and blood will not yield to the righteousness of the gospel; it will not rest in Christ; it will seek somewhat in itself. In sanctification there is opposition between 'the flesh and the Spirit.' Every good work we do it is gotten out of the fire, as it were, it is gotten by violence. In every good action, whether it be to get grace, or to give thanks to God, how many carnal reasonings are there! If a man be to give to others, the flesh suggests, I may want myself. If he be to reform abuses in others, he is ready to think, others will have somewhat to say to me; and I shall be offensive to such and such men. And then the affection of earthly things chains us to the things below, and self-love prompts a man to sleep in a whole skin. We love our wealth, and peace, and favour with men. So that a man cannot come to the state of grace without breaking through these; and hereupon comes the necessity of violence, from the opposition from within us. We must offer violence to ourselves, to our own reason, to our own wills and affections. 'You have not yet resisted unto blood,' saith the apostle, Heb. xii. 4. We do not resist by killing others, but we ourselves resist to death, when, rather than we will miss heaven and happiness, and rather than we will not stand for the truth, we will suffer death.

(2.) Again, There is opposition *from the world*: on the right hand, by the snares and delights of the world, to quench the delight in the good things of the Spirit; and on the left hand, by fears, and terrors, and scandals, to scare us from doing what we ought to do.

(3.) And then there is opposition *from Satan*, in every good action. He besets us in prayer with distracted thoughts; and in every duty, for he knows they tend to the ruin of him and of his kingdom. There is no good action but it is opposed from within us and without us. The means of salvation, and the attending on them, they are not without slander and disgrace in the world. God will have this violence therefore, because there is opposition to the means, to the attendance on them, to grace, to every good action, to everything that is spiritually good.

Nay, sometimes God himself becomes a personated enemy;* in spiritual desertions he seems to forsake and leave us; and not only to forsake us, but to be an enemy, 'to write bitter things against us,' Job xiii. 26; and that is a heavy temptation.

II. Again, God will have this violence and striving, *as a character of difference, to shew who are bastard professors and who are not*: who will go to the price of Christianity, and who will not. If men will go to heaven they must be violent, they must be at the cost and charges, sometimes to venture life itself, and whatsoever is dear and precious in the world. A man must be so violent, that he must go through all, even death itself, though it be a bloody death, to Christ. This discards all lukewarm, carnal professors, who shake off this violence. In all estates of the church, it is almost equally difficult to be a sound Christian; for God requires this violence even in the most peaceable times. Now, the truth and religion are countenanced by the laws, yet the power of it is by many much opposed. Therefore he now that in spite of reproach, in spite of slander, will bear the scorns cast upon the gospel, that will 'go with Christ without the gate, bearing his reproach,' Heb. xiii. 13, such a man may be said to be thus violent. It is an easy thing to have so much Christianity as will stand with our commodity or with pleasure, &c.; but to have so much as will bring us to heaven, I say, it is equally hard in all times of the church, it requires violence to carry us through these lesser oppositions.

III. Again, God will have us get these things with violence, *that we may set a greater price on them when we have them*. When we have things that are gotten by violence, that are gotten hardly, Oh we value them much! Heaven is heaven then. Things that are hardly gotten and hardly kept are highly prized.

IV. Again, *The excellency of the thing enforceth violence*. It is fit that excellent things should have answerable affections. Now, it being a kingdom, and the kingdom of heaven, what affection is answerable but a violent, strong affection?

V. Again, *Together with the excellency, the necessity requires it*; for the kingdom of heaven it is a place of refuge as well as a kingdom to enrich us. There were cities of refuge among the Jews. When a man was followed by the avenger of blood, he would run as fast as he could to the city of refuge, and there he was safe. So when a guilty conscience pursues us, when there is a noise of fear in the heart, when God's judgments awaken us and hell is open, when a man apprehends his estate and is convinced what a one he is and what he deserves, of necessity he will fly to the city of refuge; and where is that but in the 'kingdom of heaven,' in the church? Happy is he that can but get in at the gate of this kingdom, there is no doubt of his going in further. But there must be a striving 'to enter in at the gate,' Luke xiii. 24. And then there he shall be hid in his sanctuary; as the pursued doves get into their nests, and the conies

* That is, one who performs the part of an enemy.—ED.

hide them in the rock, when they get that over their heads then they are safe. So a Christian, when he is pursued with conscience and with the temptations of Satan, he flies to his sanctuary. Do you wonder that a guilty man should flee to his sanctuary, and the pursued creatures to their hold and refuge? In this respect 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.'

Herein it is compared to some great, rich city, that hath some great treasure and riches in it; and it must be besieged and beleagured a long time, and those that can enter into it they are made for ever. Or it is like the entrance or gate of a city where there is striving and thronging, and where besides enemies are, that if men strive not they are cut, and mangled, and killed. So it is in the state of this kingdom. When a man's eyes be opened, he sees the devil and hell behind him, and either he must enter or be damned; and being entered, it makes him rich and advanceth him for ever. So he is strongly moved to offer violence on both sides. If he look behind him there is the kingdom of Satan, darkness and misery and damnation; for as Pharaoh pursued the Israelites when they were gone out of his kingdom, so the devil pursues a man when he is broken out of his dominion: and then before him there is the kingdom of happiness and glory. The fear of that that follows them, and the hope of that that is set before them, both make them strive to enter into the gate of that city.

Use. What should this teach us?

