

A DISCOURSE OF THE REMOVAL OF THE GOSPEL.

Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.—REV. II. 5.

THESE words are part of the epistle of Christ, as king and governor, to the church of Ephesus, and they contain a severe threatening after a charge and indictment brought in against that church. The bill is preferred against them by Christ, who is described, ver. 1, to be him 'that holds the seven stars in his right hand, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.' He holds the stars in his hand to shew his tenderness, in his right hand to shew his power, and he walks among the candlesticks to shew his care over them and his love to them. Before he brings the charge, he takes notice of what was praiseworthy in that church, and gives them the commendation of their patience under persecution and zeal for his glory, vers. 2, 3. But, alas ! the case was changed, their zeal was cold, and their love was flatted : ver. 4, 'she had left her first love.' Ephesus was a mart-town of Asia, famous for Diana's temple, Acts xix. 28, which brought resort and consequently wealth to her from all parts of Asia and Greece.

I have formerly noted that the condition of the church in the several states of it is described in these epistles. Crocius discourseth of them to this purpose,* whence our Dr Moor might take his rise for that ingenious and rational piece he hath writ upon these epistles in this sense. The design of this book is to predict what should happen to the church in all ages till the conclusion of time ; and what is spoken here to these seven churches seems to be greater than can well suit these places in Asia while they remained Christian. The conversion of the Jews seems to be intimated to be brought to pass in the Philadelphian state, to which we probably are approaching, after a smart trouble : Rev. iii. 5, 'I will make those that are of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie ; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet ;' those that are of the Jewish synagogue, which he calls the synagogue of Satan, being blinded by the God of this world to keep up that worship which God hath rejected, which are indeed Jews in the flesh and by circumcision, but are not so in

* Epist. Dedicat. ante Syntag.

spirit; or it may be meant of some people that pretend to be of the Jewish race, or practising the Jewish rites, that shall in that state of the church give up their names to Christianity. And for Laodicea, it is argued that the epistle cannot be meant of local Laodicea, because that is reported to be swallowed up by an earthquake in the time of Nero, before the writing of this epistle. And it is that state of the church which shall be before the day of judgment, and therefore fitly put in that term of Laodicea, which signifies in the Greek, the people's judgment, or the judgment of the people. The church of Ephesus is understood by him to be the first and apostolical condition of the church, or perhaps not that primo-primitive, but the state of the church immediately succeeding it. It is true the primitive church was fired with zeal and ballasted with patience; she had a courage to assert the truth, and a meekness to bear her troubles, and detected those false apostles that would join works with the righteousness of Christ in justification. But after the death of the apostles, yea, and in the life of Paul, there were some that made disturbance, would have blended the gospel doctrine and worship with legal ceremonies. And when the head of that great founder of the Gentile church was laid, coldness in Christianity and corruption in doctrine crept in.

Doct. 1 How unwilling is the nature of man to be guided by the word of Christ! Men will be mixing their own wills and wisdom with the wisdom and will of God. Error could not else have crept in so soon while the memory of the apostles lasted. The church of Ephesus was the first state of the church next to the primitive, and this gave strong provocations to God to take away the gospel from her.

2. Christ takes an account both of the good and evil works of a church. One makes him not overlook the other; he will not cocker any for their good, or spare them in their evil. He sweetens his reproof here with a commendation, like oil that makes way for a sharp nail. He reckons their labour, patience, sense of his dishonour, their discovery of seducing spirits, the circumstances of their zeal for his name, and constancy and unweariedness in it. He sees our good grain and beholds our chaff; he take notices of our decreases and of our decays.

3. Grace doth not privilege sin. Though he takes notice of their worth, yet he charges them with their crime. Christ takes more notice of the sins of his people than of the sins of others. Others' sins are enmities: he expects no other from them; their sins are unkind, and more affect him. Their professions, mercies, covenants, assistances, privileges, require a suitable walk. Judas his betraying Christ did not so much trouble him as Peter's denial of him. We do not read that he thought of Judas after he had betrayed him, but he would look back upon Peter whilst he was exposed to the danger of his life, and approaching to a contest with death and wrath. Christ will be terrible in the assembly of his saints: he will not endure the dustiness of his golden candlestick.

We may see here,

1. The disease: ver. 4, 'Thou hast left thy first love.'

2. The issue of it, if it were not cured: the removal of the candlestick.

3. The cure, which consists

(1.) In consideration, 'Remember.'

[1.] Of their present condition, fallen.

[2.] Of the term of their apostasy: whence thou art fallen. Reflect upon your present condition and your former state, and compare them one with another.

(2.) In contrition, 'repent.'

(3.) In reformation; and 'do thy first work,' write after thy former copy. This method of cure was to be observed, otherwise Christ would take away the golden candlestick.

'Do thy first work;' reduce thyself to the form of primitive Christianity; away with all mixtures in worship, chillness in discipline, looseness in practice.

Doct. Reformations are reductions of things to their original pattern and first institution. When Christ would reform the abuses in marriage, he doth not bring them to the practice of their fathers and the practice of their posterity, but measures both that of their own and that of their ancestors by the first rule, 'In the beginning it was not so,' Mat. xix. 18. We are usually swayed by customs in morals, and precedents in politicals, when custom and prescription alter not the nature of unrighteousness and unreasonableness. True reformations are reductions of things to reason and reduction of things to Scripture.

