

SERMON XII.

BY THE REV. GEORGE HAMOND, A. M.

HOW MAY PRIVATE CHRISTIANS BE MOST HELPFUL TO PROMOTE
THE ENTERTAINMENT OF THE GOSPEL ?*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without.*—Colossians iv. 5.

THE case or question which comes to be spoken unto this morning is, *How may private Christians be most helpful to promote the entertainment of the gospel ?*

We have heard the question ; and, as I conceive, a due attendance unto the words read may lead us far toward the resolution of it : “ Walk in wisdom toward them that are without.” And for that reason was this text chosen. I design not, therefore, to frame a set discourse upon it, but only to lay it as a ground-work to support that which I have to offer toward the answering of the question propounded.

We have before us then a serious exhortation : “ Walk in wisdom toward them that are without.” And therein we may observe,

1. *The persons to whom the apostle doth direct it.*—And they are private Christians. This is apparent, (1.) In that here is no intimation given that he intended any other. Not one of those characters are set upon them whereby the pastors or guides of the church use to be distinguished from the community of believers. (2.) The duties which he exhorts them unto may undoubtedly, and ought to, be performed by private Christians : as, to “ continue” instant “ in prayer,” and to “ watch in the same with thanksgiving.” (Verse 2.) To pray in special for the apostle himself, that he might receive divine assistance, and be blessed with success in the ministry of the gospel. (Verses 3, 4.) To “ walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” (Verse 5.) That their “ speech be alway with grace.” (Verse 6.) With all which the same persons are charged. Now, to “ walk in wisdom toward them that are without,” is a duty of a great latitude. And if it comprehend the promoting of their conversion and salvation, as certainly it doth, (having an aptitude, tendency, and efficacy to help it on,) then must private Christians take themselves to be concerned therein ; for to them is this exhortation directed. And so we have gained a very considerable point.

That we may, from this text, charge the duty upon the consciences of private Christians, in the name and authority of Jesus Christ,

2. *We have an account of the persons with respect to whom, in a special manner, private Christians are counselled to “ walk wisely.”*—And they are described by this periphrasis : “ Them that are without ;”

that is, such as had not as yet entertained the gospel, nor professed subjection to it, but still continued in a state of infidelity. This is clear from 1 Cor. v. 12, 13: "What have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth." The sum whereof is this: that scandalous Christians are to be corrected by church-censures, when milder remedies prove ineffectual. But those flagitious persons who are out of the pale of the church, are to be left to the judgment of God, and of the civil magistrates. Thus we are advanced one step farther; for we have discovered that those to whom private Christians may be very helpful may be such as "are without," that is, Heathen, or infidels; and therefore they must not cast off all care of them.

3. *We are to inquire, What is that special work and business in the disposal and management whereof private Christians are charged?—*To "walk wisely toward them that are without." I suppose, none are so weak as to surmise, that the apostle's intent and meaning was, to caution them to make sure and advantageous bargains when they traded with infidels, who, being false and crafty, might be likely to over-reach them. This was too low for the apostle's spirit. It was something of a more sublime import and tendency; namely, to admonish and excite private Christians so to demean themselves in all things, that they might beget, even in the Heathen themselves, a due veneration for the gospel, and a love and liking of that holy religion which they professed. And, to enforce this his counsel, the apostle did set them a fair example in his own practice: "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." (1 Cor. x. 33.) And hence we learn further, that private Christians, in their negotiations with Heathens and infidels, should not mind only the enriching of themselves, but chiefly the promoting of the conversion of those poor miserable souls to the faith of Jesus Christ.

4. *In order to the winning over of infidels to Christ, private Christians ought sedulously to endeavour to promote the admission of the gospel among them; (for the gospel is the glorious chariot in which Christ is carried about the world;) and, that it may be entertained among them, to procure the preaching of it to them.—*For that is God's method; and the apostle's way of reasoning is clear and strong: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. x. 14, 15.) Here then are many things wherein private Christians may be very helpful: as in seeking out and procuring those who may preach the gospel among them; encouraging and supplying those who give up themselves to that blessed work; in disposing those poor creatures, as much as they may, toward the reception of the gospel, and preventing or removing all impediments that might obstruct their entertainment of it. This shows us in what private Christians should desire and endeavour to be helpful; namely, in promoting the entertainment of the gospel.