First, *Let it be a rule of trial to know and judge of our estate, whether we be entered into this gate of heaven or no.* Our lives are very short, very uncertain; let us consider if we be in the way to heaven. What striving, what struggling, what violence have we ever offered? There are a company that regard not the means of salvation at all, either in private or public. Some come to the word and hear, but they do not hear it as the word of God, to be ruled by it, but as a discourse to delight themselves for the time; to have matter to speak of and to censure, not with a spirit of obedience to be guided by it as the sceptre of the kingdom. What 'violence' is this, now and then to hear a sermon, now and then to read a chapter, now and then to utter a yawning prayer between sleeping and waking, perhaps when thou knowest not what thyself sayest? How then wouldst thou have God to regard it? What violence is in the lives of most Christians? what strength to enforce good actions? How do they improve the means of salvation? Many means are wholly neglected. Some perhaps they use, that may stand with their convenience, now and then; whereas there must be an universal care of all the means. There cannot one be neglected without the loss of grace, and there must be attendance on them with violence. There is none of the means can profit us without rousing and stirring up our spirits. We cannot hear nor pray without drawing up and raising up our souls. The flesh will stop the comfortable performance of any action else, and Satan will kill them in the very birth if he can.

To search a little deeper, *do but compare your courses toward these good things of heaven with your courses towards the world.* If there be hope of preferment, the doors of great men are sure to suffer violence with favourites. The courts of justice suffer violence to have our right in earthly things. The stages and such places are thronged, and suffer violence. If a man could but overlook the courses of men abroad in the city, he should see one violent for his pleasures, running to the house of the harlot 'as a fool

to the stocks,' Prov. vii. 22; another to the exchange, to increase his estate; another to the place of justice, to detract his neighbour, or to get his own right, perhaps neglecting his title to heaven in the mean time; another to the court, to get favour to rise to some place of preferment. These places suffer violence. But what violence doth the poor gospel endure? Alas! it is slighted; and men will regard that when they can spare time, &c. It is not regarded according to the worth and value of it. If ever we look to have good by the gospel, our dispositions must be violent, in some proportion answerable to the excellency of it.

Alas! we may justly turn the complaint on ourselves, that whilst we spend our strength in violence about the base and mean things of this life, the kingdom of heaven it offereth violence to us, and yet we will none of it. How doth God beseech us in the ministry! 'We beseech you to be reconciled,' 2 Cor. v. 20; and 'Why will ye die, O house of Israel?' Ezek. xviii. 31. As if the gospel and grace were commodities that God were weary of, he comes and puts them upon us whether we will or no, and yet we refuse them. We are so far from offering violence to the gospel and to grace, that God offers violence to us, as if we should do him a favour to receive the gospel, and to do good to our own souls; and yet the vile, proud, base heart of man will not regard and receive these heavenly things. How will it justify God's sentence at the day of judgment, when he shall allege there was a discovery of such things unto you, and instead of violence in seeking them, you slighted and neglected them? Nay, there is a worse sort of men than these, those that oppose the 'kingdom of heaven' in the means of it, in the persons of it; what kind of men are these, think you?

Again, We see here *that there is a blessed violence that may stand with judgment.* A man cannot be violent and wise in the things of this world, because the things are mean; and eagerness is above the proportion of them. A man cannot be violent after honour or riches, and be as he should be. These are things that he must leave behind him, and they are worse than himself. Much less after filthy pleasures can a man be violent and wise; a man 'must become a fool in this respect,' as the Scripture saith, 1 Cor. iii. 18. But in respect of heavenly things, a man may be violent and wise; for there is such a degree of excellency in the things that no violence can be too much. Men talk of being too strict and too holy. Can there be too much of that which we can never have enough of in this world? I speak it the rather to confound the base judgment that the world hath of a holy disposition, which is carried with a sweet, eager violence to these things. They are thought to be frantic, to be out of their wits, as they thought St Paul was; but he answers, 'If we be out of our wits, beside ourselves, it is to God,' 2 Cor. v. 13. Christ himself was sometimes laid hands on, as if he had been out of himself, John x. 20; and as Festus told blessed St Paul, 'that much learning had made him mad,' Acts xxvi. 24, when he saw him eager in the cause of Christ, so many, when they see a man earnest in the matters of God, they think surely these men have lost their discretion. No; it is the highest discretion in the world to be eager and violent for things that are invaluable; and if men be not eager for these, they are fools. They know not how to prize things. The most judicious men here are most violent. So that it be violence that hath eyes in its head, violence guided with judgment, from the knowledge of the excellency of the good things of the gospel, I speak of such a violence as that.

Away, then, with base reproaches! Let us not be affrighted with the ill

reports of idle brains and rotten hearts of people, that know not the things that belong to the 'kingdom of heaven.' Alas! they know not what they say; they are to be pitied, and not censured. Is there anything that a man should be earnest for if not for these things? Were our souls made to pursue things that are earthly and base, worse than ourselves? Were our wits made only to plod in our temporal, and to neglect our heavenly, calling? If anything may challenge the best of our endeavours, the marrow of our labours, the utmost of our spirits and wits, certainly it is these: grace and glory, that will stand by us when all things will fail us. Therefore let not your own hearts besot you, nor the vain speeches of others affright you. It will be acknowledged by every one ere long that there is nothing worth a man's eagerness but these things. The worldling is violent and eager; he troubleth himself and his house about 'a vain shadow,' Eccles. vi. 12, for pleasures and profit, &c.; and what comes of all his violence? He is turned naked into his grave, and thence into hell; and there is an end of all the violence about all other things besides these.