'I will remove thy candlestick out of his place.' I shall not trouble you with the different interpretations of it. There was a candlestick within the tabernacle, Heb. ix. 2, which had seven branches, wherein lamps were continually presented lighted. The candlestick represented as a type the gospel church, and the lamps the gospel in it, and the oil to supply the lamps the gifts of the Spirit for the preservation and propagation of the gospel. An allusion is made in this place to the candlestick in the ancient tabernacle. Some think the candlestick with the seven golden branches represented the seven planets, but with what reason I understand not, since the branches of the candlestick were all equal, but the planets are of a different light and magnitude. The chief intention of the ancient tabernacle was to represent and signify future things. The seven particular churches allude here to the seven branches of that candlestick, seven particular churches or seven states of the church, all parts of the universal. The chief concern of the candlestick was the light in it, without which, as the tabernacle had been a place of darkness, so is the world without the gospel.

By removing the candlestick is therefore to be understood the removing of the gospel, and so an unchurching of them. Candlestick may be here put for the light in it, by a metonymy of the subject for the adjunct.

We might observe,

1. A nation, people, or church, that have been eminent for the owning the ways and truths of God, may have great decays in their affections, and greatly apostatize.

2. Apostasy in a church is followed with a removal of the gospel.

3. The removal of the gospel is the saddest judgment that can happen to a nation.

We may put the two last together, and so I shall insist on this doctrine.

Doct. God doth often remove the gospel upon provocations, as the severest judgment he can inflict upon an unworthy people. Apostasies have been very frequent. Everything under the sun is subject to alteration and corruption. Faith is not a hereditary thing like a standing patrimony. Children do not always tread in the steps of their ancestors; what they receive only by education, they will easily part with upon some carnal interest, some smiling or frowning temptation. Some have observed that the purity of the gospel hath scarce lasted in a city or province to the third generation. The gospel in the honour of it may remain longer, but usually some error, some mixtures, have deformed it. Good corn is scarcely sown but the devil is as ready to sow his tares.

I shall premise,

1. The gospel shall not be removed out of the world, while the world endures. Sion, the universal church, hath a promise of stability; the gospel therefore, whereby she is constituted a church, shall be perpetually in her. The shutting the gate of the sanctuary after the Lord's entering into it, Ezek. xliv. 2, is expounded by some, of the everlasting dwelling of the Lord in the gospel church, and never departing from it, as he had done from the temple of Jerusalem. The promise of Christ assures it: Mat. xxviii. 20, 'I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Not with the persons of the apostles, who were to expire, but with the doctrine of the apostles, which was to endure; though the apostles die in their bodies, yet they live in their doctrine.

2. The gospel hath been, and still may be, removed from particular places. No particular church but may be unchurched, because no particular church hath a promise of stability. There is no entail of God's favour to any particular church in the world. The gospel is a candle, and the church is a candlestick; both candle and candlestick are moveable things, not an entailed inheritance. Many nations have had their day of grace set, and are now benighted. Jerusalem had a season wherein to know the things that concerned her peace, Luke xix. 42. She finds nothing now but sorrow and exile. There is a time when the Spirit strives, and there is a time when the Spirit turns his back, and ceaseth any longer wrestling. Sometimes God doth both unchurch and un-nation a people, sometimes he removes the gospel, and continues a nation in being; but this is rare, to continue providential mercies when his most excellent truth is departed. But in such cases he gives them up to strong delusions, who would not render themselves at his summons; he continues the substance, while he removes the efficacy by withdrawing his Spirit; and then the gospel is like a carcase without a soul: Isa. vi. 9, 10, 'They shall hear and not understand.'

I shall observe this method in handling this doctrine. I shall shew,

I. The gospel has been removed, a nation hath been unchurched.

II. It is the greatest judgment.

III. The Use.

I. That a nation has been unchurched, and the gospel has been removed.

1. The Jews are an eminent instance. They had the gospel in a type, while they enjoyed the ceremonies; they had the gospel unveiled, while they had the presence of Christ among them. God gave them anciently some evidences of the possibility of it. The law was near being quite removed from them, when upon their idolatry, the two tables were broken by Moses, which a little before had been received from God. When the ark was put into the temple, at Solomon's dedication of it, though it was lodged there without any intention in the people to remove it, yet the staves whereby it was carried were continued in it, 1 Kings viii. 8, 9, so that it was ready for a removal at any time; to shew, say some, that if the ark were abused and the testimonies slighted, it should be taken from them.

(1.) Consider, they were a people that had the greatest titles. They were called by his name, Jer. ii. 2, 3. They were his peculiar treasure, they were called God's son, his first-born, his spouse, his portion, inheritance, his delight; yet he hath flung this treasure out of his coffers, disinherited his first-born, cast his children out of his house to be fugitives about the world; his spouse is divorced from him, and his inheritance laid waste. No child was more endeared to a father, no wife more to a husband, than those people to God; yet how is that Jerusalem, which was his delight, now a den of thieves?