5. The last thing, the former four being established and admitted, is to inquire, *How private Christians may be most helpful herein.*—The text gives a general direction when it enjoins them to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without.” And this will administer to us occasion to lay-out this general direction more distinctly and particularly.

Thus, I hope, the opening of the text hath reflected some light upon the question; and all that I have to offer may be gathered up in this

OBSERVATION.

Private Christians, walking “in wisdom toward them that are without,” may be exceeding helpful to promote the entertainment of the gospel among them.

This they may do, and more; for they may be helpful to promote their conversion and salvation. To further the entertainment of the gospel among them, is but the means; to promote their conversion and salvation, is the end; and the means are for the end. Now it is expressly affirmed, that a private believer may save an infidel: “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or, how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” (1 Cor. vii. 16.) That is, the believing party may be induced to cohabit with the unbeliever upon a hopeful prospect, that it is possible to conquer them by love, to attract them to have an esteem for holiness by an exemplary conversation, and to obtain God’s grace for them by ardent prayers, and so be the means of saving their souls. The apostle Peter exhorts Christian women who were yoked with unbelievers, to become eminent for their modesty, chastity, humility, and respectfulness to their husbands, by the same argument: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of their wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.” (1 Peter iii. 1, 2.) Christian graces, being so exercised that they may be seen in their proper lustre, are excellent orators, and have a mighty power to persuade. It is more *to live* virtue, than *to commend* it. Let me have leave to say to “women professing godliness,” as the apostle styles them, (1 Tim. ii. 10,)—O, live to such an eminent pitch of holiness, that ye may raise an admiration of you in the judgments of such as otherwise would have no great reverence for religion, and give them occasion to say, as it is reported that Libanius, a Heathen philosopher, did, *Proh, quales feminas habent Christiani!* “O, what excellent women have these Christians!”

The correspondence between the text and the question having been, as I think, sufficiently insisted upon, I shall now apply myself to give a direct and satisfactory answer to the question propounded. And, that I may speak to it the more intelligibly and profitably, I shall consider,

I. *The persons mentioned in it.*—And they are private Christians.

II. *Their duty and work.*—And that is, to be helpful to promote the entertainment of the gospel.

III. *The way that they are to take, and the means that they are to make use of, that they may be most helpful in the carrying on of that blessed work.*

I. *The persons specified.*—And they are private Christians. In which is intimated, 1. *Their general character, as Christians.* 2. *The restrictive term that is added to denote their special circumstance, as they are private Christians.*—Which limits our inquiries, or calls on us to speak more specially at least of the duty and work of private Christians in the undertaking mentioned in the question.

1. It is supposed, *that Christians only will be willing or proper to be made use of in this holy work.*—We may conclude, that they who reject the gospel, and put away salvation from them, (as those did who are mentioned, Acts xiii. 46,) will never, while they continue in that temper and disposition, promote the entertainment of the gospel, but will endeavour to obstruct and hinder it.

But all Christians, in the most comprehensive latitude, both stand obliged in point of duty, and may also eventually be helpful, to promote the spreading of the gospel, even every one who “nameth the name of Christ,” (2 Tim. ii. 19,) or that is “called by his name,” as, Jer. xiv. 9. Even those Christians as are such only by external profession, though they remain destitute of internal and real sanctification, may be helpful herein by their common gifts, their interests, their services, and by contributing their assistance and encouragement to those who are engaged in this holy work. And they may be influenced by such motives and inducements as may excite and engage them thereunto. Such as these, for aught I know, may be admitted to contribute their help to build the temple of the Lord, and are not to be excluded. For probably Christ’s aphorism, “He that is not against us is on our part,” (Mark ix. 40,) may be understood of such. But how far such may be accepted or rewarded, falls not under our present inquiry. This, I presume, will be admitted by all,—that such only as are Christians indeed (as Christ said of Nathanael, “Behold an Israelite indeed,” John i. 47) are the only persons who are rightly principled and will be found sincerely affected to this blessed work, and will be most vigorously active in carrying it on. This may suffice touching the persons under their general character as Christians.