We see then the disposition of true professors, *they are violent in respect of heavenly things.* *Those therefore that are not earnest in the cause of religion, when the state of things requires it, they have no religion in them, they are not in the state of grace.* We must be earnest, first of all, against our own sins. Violence must begin there, to subdue all to the Spirit of Christ, to suffer nothing else to rule there; and after that, violence to maintain the cause of Christ. 'To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,' Jude 3; to contend with both hands; not to suffer it to be wrested from us or to be betrayed; and if it be opposed, to vindicate it. We must be violent both to propagate the truth of God, and, in case of opposition, to vindicate it. 'He that is not with me,' saith Christ, 'is against me,' Mat. xii. 30. If a man be not with Christ, he is against him. It may seem a strange speech, but Christ cannot abide lukewarm neutrals. He cannot abide *nullifidians*.* He cannot endure cold persons. His stomach cannot brook them. 'He will cast them up,' as he saith Rev. iii. 15, 16, 'I would thou wert hot or cold.' A man had better be nothing in religion than be lukewarm. The reason is, if a man will have good by any religion, he must be in earnest in it: 'If Baal be God, stand for him, if you would have good by him: if the Lord be God, stand for him,' 1 Kings xviii. 21. Be earnest in his cause. If popery be good, then stand for that, if you hope for good by it; and if our religion be good, then stand for that, if you hope for good by it. There is no good received by religion if we be not earnest for it. Religion is not a matter to be dallied in.

Therefore they are bitter, sour, profane, scoffing atheists, that trifle with religion, as if it were no great matter what it be. They will be earnest in all things else; earnest to scrape riches, to satisfy their base lusts. But for religion, it is no matter what it be; it is a thing not worthy the seeking after; the old religion or the new, or both or none. These are persons to be taken heed of, breeding a temper opposite to religion more than any other. Christ can least brook† them. There is great reason for it. Who can brook any favour to be neglected and slighted? Especially for these excellent things to be undervalued and slighted, it cannot be that God can endure it. There will be a faction in the world while the world stands—Christ and Antichrist, good and evil, light and darkness. But a man cannot be of both; he must shew himself of one side or other in case of opposition. Therefore the temper of the true professor is to be earnest

* That is, persons of no faith.—Ed. † That is, 'bear,' 'endure,' 'suffer.'—G.

in case of opposition of religion, and in case of opportunity to advance his religion. In civil conversation, and dealing with men that are subject to infirmities, he must be gentle and meek: 'the Spirit of God descended in the shape of a dove' upon Christ, as well as in 'fiery tongues' upon the apostles, Mat. iii. 16, Acts ii. 3. But in the cause of Christ, in the cause of religion, he must be fiery and fervent. No man more mild in his own cause than Moses—he was a meek man, Exod. xxxii. 19—but when occasion served, when God was offended, down he throws the tables of stone. He forgot himself, though he were the meekest man in the world otherwise in his own matters. So, I say, the Spirit is both meek and gentle as a dove, and earnest, and zealous, and hot as fire. In Acts ii. 2, the Spirit of God comes down as a 'mighty wind.' The wind is a powerful thing, if it be in a man's body. There is no torment like to windy sickness, as their complaints witness well enough that feel them. And if a little wind be enclosed in the earth, it shakes the whole vast body of the earth. The Spirit is like wind: it makes men bold; it fills them with a great deal of eagerness in the cause of God. Again, the Spirit appeared to the apostles in the likeness of fire. It inflamed their zeal, and made them fervent, that were cold before; as we see in Peter, the voice of a damsel terrified and affrighted him, Mat. xxvi. 69, 70; but when the Spirit came upon him, it so fired him that he accounted it his glory, Acts v. 41, 'to suffer anything for the cause of Christ.' Therefore, those that hope for anything by religion, let them labour to be for that religion in good earnest. They shall find God in good earnest with them also.

Again, Hence we see that religion takes not away the earnestness of the affections. It doth direct them to better things; it changeth them in regard of the object. It takes not away anything in us, but turns the stream another way. Violence requires the height and strength of the affections. Religion taketh them not away, but turns them that way that they should go. If a stream run violently one way, if it be derived* by skill and cunning another way, it will run as fast that way when it is turned as it did before. So it is with the heart of man. Religion takes nothing away that is good, but lifts it up; it elevateth and advanceth it to better objects. There are riches, and honours, and pleasures when a man is in Christ, but they are in a higher kind. Therefore they draw affections, and greater affections than other things. But these affections are purified, they run in a better, in a clearer channel. Whereas before they ran amain to earthly, dirty things below, the same affections, of love, of desire, and zeal, do remain still. He that was violent before is as violent still, only the stream is turned. For example, take St Paul for an instance. He was as earnest when he was a Christian as before. He was never more eager after the shedding of the blood of Christians, and breathing out slaughter against them, as he was afterwards in breathing after the salvation of God's people and a desire to enlarge the gospel. Zaccheus was never so covetous of the world before, as he was covetous of heaven when he became a Christian. I say religion takes not away anything, only it turns the stream. But it is a miracle for the stream to be turned. It was God that turned Jordan. So it is a greater work than man can do to turn the streams of man's affections, that run amain to earthly things, to make them run upward. It is only God's work. This is the excellency of religion. It ennobles our nature. That which is natural it makes it heavenly and spiritual; that a man shall be as earnest for God and good things as ever he was before after the things of this life. So much for that point.