(2.) Consider the privileges they enjoyed. They were a people cherished in his bosom, walled about with miracles, protected by him in person; he marched before them as their general, and conducted their motions, Exod. xiii. 21. He was their lawgiver, and penned their statutes, whereby they were to be governed, with his own hand; he spake to them from heaven (which he did to no other nation); he was their caterer, and provided manna for them in their necessity, and fed them by miracle. He was their bishop to settle them a church, and their prince and magistrate to form them into a state; not only their religion, but their civil government was the birth of the wisdom of heaven. He put his oracles as a treasure into their hands, Rom. iii. 2. The covenant, ark, pot of manna, were committed to them; he planted them a noble vine, culled them out from all the nations of the earth, whereby they were made the delights of heaven, and the admiration of the rest of the world. He made them his garden, they cost him more than all the nations beside, and he seems to have no care of any part of the earth besides them, Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20. The world had his alms, and they the inheritance; the rest of the world were his Ishmaels, and they his Isaacs; and which is observable, his first thoughts seem to be, to have the gospel confined only to them in that covenant which he makes with Christ, which is represented in the manner of a treaty between the Father and the Son. He seems to pitch no further than Israel, 'in whom he would be glorified,' Isa. xlix. 3, till Christ complains of the narrow limits, and gains a larger portion for himself. The terms are then enlarged: ver. 6, 'It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles.' The promises of the Messiah made to Abraham and Jacob were often with an addition of clearness renewed to them by the prophets. He chose them of all nations, of whom his Son the Saviour of the world should be born, with whom he was first to treat. His personal ministry was designed for them, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel only he was sent, that nation he in person solicited, over them he wept, and for them he prayed, Mat. xv. 24. Those that were to carry the gospel into other parts of the world, were selected out of that nation; and though they used him so ill, yet he was indulgent to them, sent his Spirit upon the apostles first at Jerusalem; seemed to have little care of the Gentiles. How long after was it that Peter scrupled to treat with them? But since they have proved false to God, and forgot the Rock of their strength, he exposed them to the fury of a Roman army, tore up the foundations of their government, demolished their temple, caused the land he had infest them in to spue them out, scattered them over the face of the world as a spectacle of his vengeance, and a standing monument what the case will be of any nation that walks unworthily of the gospel.

(3.) Consider the multitude of strange providences they had. He delivered them, to the amazement of all round about them; they were a happy people, in being a people saved by the Lord, Deut. xxxiii. 29. They saw more of his wonderful providences than all the world ever since hath done: he put himself out of the ordinary course of providence in their favour; he spread their tables in the wilderness, and filled their cup; no good thing they could have a mind to, but they had for asking; the sun must stand still in heaven to light them to the gaining a victory, if Joshua desire it; they had upon all occasions immediate direction from the ark. What favour did they find from Cyrus after they had been captivated? A hundred thousand were set at liberty by Ptolemy, after they had been enslaved by his father. When they proved false to God, and played the harlot upon every high hill, and under every green tree, how was their temple and city destroyed, and

after some revolution of time repaired; and that by their enemies, as some observe, contrary to all the rules of policy, since the re-edifying their temple, and the repairing the walls of their city, might be encouragements to them to rebel, they being a people that had so often forced their necks out of the conqueror's yoke. And often when the temple wanted repairs, God stirred up the hearts of their enemies to send supplies out of the Roman provinces to beautify it, that as God had at first enriched them by the jewels of the Egyptians, he would maintain their wealth by the assistance of the other Gentiles. And when Pompey entered into their temple, where there was a treasure in the vessels, and instruments of gold, amounting to about nine millions of money (a strong temptation to a generous person), yet God so ordered it, that he could see nothing there but a cloud. They never were conquered (which you know was often), but God raised them up some patrons. Yet notwithstanding all these providences whereby God so miraculously owned them, and all the dangers from whence he so powerfully delivered them, they are now pulled up by the root, persecuted by man, abandoned by God, 'the generation of his wrath,' Jer. vii. 29. Of a tender Father he has become their enraged enemy, and flings vengeance down upon those heads which before he crowned with mercy. No spiritual dew falls upon these mountains of Gilboa. Those that were as plesant to God as the 'grapes in a wilderness' to a thirsty traveller, Hosea ix. 10, are of as little regard as a bramble. Their names are a detestation in nature, and a hissing to the Gentiles. God sometimes embraced the Jews without taking the Gentiles, and now hath received the Gentiles with rejecting the Jews.

2. The seven churches of Asia, to whom these epistles are written, are another instance. How do their places know them no more as once they were! Not only their religion, but their civil politeness is exchanged for barbarism. They have lost their ancient beauty for a Turkish deformity. Mahomet's horse hath succeeded in the place of the gospel dove. The blasphemies of the Alcoran sound where the name of Christ hath been called upon. The triumphant banners of an impostor advanced where the standard of the gospel had been erected. Christ had a great company of votaries in those places when the ancient Britons were under the empire of Satan, but now he seems to have sowed those places with salt, and made them barren. No courageous Athanasius, or silver-tongued Chrysostom, or lofty Nazianzen to be found in those places. He hath translated the gospel into other parts, and multiplied children in those places which before were barren. We might instance also in the church of Rome, a church whose faith was spoken of throughout the whole world; and how is the truth and purity of religion discarded, true faith dwindled into implicit, the righteousness of Christ changed for impotent and feeble merit; pilgrimages, oblations, self-chastisements advanced instead of the virtues of the cross; whole countries made drunk with the wine of her fornication; the glory of the gospel gone, a mere echo only remaining, the end of a voice, and no reality! They are given up to strong delusions to believe a lie.

II. Thing. That the removal of the gospel and unchurching a nation is the greatest judgment. Can there be a greater judgment than to have the word of God removed, to want a prophet to instruct and warn, when the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancient? This God threatens as the greatest, Ezek. viii. 26. And the church complains of it as the sorest: Ps. lxxiv. 9, 'We see not our signs, and there is no more any prophet among us.' It was the greatest token of God's anger, when his glory went up from the cherubims, Ezek. ix. 2. *A loco placationis.* How much more terrible is the shaking off the dust of the feet of God against a people,

than the shaking off the dust of the feet of an apostle! What greater evidence can there be of a father's indignation against a disobedient son, than not only to disinherit him but disdain to speak to him, or send to him any notice of his mind and will? The misery of the old world was summed up in this, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man,' Gen. vi. 3; and then are the flood-gates of heaven opened. The shutting up the book of mercy is the opening the book of justice, the unstopping the vials of wrath; this, this is the very dregs of vengeance.

1. The gospel is the choicest mercy, and therefore the removal of it the sharpest misery. The gospel is so much the best of blessings, as God is the best of beings. This is the sun that enlightens the mind, this is the rain that waters the heart. Without this, we should sink into an heathen, brutish, or devilish superstition. By this, the quickening Spirit renews the soul, and begins a gracious and spiritual life in order to a glorious and eternal one. It is by this our souls are refined and our lusts consumed. Without it we are without help, and without hope; without it we have no prospect of a world to come, nor any sight of the paths that lead to happiness. This is the foundation of the peace and joy of our spirits here, this is the basis of our hopes of happiness hereafter. This is a pearl of great price; this is the glory and honour of a church, people, or person. This only instructs us to save our souls. Your trades may gain and preserve an estate, your bread may nourish your bodies, this only can fatten and prop your souls; had we the law only, which yet is the law of God, we should still find it weak through the flesh, it cannot now save us, though the observance of it might have made our father Adam happy. It is the gospel only that is strong to save through the Spirit. The law could bless an innocent man, but the gospel only restores a guilty man. When the candlestick, the gospel, therefore, is removed, the light is removed which is able to direct us, the pearl is removed which is able to enrich us. In the want of this is introduced a spiritual darkness, which ends in an eternal darkness. As the gospel is compared to heaven, and so called the kingdom of heaven, and a people in the enjoyment of it are said to be 'lifted up to heaven,' Mat. x. 23, so in the want of it they are said to be cast down into hell, so that what resemblance there is between heaven and the means of grace, that there is between the want of them and hell, both are a separation from God by divorce between God and a people.

2. It is made worse than those judgments that are accounted the severest. Plagues, wars, famine, are lighter marks of divine anger than this. God, upon several provocations of the Jews, sent enemies to waste their habitations and ravage their country, plagues to diminish their inhabitants, yet they were still his people; but when he takes the word and ordinances from them, they are Lo-ammi, not my people, Hosea i. 9. God may take notice of a people under the smartest afflictions, but when he takes away his word, he knows a people no longer. A father may scourge a child and yet love him, but when he takes away his treasure, his food, from his child, he can no longer be said to love him, he breaks the bands of all relation and natural affection. This judgment is compared to, and yet made worse than, a famine of bread. What more terrible than famine, that hath forced parents against the ties of natural affection to devour their children, and children to feed upon the lean flesh of their parents! What more terrible than famine, that hath rendered carrion, dung, rats, serpents, the refuse of nature, a delicious food in that extreme necessity! What more dreadful than this, that brutifies the nature of man, and necessitates them to horrid and abominable actions! Yet this is made a light thing in comparison of the other: Amos viii. 11,

'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.' In what bitter gall doth God here dip his pen! I will not send so light a judgment, I have a worse scourge for them. When God sent the Jews into captivity, he sent prophets to attend them while they were under the Chaldean power. The remains of them in the land had Jeremiah and Baruch. The captives in Babylon had Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras; after the captivity they had Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi; but in this judgment threatened against Israel, none at all; they were to be without a prince, or a priest, Hosea iii. 4 (for the word signifies both), without a sacrifice, without Ephod and Teraphim. As the soul surpasses the body in excellency, so a soul famine exceeds a bodily famine. The want of spiritual is more dreadful than the want of corporeal food; this makes us weak, and that makes us wicked; this pines away the strength of the body, that drives out the health of the soul; this may be a means to make us seek the Lord, but that leaves us groping in the dark. We may live in our souls by the influence of the word, when we have not bread to convey strength to our bodies, but how must the soul languish when it is deprived of spiritual food to nourish her! Isa. xxx. 20. How doleful would it be to have the ground parched by the sun, the sky emptied of clouds, or the bottles of heaven stopped close without venting a drop of refreshing rain. But how much more deplorable is this judgment than the withholding the clouds from dropping upon our earth, or the sun from shining upon our fruits.

3. When the gospel departs, all other blessings depart with it. When the great charter is taken away, all the privileges depending upon it are snatched away together with it. When God departs, judgments succeed. When the glory of God was gone up from the first cherub to the threshold of the house, Ezek. ix. 3, the angels are commanded to execute the destructive sentence against the city, ver. 4, 5.

(1.) The honour and ornament of a nation departs. When a man departs from his house, the hangings are taken down, the furniture removed, and the walls left bare. Length of days are the blessings of wisdom's right hand, riches and honour the treasures of her left hand, Prov. iii. 16. She departs not from any, to leave her hands, and the blessings of her hands, behind her.