* That is, = 'conveyed.'—G.

The third thing is the success.

'The violent take it by force.'

The earnestness of affection and violence, it is successful. '*They take it.*' The good things of God, they are here compared to a fort, or to a well-fenced and well-armed city, strengthened with bulwarks and munition, that is a long time besieged, and at length is taken; for this clause, '*The violent take it by force,*' it doth as well shew the issue of the violent ones striving for the kingdom of heaven, to wit, that they do at length take it, as the manner how it is taken, namely, by force.

Doct. The violent, and only the violent, and all the violent, do at length certainly obtain what they strive for, the kingdom of heaven.

Why?

1. *Because it is promised to the violent.* 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you,' Mat. vii. 7. 'Be zealous, and repent' (that is the means to cure all former transgressions, 'repent'), 'and be zealous, and do the former works,' and 'To him that overcometh,' Rev. iii. 19, 21 (that is, he that is earnest, that will never leave off till he hath overcome), 'to him will I grant to sit with me on the throne; and to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life,' Rev. ii. 7. All the promises are to him that overcomes, to him that is zealous and earnest.

2. Then again, *The Spirit whereby a man is earnest is a victorious Spirit.* As Christians have the word and promise to build on, that leads them on, and encourageth them, so they are led by a mighty Spirit, that hath the force of wind and fire, that beats down all before it, that breaks through all oppositions and difficulties. Being led with a divine Spirit, what earthly thing can oppose that which is divine? It brings under and subdues all. Therefore '*the violent take it,*' the Spirit of God seizing upon and possessing the heart, and carrying it with strength after these things.

3. And then only the violent take it, because *God hath set it at this rate.* 'He that heareth and doth,' 'he that perseveres to the end,' 'he that sells all for the pearl,' for the treasure in the field; there must be nothing retained; all must be parted with; we must be at any cost and charge and peril, and all little enough. It is offered to us upon these terms, of parting with all, of enduring anything, of breaking through all difficulties. Only such, and all such, shall obtain it by force.

4. And again, *Only the violent, because only they can prize it when they have it.* They only can prize grace and heaven. They know how they come by it. It cost them their pleasures and profits, it cost them labour, and danger, and loss of favour with men; and this pains, and cost, and loss, it endears the state of grace and glory to them; for God will never bring any man to heaven till he have raised his affections to that pitch, to value grace and glory above all things in the world. Therefore only those shall take it by violence; for only those shew that they set a right price on the best things. They weigh them 'in the balance of the sanctuary,' Dan. v. 27. They value things as God would have them valued.

Obj. But is not the kingdom of heaven and grace free? Therefore what needs violence to a thing that is free, and freely offered?

Ans. I answer, Because it is free, therefore it is violently taken. For, alas! if it were offered to us upon condition of our exact performing of the law, it might damp the spirits of men, as indeed usually such, if they be not better informed, they end their days in despair. But being freely offered, 'the publicans and harlots,' saith Christ, 'go into the kingdom of God before the proud Pharisees,' Mat. xxi. 31. Because it is free, it is

free to sinners that feel the burden of their sins. 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,' &c., Mat. xi. 28. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: they shall be satisfied,' Mat. v. 3-6. Thereupon he that hath a guilty conscience, he makes haste, and offers violence, when he hears of free pardon. What makes the condition of the devils so desperate? There is no hope of free pardon to them. What makes men so eagerly to embrace the gospel, notwithstanding their sins? Because it is freely offered. Thereupon it was that the Gentiles were so glad of it, that had been sinners and under Satan's kingdom before; and that makes miserable persons, that are humbled with afflictions and abasement in the world, glad of it—it being so great a thing, the kingdom of heaven, the favour of God, and freedom from misery, and so freely offered. It is so far from hindering violence because it is free, that therefore the humble afflicted souls that desire grace are the more eager after it. The proud Pharisees thought the kingdom of heaven belonged only to them; and therefore they despised Christ, and despised the gospel, because it was propounded to sinners, and to such mean persons that they thought were viler than themselves. But now when the meaner sort of people, and others that were abased with crosses in the world, saw what a kind of gospel it was, what great matters were offered, and that it was offered freely, they justified wisdom, Mat. xi. 19, and the counsel of God which others despised, and pressed for it with violence, Luke vii. 29, 30.

It is little comfort to hear of the excellency and necessity of these heavenly things, if there were not hope of them. Hope stirs up diligence and endeavour in the things of this world. What makes men adventure to the Indies, east and west? They hope for a voyage that shall enrich them all their life. Hope in doubtful things stirs up industry. What makes the poor husbandman diligent to plough and to sow? The hope that he shall have a harvest; yet this is under a providence that may guide it another way. But spiritual things are more certain. Therefore hope in spiritual things must needs stir up endeavour. We need not call them into question. And as it stirs up to diligence, so it stirs up in the use of the means; not to give over till we see our hopes accomplished. Then, in the third place, hope of success, that we shall not lose our labour, it enables and strengtheneth us to bear the tediousness of the time and the incumbrance of afflictions, and whatsoever is between us and the thing we expect. Though we have not that comfort from God that we would have, yet it makes us wait upon God.

Therefore when he saith, 'the violent take it by force,' it is to encourage us. The violent, eager, strong endeavours of a Christian in the ways of God, in the means of salvation, they are no successful endeavours.