(2.) The strength of a nation departs. The ordinances of God are the towers of Sion. The temple was not only a place of worship, but a bulwark too. The ark was often carried with the Israelites into their camp, because there their strength lay; and when David was chased away by his son Absalom, he takes the ark of the tabernacle as his greatest strength against the defection of his son and subjects. When the gospel goes, God continues no longer the protector of a people. When a man hath packed up his wares, and removed them, he cares not much what becomes of the house he hath left, which, while he is in it, he will defend to the utmost. When the ark was taken by the Philistines, what a rout is there among the Israelites, thirty thousand of them slain; Eli, the High Priest, breaks his neck; his sons fall in the battle; and the strength and glory were departed from Israel, 1 Sam. iv. The flourishing condition of the seven churches withered when the candlestick was removed. When the things of Jerusalem's peace were hid from their eyes, the destruction of their city followed, so that one stone was not left upon another, because they knew not the time of their visitation, Luke xix. 42, 44. Then the Roman eagles clapped their wings in judgment upon them; then did the armies of the enemies bring desolation upon the points of their swords; then was the temple filled with the blood of the

worshippers, which had been formerly consecrated in a way of mercy by the blood of sacrifices; then were carcasses heaped one upon another, and the survivors led in chains to a miserable captivity, or a disgraceful death. What a wasted wilderness is that land now, deprived of that ancient fruitfulness whereby it afforded maintenance to such multitudes, which in David's time were about one hundred and thirty thousand fighting men, yet thought by some not much bigger than Yorkshire! When the gospel of peace removes, eternal peace goes with it, temporal peace flies after it; and whatsoever is safe, profitable, prosperous, takes wings and attends it.

4. God hath no other intention in the removing the gospel, and unchurching a nation, but the utter ruin and destruction of that nation. Other judgments may be medicinal; this is killing. Other judgments may lance and let out the corrupt matter; this opens a passage for life, soul, and happiness. Other judgments are but scourges; this is a deadly wound. In other judgments, God may continue a Father; in this, he is no other than an enemy and a destroyer. Other judgments are upon our backs; but this is in our bowels. Other judgments may be for conversion; this takes away the means of conversion. The torments of hell are not inflicted for the conversion of the damned, nor the setting of the gospel sun for the conversion of a nation. Other judgments may be *nubecula cito transitura*, as the Father's speech was of the storm in Julian's time; but this is a covering the heavens with blackness, a pulling the sun out of the firmament. A deluge of other judgments may lift the ark higher, but this overthrows it. Other judgments may have their period; this is hardly reversed. Not one of the seven churches restored to their former beauty to this day. This is an absolute shutting the gates of heaven against a people, and entailing upon them death and curses.

5. This judgment is accompanied with spiritual judgments, which are the sorest. The pounding of the jewel is far worse, and of greater loss, than the breaking the casket. The judgment of being given up to our hearts' lusts, to sensuality, pride, hardness of heart, delusions to believe a lie, are the sorest judgments; they are like poison in the soul, that will never leave till it hath eaten out the vitals. There shall then be no divorce between men and their idols: Hosea iv. 11, 'Your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery,' *i. e.* spiritual adultery and idolatry. When the check of idolatry is gone, the fury of that lust will rage.

III. *Use.* Doth God often remove the gospel upon provocations, as the severest judgment he can inflict upon an unworthy people? Then,

1. Be afraid of this judgment. How do we know but that God hath limited the preaching of the gospel, and the standing of the candlestick in this and that place, only for a time; and when that is expired, it may be carried to another place? We see it hath been so with others. If he hath not spared the natural branches, nor the church next the primitive, nay, those churches where the gospel was planted by the apostles, what reason have we to think he should spare us, who have long ago discarded primitive discipline, and are in a fair way to throw away primitive doctrine after it? Is England better than Jerusalem and Ephesus? Are the privileges we enjoy a bar to the removal of it? Are our privileges greater than those churches which were planted by the apostles had? Yet the hand of God hath shaken them off. Did not the Jews oppose their descent from Abraham, to whom the promises were made, and the glory of their temple, as an invincible shield against all the threatenings of destruction by the prophets, as though God had been shut up in their temple, and so enamoured on the beauty of that

structure, that he could not have the heart to leave them? But are they not rejected, and the Gentiles received in their room? Is not that which was once the glory of their nation, and the wonder of the world, many an age since fallen to the ground and mouldered to dust? What though the gospel be not yet gone? That sin may lie at the door which is meritorious of its departure. God's patience doth still last, but will it always last? The gospel may shine bright one day, and be eclipsed the next hour. The Jews might say with confidence, 'Our temple yet stands,' till they heard the report of the Roman eagles marching towards them. The sun shone very bright that day Sodom was burned. The preaching the gospel in a plentiful manner is a sign of judgment when there is unfruitfulness under it. Was not the gospel preached to Jerusalem by the best preachers of it that ever were, the Son of God, and the apostles after him, not many years before the destruction of that city? God is quick in his judgments when the gospel is contemned. The black, red, and pale horse—plague, war, and famine—followed just upon the white horse, to cut off such as would not be conquered by him that sat on him, Rev. vi. 2, &c. The sun shines brightest many times when it is nearest setting. I must confess I am of the opinion that the gospel will never be perfectly and totally taken away from these western parts of the world. It hath borne up its head for many ages within the scent of Rome, in those of Piedmont, notwithstanding all endeavours to extinguish it. The slaying of the witnesses, or the two prophets, which perhaps is not far off, is not a corporal, but a political death. Their dead bodies would not then be suffered to lie in the streets three years and a half (which we must understand by the three days and a half, Rev. xi. 9); and the resurrection of them, the returning of the spirit of life into them, is not to be meant of the resurrection of their bodies, but the resurrection of their offices; which political slaying is to be not long before the fall of the tenth part of the city, *i. e.* Rome, that city being the tenth part in greatness now of what it was anciently. And before the fall of Babylon the everlasting gospel shall be published with more efficacy than in many years before, ver. 13; and therefore I think the gospel will never totally depart, though it may for a while be much obscured. And I cannot but mind you of an observation a Jewish writer hath of the lamps in the temple,* that though some of them went out in the night, yet the western lamp was always found burning. The lamps were representations of the gospel, and this might signify the perpetuity of the gospel in the western parts of the world, when we see it is extinguished, or at least burns very dim, in most of the eastern parts. Yet a great eclipse, I fear; the interposition of a black moon between us and the sun, an antichristian smoke out of the bottomless pit to darken the sun and the air. In the description of the Sardian church, Rev. iii. 1-3, which is the state of the church where we are, Christ speaks of decays coming on them with some sharp scourge, but doth not threaten the removal of the candlestick. And may we not have just reason to fear it? to fear, I say, a judgment like this of removing the gospel, the removal of it in part? Bethel, when Jacob laid his head there, was a place where angels went up and down in vision; afterwards it was changed into Bethaven, where calves and devils were worshipped, when Jeroboam swayed the sceptre.

(1.) Is not our profaneness a just ground of our fear? Is there not more wickedness found amongst us, where the glorious gospel hath shined, than among them that live under the fogs of the Turkish Alcoran? Have not our fruits been grapes of Sodom and clusters of Gomorrah? Have not many,

* Kimchi, in 1 Sam. iii., edit. by Lightfoot, Temple, chap. xiv. sec. v. p. 83.

that have been lifted up to heaven by the presence of the gospel, walked as if they had the seal of hell in their foreheads? A fulness of iniquity makes the harvest ripe, and fit for the sickle, Joel iii. 13. Why may we not fear the clouding of the gospel, as well as we have heard of Moses his breaking of the tables of the law, when he found a people given to luxury, sensuality, and idolatry? When Eli the priest is remiss, and Phinehas his son is profane; when there is little care of the true worship of God, and no censures for profaneness of life, is not the fruit of this an *Ichabod*, 'the departure of the glory from Israel'? 1 Sam. iv. 21. What can be expected, when the punishment of profaneness is neglected, and the practice of piety hath been discouraged? When the Jewish vineyard brought forth wild grapes, God commanded the clouds to rain no more upon it, Isa. v. 6.

(2.) Is not the slighting of the means of grace a just ground of this fear? When reformation have not answered calls, nor improvement answered mercies conferred; when we have fought against God with his own gifts, and contemned that rich mercy we cannot want without ruin. Doth not every man's observation witness, that this contempt of the gospel hath been a national sin in those frequent and repeated endeavours to suppress the purity of it, and tire out the professors thereof: and as a great man saith, they had rather part with the gospel, than part with a rag. And is it not to be observed, that in many of those places where the gospel was powerfully preached in our memories, the very sense of it seems to be worn out? What can be expected, when children throw a precious commodity in the dirt, but that the parents should take it away and lay it in another place, and lash them too for their vanity? God will not obtrude the gospel long against men's wills. When the Gadarenes desired Christ to depart from their coasts, Christ granted their wish and turned his back. When there is no delight in the word, Sabbath, gospel, then comes a famine of the word, Amos viii. 5. After Christ had pronounced a woe upon Bethsaida, Mat. xi. 21, though he came afterwards to the town and had the opportunity of curing a blind man, he would not do it in the town, and commanded him, after he was restored, not to go into the town, nor tell it to any inhabitants of it, Mark viii. 22, 26. He would spill no water upon that ground he had cursed. We shall know God, 'if we follow on to know the Lord.' If we then neglect the knowledge of God, which is the end of the gospel, to what purpose should means of knowledge continue among us? God will not suffer the waters of life to run there, where he sees they will altogether run waste. The gospel hath too much worth, and the honour of God is too much interested in it, to leave it exposed to the injuries of men, without revenging it.

(3.) And what shall I say of the barrenness of the church's womb? How few real converts are there brought forth of the church's womb, and nursed upon the church's knees? God seems to have written barrenness upon her womb, and dryness upon her breasts. Doth not ignorance sway, where before the gospel triumphed? When the ground yields but a faint increase, and answers not the cost and labour of the husbandman, he lays it fallow. The abatement of the powerful workings of the Spirit, is a presage of a removal or dimming the light in the candlestick. When God withdraws gifts from his ministers, and the Spirit from the bearers, it is a sign he will take away that lamp, into which he will pour no more oil.

May we not add to this, the apostasy of the age? Where is the old primitive spirit, I had almost said puritan spirit, that sincere love to all the truths of the gospel, that valuation of all its ordinances? What generous designs are taken up to glorify and propagate it? Here is pride and worldliness, like Balaam's lean kine, devour the fat ones of spiritual duties. How

seldom have we a sense of God, an estimation of Christ, when we speak of him !