He labours for that he knows he shall have; his violence is not in vain. He that is violent in good things hath a promise. He that wrestleth with God shall overcome, and he that overcometh shall have a crown. Here is a promise to build on. Therefore here is encouragement to be earnest and violent, 'he shall overcome,' he shall enter the castle at the last, if he continue striving, and give not over. Hence there is a difference to be observed between the endeavours of a Christian and of three sorts of other men.

(1.) First of all, If those only that offer violence to the kingdom of heaven, that set on it with encouragement, shall get it, and that by force, *what a great difference then is between them and those that in a contrary way offer violence to the kingdom of heaven; that is, those that wrong Christ in*

his members, and hinder the means of salvation. What promise have they to speed? Surely they have no promise nor hope at all. Only their malice carries them amain in spite. Because the gospel reveals their hollowness and hypocrisy to all men, and forceth upon them a necessity to be other men than they list to be for the present, therefore they are eager in hating the gospel. There are threatenings enough against such as are violent against the gospel. They are violent in vain, for they 'kick against the pricks,' Acts ix. 5; they run themselves against a stone wall, and they shall dash themselves against it. Those that have ill will to Sion shall perish. There is one 'sits in heaven that laughs' all their attempts 'to scorn,' Ps. ii. 4. A Christian hath comfort in his endeavours. There is hope of good success, though there be inward and outward opposition. He shall prevail. Those that are enemies have nothing but discouragement. They shall be 'as grass on the house-top,' Ps. cxxix. 6, &c., that no man blesseth, but is cursed of every one. No man bestows a good word on them. It is a fruitless endeavour. They are under a curse.

(2.) Again, It shews us how to *judge of the courses of other men, that are violent in other courses, about the world.* A Christian he takes his kingdom at the last and enjoys it for ever; but those that are violent for the world, after pleasures, after baser things than themselves, alas! when they have it, they have but a shadow, and they become shadows in embracing it. Vanity embraceth vanity, and how soon are they stripped of all! If a man by violence scrape a great estate, he must leave it shortly. Here he found it, and here he must leave it, in spite of his heart, ere long; and 'all is but vanity' in the censure of him that knew all things the best of any man, even Solomon, that had gone through the variety of all things. And oft-times they miss of that they labour for; 'they do not roast that they get in hunting,' Prov. xii. 27. They hunt after preferment and after riches, but oft-times they do not enjoy them; and if they do, they get the curse of God with them, and ere long they are stripped of all. But here is that that may strengthen our endeavours. 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it.' It is not an endeavour that is lost.

(3.) Then again, This shews that *the state of true Christians is different from the state of persons that are carried to good things, but not violently.* 'The violent take it.' He surpriseth the city at the last, he lays his siege, and will not remove till death. He will not give over till he have it. He will have it, or he will die in the business, and so at last he obtains his desire. The sluggish careless man he goes a little way. As Agrippa said to Paul, 'he was almost persuaded to be a Christian,' Acts xxvi. 28, so it is with such men. In some things they will be Christians, but there they are at a stand. They will go no farther. 'The sluggard desireth and wisheth, but his soul hath nothing,' Prov. xiii. 4. A sluggish, cold, lazy Christian he loseth all his pains. If a man be to go ten miles, and go but nine, and there sit down, he shall never come to his journey's end. If a man will give but seven or eight shillings for that which is worth ten, he shall go without it. Grace and glory are set at this price. There is required such strength of labour and endeavour and violence. Therefore without this, a man shall never attain it, unless he stretch himself to such a pitch. 'He shall never come to the end of his faith, to the salvation of his soul, to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,' 1 Pet. i. 9. 'The sluggard wisheth and gets nothing.' The reason is, because he is a sluggard; because he will not strive; but the striver gets the fort, and hath all in it, and is a man made for ever.

'The sluggard thinks himself wiser than many men that can give a reason,' Ps. xxvi. 16. The sluggish discreet* Christian, I warrant you, he hath reasons for what he doth! It is not good to be too earnest! It will incur the disfavour of such a man or such a man! I shall be accounted so and so for my pains! But a wise man he seeth the excellency of the things, and he knows that his courses and his conscience will justify him at the last, and therefore he goes on, whatever comes of it.

God is not so weary of these precious things, these precious jewels of grace and glory, as to force them upon us. Is 'the kingdom of heaven' such a slight thing, that it should be obtruded to us whether we will or no? Shall we think to have it when our hearts tell us we esteem other things better? No. There are none ever come to heaven but their hearts are wrought to such an admiration of grace and glory, that they undervalue all things to it. Therefore there is no hope for any to obtain it, but he that takes it by violence. We see Moses esteemed the basest thing in the church better than the greatest excellencies in the world, that men are so violent after. He esteemed the very afflictions of God's people better than the treasures and pleasures of sin for a season, nay, than the pleasures of a court, Heb. xi. 25. When men shall esteem the base things of the world above all the treasures of heaven, above the state of Christianity, they have no hope of coming there. They may pretend God is merciful, and Christ died, &c. Ay, but whosoever he brings to salvation, he works such a sense of misery in them, and such an apprehension of grace, and of the means of grace, that there is an undervaluing of all other things. God will not bring them to heaven that shall not glorify him when they come there; and how shall they glorify him here or there when they value the world and these base things that they must leave behind them more than the things of heaven? This is the reason that few are saved, because they content themselves with easy, dull, and drowsy performances, and never consider with what proportion they are carried to things. When they had rather lose the advantage of that which will bring everlasting good to their souls, than lose the petty commodities of this world, and yet think themselves good Christians, what a delusion is this! It is the violent only that are successful, 'they take it by force.'