(4.) And may not the errors in the nation step in as the occasion of our fears ? Not little petty errors, but errors about the foundation, when the doctrine of justification is not only denied, but scoffed at ; a doctrine which, as it was owned or opposed, was deservedly accounted in the first times of the Reformation, *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesie*.

(5.) What should I speak of the divisions amongst us ? These preceded the ruin of the Jews, and made way for the fall of the seven churches in Asia. By these did Rome grow to that height, as to put a veil upon the gospel, and in most places to extinguish it. The concord of the ancient Christians was the cause of the flourishing progress and increase of the gospel ; when they began to scuffle, their feuds rose to such a height, as threw down the candle which gave them light, and ruined that which the union of the former Christians had strongly built. When children fall out and fight about the candle, the parents come and take it away, and leave them to divide* their differences in the dark.† We may justly fear, God will take away that light which we quarrel by, instead of walking and working by.

(6.) May we not consider also the death of the ablest ministers as a sad prognostic ? Sometimes, indeed, the removal of signal instruments portends a nearness of some great appearance of God. When the people were upon the skirts of Canaan, first Aaron and then Moses are snatched away ; but there were others to succeed in their room : a zealous Phinehas was left behind Aaron, and a courageous Joshua succeeded Moses. Many good men may do things offensive to God, and the work of their generation, for which cause God will not let them live to see the blessings he is bringing upon a people. But, alas, it is often a sign of an approaching judgment. When the Lord gives out his word, 'great is the company of them that publish it,' Ps. lxxviii. 11 ; when the Lord will remove his word, small is the company of them that publish it, till at last not one labourer may be left, because God will not have a harvest to gather in, but leave the place as a wild field to ravenous beasts and the fowls of the air. Methuselah is taken away just before the deluge ; and Ambrose his head was scarce cold in his grave before the Goths invaded and wasted Italy. It was observed by the Jews, that while they were in God's favour, before the sun of one righteous man set, the sun of another righteous man did arise. Before Moses' sun set, Joshua's sun arose ; before Eli's sun set, Samuel's sun arose ; and this, they say, is the meaning of that place, 1 Sam. iii. 9, that before the lamp of God went out, the spirit of prophecy came upon Samuel. Is it thus with us ? Doth a new spring equal the old stock that are gone ? How few do possess a prophet's spirit among them that wear a prophet's garment !

We may well therefore fear an eclipse of the gospel, and many eyes may not see the emerging of it out of that eclipse. It is worth our consideration, that when the spies that were sent to Canaan returned, and gave a good report of the land, the common multitude would not believe them, they would return back to Egypt ; and though they had been lashed for their murmuring, yet after this provocation, and the slighting the good land, and the perfection of the deliverance in the possession of Canaan, God swore the destruction of that generation, Numb. xiv. 21-23 (though because of the word passed he did not deprive their posterity of the enjoyment of the promised land) ; and God never left, till he had swept away that generation, before the people came to Canaan.

Use 2. If the removal of the gospel be so great a judgment, we have

* Qu. 'decide' ?—ED.

† Fuller.

reason to bless God for its continuance so long among us. What a grace is it, that God hath drawn us out of the depths of error and folly, wherein other nations have been plunged so long a time! How mercifully hath God indulged us that which thousands of heathens have wanted, and do to this day! Many in the world never enjoyed it, and many that have had it have now lost it. We have been like Gideon's fleece, wet, while most of the world have been dry. He hath nourished us with heavenly manna, making it to fall every day at our gates, without putting us to much labour to gather it. That ever God should vouchsafe a light to direct us, who are descended from a race of first pagan, and then popish idolaters, plunged in superstition! How criminal will our ingratitude be, if we have not lively resentments of his immense goodness! God hath yet rained upon us, and not upon many of our neighbours, who are under the thickness of popish fogs. We are yet in the way where his blessings be, and where his heavenly manna often falls. How deplorable would our case have been, if we had been starved for want of food! Had the sun been extinguished, and the stars put out, and our residence had been in a gloomy and dolesome world, ignorance might have bemisted our minds, and an implicit faith, we know not in what, have hoodwinked us to damnation; our Bibles might have been as sealed books, and a crime as bad as atheism so much as to peep into the word of God. Traditions might have been mingled with the oracles of God, whereby the wisdom of God would have been blemished; the merits of Christ might have been mated with the merits of men, whereby the grace of God would have been dimmed, and worship given to idols and images, whereby the glory of God would have been rifled. What a ravishing mercy is it, that our brains have not been knocked out by St Peter's successor! that God hath hitherto continued our preservation, when the seal of the fisher had ratified our destruction! Antichristianism leaves men in thick darkness. It is the gospel dispels our ignorance, and disperseth the beams of saving knowledge. It is this which rescues you from despair, by shewing you the doctrine of justification, which heathens could never attain to, and antichristianism would fain expunge out of the world. It is the gospel acquaints you with the fulness of the satisfaction of Christ; whereas antichristianism would fright you with a pretended fire of purgatory, to empty your purses, and defeat your heirs. The gospel teaches you to worship God only; whereas antichristianism would divert your prayers to saints, perhaps to St Garnet and St Fawkes, saints of a new stamp, and saints of so bad a hue, that a sober man would never admit to be his servants. It is the gospel that fills you with peace, that settles you upon the basis of an infinite satisfaction of the Redeemer, that elevates you in a sincere belief, not only above the fears of a pretended purgatory, but of a real hell. It is the gospel that puts you upon a real sanctification, a mortification of lust by the power of Christ's death, and the grace of his Spirit, not by bodily torturings, whereby the soul may be rendered unfit for its proper function in worship. It is the gospel that directs us in an inward holiness of heart, and frees us from being painted tombs and gilded sepulchres. How much ought we to bless God for the continuance of this gospel among us!