Obj. Ay, but what if the opposition grow more and more?

Ans. Then the grace of God and courage will grow and increase more and more. As Luther said well, 'The more violent the adversaries were, the more free and bold was he' (a). So the more the enemies rage, the more the Spirit of grace grows in God's people. It increaseth by opposition. As Noah's Ark, the higher the waters were, the nearer still it was carried to heaven. So we are nearer to God, and nearer to the 'kingdom of heaven,' the more opposition swells and rages. True courage grows with opposition. As the palm-tree riseth up against the burden that presseth it down, so the divine Spirit being a heavenly thing, and all opposition below of the devil and devilish-minded men being but earthly, what are they to the divine Spirit which sets us on and encourageth us? They cannot quell it, but the Spirit grows more and more in opposition. The apostles they ran all from Christ when he was to be crucified. They had but a little measure of the Spirit, but when the Holy Ghost was shed more plentifully on them, they began to stand courageously for the cause of Christ. When there was more opposition the Spirit grew more and more, till they sealed the truth with their blood. Therefore though opposition

* That is, 'over-prudent, cautious,'—G.

of enemies and their fury and rage grow, let us know whose cause we manage, and with what assurance of success. The violent at length 'shall take it by force.' Let us meditate upon this, that success is tied to violence. Therefore when you pray to God, if he seem to deny your request, offer violence, wrestle with him, let him not go without a blessing. When he seems to be an enemy, as sometimes he doth to try our strength, we must use an holy violence. When we are dull, and not fit to pray, nor fit for holy things, let us stir up the Spirit of God in us, and labour to get out of that estate; let us use violence, and violence will overcome at the last. A man that hath the Spirit of God gets the victory of whatsoever opposeth him. If there be snares offered from the world, he withstands them; if Satan come with his temptations, he resists him. He hath a promise for it: 'Resist the devil, and he will flee,' James iv. 7. Let us hold out and we shall get the victory, and overcome even God himself. How much more all other things! Therefore when either opposition without, or indisposition within, sets upon us in the course of religion and piety, let us think here, now is time and place for violence. I know, if I set myself about it, I shall have the victory and the crown. A Christian is alway in a hopeful state and condition, he hath somewhat to encourage him, he hath arguments to prevail over the state of opposition; he knows he shall win all at last if he go on, and that makes him courageous in what estate soever he is. Let us not be discouraged to hear of opposition. And let us be encouraged when we hear of good things, when we hear that the kingdom of heaven and grace is offered in the preaching of the gospel. 'Let us attend upon the posts of Wisdom's doors,' Prov. viii. 3, 4, and not give over till 'we come to peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost,' Rom. xiv. 17. If we hear of comfort in the word of God against distress of conscience, let us never give over till we find it. If we hear that God is a God 'hearing prayer,' let us never leave knocking at heaven-gate, never leave wrestling, till our prayers be heard. When we hear what ill is to be avoided, and what good is offered, let us not cease till we avoid the one and obtain the other. 'The violent take it by force.'

The last point is the date of time from whence this kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.

'From the days of John Baptist until now.'

Quest. Was there not a kingdom of heaven that suffered violence before John Baptist's time? Did the kingdom of God begin then? Was Christ a king, and was heaven opened only then?

Ans. I answer, No. But now the things of God were more gloriously discovered. Therefore, John i. 51, 'henceforth you shall see heaven opened.' The kingdom of heaven was opened now by the preaching of the gospel more gloriously than before. Therefore the state of the gospel is called the 'kingdom of heaven,' partly in regard of the times before, and partly in regard of the times after.

The law was full of *servile bondage to ceremonies*. It was a heavy dark state. They were laden with a multitude of ceremonies, which were but cold things to the spirit of a man that desires peace. Though they were ceremonies of God's appointing, yet they were but outward empty things in comparison: 'weak and beggarly elements,' as the apostle saith, Gal. iv. 9. They were costly and painful and cold things, that had not the efficacy of spirit in them.

And secondly, Then it was *entailed to the Jews only*. Now, since Christ's

time, it is enlarged ; and being more large and free, this blessed estate is called 'a kingdom.' John Baptist now opening Christ clearly, and a better state than the church had yet enjoyed, when people saw an end of the ceremonies, and the beginning of the glorious liberty in Christ, this made them violently set on them.

Again, John Baptist *made way for Christ*, levelling the souls of men by his powerful preaching and his holy life. He taught them in what need they stood of Christ. He was the messenger sent before Christ for that end. He was as the morning star to the sun. He was powerful in his preaching, and holy in his life. He told every man his own. He told the Pharisees that they were a 'generation of vipers.' He shewed men their state by nature, and told them of a better state, that 'the kingdom of heaven was at hand,' Mat. iii. 2. And although he wrought no miracles, yet himself was a miracle. To teach such holy doctrine, and to live an austere holy life in those evil days, it was no less than a miracle. Therefore this violence to the kingdom of heaven, it hath the date from John Baptist's time ; from his preaching, not from his birth. He being so excellent a preacher, no wonder there should be violence.

This shews the reason why the gospel in later times was embraced so greedily when Luther began to preach. Alas, people had been in a worse condition than Jewish in respect of ceremonies ; and otherwise foolish idle men they will set God to school, they will have some fooleries alway that they will make as much of as of the worship of God ; and so it had been in the times before Luther. In Saint Austin's time he was pestered with many vain ceremonies ; and, good man, he yielded to the stream and custom in many things, though he could hardly endure the slavery of those things. Now when the times grew better, it is no wonder the world embraced the gospel with violence, as in Luther's time, when there was a freedom proclaimed from those beggarly rudiments and traditions. Antichrist had hampered the consciences of men with an intolerable mass of foolish, groundless ceremonies, making them equal with the word of God, as we see in the Council of Trent, (b) and this vexed the consciences of people like scorpions, as it is Rev. ix. 9. They oppressed the people with a multitude of weights and burdens, which when people could not assent unto, it stung their consciences. No wonder then if people thronged after Luther when he opened the doctrine of free justification by faith, that the consciences of men were not to be hampered with these things. He taught that God's people were only to have a few ceremonies for present order ; but for the rest, to trouble men's consciences, and to make them of equal value with the word of God, he shewed it was an abominable doctrine, and wrote against it learnedly and sweetly. And therefore it is no marvel though the truths he taught were soon and cheerfully by multitudes embraced.

And the reason why now the gospel begins to be so little embraced and esteemed, is because, by reason of the long continuance of it, we are weary of this heavenly manna. As the people in Saint John Baptist's time, as eager as they were after John's preaching, yet it was but for a time that they rejoiced in his light. They grew weary of him. We never felt the burden of those Romish ceremonies, and therefore now grow weary of our liberty. Whereas in the beginning of Luther's time, because they were eased from many beggarly, and which is worse, tyrannical ceremonies of Rome, therefore with much joy and eagerness they embraced the truth when it came to be preached amongst them.

Therefore we are to praise God for the liberty of the church at this time,

that we have the word of God to rule our consciences, and that other matters are not pressed on us but as matters of decency and order. Alas, if we were in bondage to those proud popish wretches, our consciences would be enthralled to a world of snares.

Last of all, 'From the days of the Baptist,' and so forward, 'the kingdom of heaven did suffer violence,' because from that time forward *the Spirit began to be more plentifully given*. Christ comes with his Spirit, which is soul of our soul, and the life of our life. The Spirit is like a 'mighty wind,' that moves the ship in the water. The ship is becalmed. It cannot move unless there be a wind. So the soul cannot move to that which is good without the Spirit. Now there is more abundance of the Spirit since the coming of Christ. Christ, who is the king of his church, the Lord of heaven and earth, he reserved the abundance of the Spirit till his own coming, especially till he entered into heaven. Then the Spirit came in abundance. 'It was poured upon all flesh,' Joel ii. 28. It was but, as it were, dropped before, but then it was 'poured out.' Then the Gentiles came in, and the apostles received the Spirit in abundance. Therefore no wonder that there was violence offered to the kingdom of heaven. Then hence we may observe,

That the more clearly Christ and the blessed mysteries of Christ are opened, the more effectual the Spirit is, and the more heavenly men are, and more eagerly disposed to spiritual things.

(1.) The reason and ground of it is in nature. *The affections follow the discovery of the excellency of things*. When first *the necessity of being in Christ is laid open*; that there are but two kingdoms, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the devil, and that a man must either enter into the kingdom of Christ, or be of the devil's kingdom still;

(2.) And when, secondly, together with the necessity, *the excellency of Christ's kingdom is discovered*, that it is a state that will make us all kings; a state wherein we shall at length overcome all opposition of hell, sin, death, the wrath of God; that whereas earthly kingdoms are opposed, and enthralled, and one dash against another, the kingdom of heaven is a state that subdues all that is against it by little and little. As Christ overcame death and the wrath of his Father, and now rules in heaven in his person, so all his members shall overcome all in time. When the excellency of this kingdom is laid open to the understandings of men, is it a wonder that their affections are set on fire? Will anything do it more than such a kingdom?

(3.) Then, in the third place, *when it is hopeful, too; when, together with the necessity and excellency of it, there is assurance given us that we shall obtain it if we strive for it*; when it is offered freely, even grace and glory, and we are entreated to receive grace: 'Come unto me, ye that are weary,' &c., Mat. xi. 28. Nay, we are threatened if we do not come, and we have example of the worst sort of people: of Zaccheus, and the poor woman out of whom the devils were cast; of Peter, that denied Christ; of Paul, that persecuted him; such as had been wretched persons, that have come out of Satan's kingdom; when these things are propounded, and understood, and apprehended, men that are in their wits, that are not besotted by the devil, men that are not in love with damnation, and hate their own souls, they will embrace them. When they see a state discovered in Christ wherein they are above angels, in some sort, above death and hell, that they triumph over all in Christ, that because it is as sure that they shall be crowned conquerors with Christ in heaven, as if they were there

already; when it is propounded thus hopefully, who would not offer violence to this kingdom? When John Baptist laid it open so clearly to them, 'This is the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world,' John i. 29, it made them offer violence to it.