3. It should teach us to improve the gospel while we enjoy it. The time of the gospel revelation is the time of working. Good entertainment and good improvement invites the gospel to stay; ill usage drives it out of doors. God hath allowed us his gospel, and set his candlestick among us, but not left it to our discretion to do with it what we please; he hath given it to us, as he did the angel to the Israelites, to comfort and conduct them, Exod.

xxiii. 20, 21 ; but with a caution not to despise and provoke him, because his name was in him.* Let us improve the gospel dispensation to the getting a gospel nature. It is not enough to be within the visible ark ; so was a cursed Ham. Let us not receive the grace of God in vain, but adorn the gospel by a gospel spirit and a gospel practice, and walk as children of light. Let us not trample it under our feet, but put our souls under the efficacy of it, and get from it the foretastes of a heavenly and everlasting life. Let us not loiter while the sun shines, lest we be benighted, bewildered, and misled into quagmires and puddles by some *ignis fatuus*. We cannot command the sun to stand still and attend our pleasure ; it will go its course according to the word of its governor, and listen not to the follies of men, nor stay for their loiterings. Let not an antichristian principle reign in your hearts ; implicit faith is against the improvement of the gospel ; there is as much of it in practice in England as there is of principle in Rome. How many believe as their church, or churchmen believe, without being able to render a reason why they do so ? The gospel was given for every man to study and embrace, to embrace knowingly, not blindly. If we do not increase in knowledge and grace by it, we anticipate the judgment of God ; we remove that from us voluntarily which God accounts the removal of judicially to be the most deplorable misery. If we do not improve and hold fast what we have received and heard, the coming of Christ in a way of revenge will be sudden, like a thief in the night, and we shall not know what hour he will come upon us till we feel the stroke ; I mean not by death, but some sore scourge, for so he speaks to the church of Sardis, the state wherein the church is at this day, Rev. iii. 3.

4. Let us prevent by repentance and prayer the removal or eclipse of the gospel. The loss of your estates, the massacring of your children, the chains of captivity, are a thousand times more desirable than this deplorable calamity. Estates may be recovered, new children raised, fetters may be knocked off, new houses may be reared upon the ashes of the consumed ones, the possession of a country regained, but it is seldom the gospel returns when carried away upon the wings of the wind. God indeed is interested in the preservation of religion and a church, but not in this or that particular church, not among this or that particular people ; rather than want one, he will raise up stones to be children to Abraham. As he will not have his blessings abused, so he will not have his gospel extinguished in all parts of the world, or all parts of this western world. But doth this secure us from any great eclipse ? What if God will not remove his gospel ? may he not suffer many to be infected with popery ? May not many of your friends, children, be tainted with this leprosy, that may prove incurable in them ? What if there be a likelihood that it will not endure long ? If it shall enter upon the stage must we not therefore endeavour to prevent it ? Prophecy is the rule of our foresight, precept is the rule of our duty. What if God will not remove the gospel, may he not bring a sharp persecution ? Is not the enemy at our door ; the rod shaken over our heads ? Have we not gathered the twigs of it ourselves, and formed a scourge for our own backs ? Did we not first let in the serpent's head, and what should we expect but that he will get in his whole body ? What can we expect but that God should begin his judgments at his own house, and scrape the sides of his sanctuary that have been defiled with so much filthiness ? Let us therefore meet God in an humble reforming posture, and lay hold on his strength ; consider where we left him, and do our first work, whence we are fallen, and fallen by our own fault and peevishness, fallen from a zeal for

* Claud de Noces, p. 179.

God, a national endeavour for the propagation of the gospel. Let us desire him, as the disciples that were going to Emmaus did Christ, Luke xxiv. 29, 'Lord, abide with us, for the evening begins to come, and the day is far spent.' Our Saviour did so, and gave them his blessing before he vanished again out of their sight. God may deal so with us, and leave some notable blessing with us, till he comes again to pitch his sanctuary in the midst of us for evermore, as the promise is, Ezek. xxxvii. 28.

Let us therefore seek to him, chiefly to him, only to him; he only can remove the candlestick, he only can put his hand as a bar upon the light; men may be instrumental, but it is Christ only removes the candlestick, and he only can maintain it against the puffs of men and devils. He hath the enemies in a chain, and the full command of their breath. Place no confidence in men, some may have some power to give relief, and will not; others may have will to help, and cannot. If we maintain our feud with God, he will bid the gospel go, and it shall go; if we make our peace with him, he will bid the gospel stay, and it shall stay. As he hath angels to bring, so he hath angels to carry away the everlasting gospel. Remember the threatening in the text is not absolute, there is an *else* and an *except* to mitigate it. 'Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or *else* I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, *except* thou repent.'