And this is another reason why in the latter, the second spring of the gospel—for there was a winter in the time of popery, it being a kingdom of darkness, keeping people in ignorance—so many nations so suddenly embraced the truth. Luther was a man that was wondrously exercised and afflicted in conscience. This made him relish the doctrine of justification by grace in Christ, and thereupon to lay open the mysteries of Christ and the bondage of popery; and this being once a-foot, the people's minds being prepared out of the sense of their former bondage, whole kingdoms came in presently. As in the spring time, when there comes a fine sunshine day, the prisoners are let loose out of the earth after a cold winter, so after the winter of affliction and persecution, inward and outward, came the sunshine of the gospel, and made all come forth and flourish presently. Wheresoever Christ is taught powerfully and plainly, and the excellency and necessity of the state we have by him, and that men may partake of it, if they be not false to their own souls, there is always violence offered to these things, because where the riches of Christ are opened, the Spirit goes with it, and goes with violence, that it carries all before it.

Hence, again, we may see that popish spirits are witty* in opposing the unfolding of the gospel in the ministry, especially where there is conscience and skill to unfold Christ plainly. They know when Christ is opened, all their fopperies and inventions will grow base. The more Christ is unfolded, the more people will grow in hatred of antichrist. The more they see the light, the more they will hate darkness. For this cause they oppose the unfolding of the gospel to the understanding of the people; they would keep people in ignorance that they may make them doat upon them. It argueth a disposition dangerous, that shall never taste of the good things of God, to be in a bitter temper against the unfolding of the gospel of Christ. For we see here the discovery of it makes it wondrous effectual. John Baptist laying open Christ clearer than he was discovered before, 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.'

Here we are instructed what way we should take if we would bring ourselves or others into a temper fit for heaven, to an earnest temper after holy things, not to begin with dead outward actions, but to begin, as becomes the condition of reasonable men, as God deals with man, befitting the nature of man; *begin with the understanding*. Let us meditate seriously of the truth of Christ's coming in the flesh, of the end of his coming, 'to dissolve the works of the devil,' 1 John iii. 8, to bring us out of the state of nature to a better condition. Meditate of the excellency of the state of grace, of the eternity and excellency of the state of glory. Let us warm our hearts with these things. When a man hath once these things and believes them, let him be cold and dull if he can. And so, if we would gain others to a fit disposition for heaven, let us labour to instruct them what their state by nature is; what kingdom they are born in; that they are liable to hell and damnation; that they are under the possession of the 'strong man,' the devil, if the stronger man bring them not out and dispossess him; and let them know withal the infinite love and mercy of God in Christ, offering a better state, giving the gospel and promising his Spirit with his truth; and if they be-

* That is, 'wise.'—G.

long to God, this will work upon them, or else nothing will. Other courses, to punish men in their purse, or imprison them, or the like, may subdue them to outward conformity, but if we would bring their souls to heaven, let us endeavour to enlighten their understandings to see the danger they are in, and to see the riches of grace and salvation that is proffered in Christ, and this will 'compel them to come in,' Luke xiv. 33. There will be no need of any other compulsion, no more than there can be need to bid a man escape away that sees wild beasts about him, or to bid a guilty person to flee to the city of refuge and take hold of the horns of the altar. Let John Baptist come before Christ to make way for him, and presently 'the kingdom of heaven suffers violence;' and after Christ's time, when the Spirit was more abundantly given, and the gospel more clearly opened, the world stooped to the gospel. The gospel at length overcame the proud sceptre of the Roman empire. They laid their crowns down before Christ's gospel. The cross of Christ got above the crown in the preaching of the gospel, it was so powerful. Thus, if we would have the number of heaven enlarged, let us desire that God's truth may be opened plainly and powerfully. John Baptist was a plain and powerful preacher; a man of holy life. They all revered John as a holy man. Thereupon his doctrine came to be so effectual. This is the way whereby God will do good to those he delights in. For others that are bitter atheists, whom God hath appointed to damnation, the gospel hardens them and makes them worse. The Pharisees were the worse by the preaching of Christ. When the gospel is preached, some are made worse by it, and malign, and persecute it as far as they dare. As the apostle saith, God is glorified in the damnation of such bitter opposers, Rom. iii. 8. We are not to look to gain all by preaching. Those that withstand it are sent by it with the more just damnation to hell, but those that do belong to him are gained this way.

Let us labour, therefore, for a clear manifestation of Christ. There is the treasure of all goodness in Christ, whatsoever is necessary to bring us to heaven. And the more he is discovered and applied, the more we are enriched with grace and comfort. Times of change may come; and if times of opposition and persecution come not, yet temptations will come, and the hour of death will come, when we shall have occasion to use all the strength and comfort we have; and the more dangerous the times are, the more sound and clear knowledge of Christ we should labour for, and that will breed this holy violence, that shall break thorough all oppositions whatsoever.

NOTES.

(a) P. 309.—'As Luther said well, "The more violent the adversaries were, the more free and bold was he."' An often-repeated saying of his 'Table-talk' and letters. Cf. note *uu*, Vol. III. page 533; also Vol. I. page 126.

(b) P. 311.—'As we see in the Council of Trent.' For history of this celebrated Council, see note-references in *jj*, Vol. III. page 532.

I take the present opportunity of correcting a mistake of Sibbes' in relation to this Council. See note *uuu*, Vol. III. page 536. He there makes Luther observe, that 'if they [the Papists] live and die peremptorily in all the points professed in the Tridentine Council, they cannot be saved.' Sibbes gives no authority; but it is plain that Luther could not adduce the *Tridentine* Council, as the following brief quotation from Bungener's History of the Council of Trent (by Scott, page 66) will shew: 'For the first time (it was now the 22d of February) the Council met to deliberate in good earnest. The legates appeared radiant with smiles. Why so? . . . *Luther was dead.*'—G.