2. *Their special circumstance, as they are private Christians.*—Whereby they are distinguished from such as are invested with public offices. Such are *Christian rulers and magistrates*, who are the ministers of God, who bear the sword; and such as are called to preach the gospel, who are *ministers of the word*. I confess, these come not directly within the compass of our question, for that concerns private Christians; neither yet ought they wholly to be excluded out of it, because they are Christians, and therefore are not silently to be passed over. And so I shall say something, yet but little, of them. Doubtless both Christian magistrates and ministers of the gospel are as much obliged, in point of duty, to promote the

entertainment of the gospel, as private Christians; and they may do more, because they have greater advantages put into their hands; for that is a rule laid down by our Saviour himself: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." (Luke xii. 48.)

(1.) *For Christian rulers.*—When their hearts are thoroughly knit to Christ in faith and love, and they act upon gospel-principles, and according to the rules thereof, what wonderful things may they perform toward the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ in the world! If a poor bond-slave, who lies in the lowest rank of men, may in his station "serve the Lord Christ," (Col. iii. 24,) what eminent services may princes and potentates do him, who are placed in the highest rank of men, and dignified with the title of "gods!" (Psalm lxxxii. 6.) The zeal of Constantine the Great for the Christian religion is praised by more than are disposed to imitate it; but when those who have given their strength and power to the beast shall hate the whore, and make her desolate, and devote their crowns and sceptres to the Lamb, we may hope for those blessed days wherein the light of the gospel shall shine forth so gloriously as to illustrate the whole world. This should excite all private Christians to pray hard, that God would put it into the hearts of kings, and those who are in authority, to "kiss the Son," by whom they reign.

(2.) *As for the ministers of the gospel.*—All they who understand and attend unto their office and duty, must acknowledge that they are under the strictest and most forcible engagements in the world to lay out themselves entirely, and to the uttermost of their capacity, to serve the Lord Jesus, and to help forward the enlargement of his kingdom. And yet it is not the duty and work of every ordinary minister to go up and down the world to preach the gospel for the conversion of the Heathen, as the apostles and evangelists did: "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation;" (Rom. xv. 20;) because they are commanded by Christ to attend upon their proper flocks. (Acts xx. 28; 1 Peter v. 1, 2.) But what measures they are to take farther, or what methods they are to pursue, to promote the spreading of the gospel, is indeed a very Christian and noble inquiry; at the debate whereof I should most gladly stand as a silent learner, and not presume to be a director. However, I hope it will be excusable, if I offer one thing to the consideration of those whose piety and learning may challenge a due esteem in the hearts of all that fear God. We have had among us committees for the encouragement and increase of trade. And what, if there were some to consult how the gospel might be propagated? The Papists have at Rome their *Congregatio de propagandâ Fide*. ["College for the Propagation of the Faith."] Their design may be very ill, while they contrive not how that "faith which was once delivered to the saints" may be propagated, but how the leaven of their own superstition may be diffused, and especially how the pope's kingdom may be enlarged. And yet to deliberate how the gospel of the grace of God may be carried into the dark corners of the earth, for the conversion and

salvation of them who are ready to perish, and so the kingdom of Christ get ground in the world, is, I am sure; a most holy and excellent design; and so I recommend this also to the prayers of godly, private Christians.

These few things being suggested touching those Christians who bear a public character, I now shall address myself to all godly, private Christians; and I must exhort and beseech them, with all the fervour I can, to set their hearts sincerely upon this glorious work, and to bestir themselves in it with all their might. This belongs to every Christian, as such, in what circumstances soever the providence of God doth dispose of them, whether they be high or low, noble or base, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, male or female: none are to be excluded or exempted.

But it is likely this may seem strange to many private Christians, that they should be charged, in the name of Christ, to be helpful to promote the spreading of the gospel all the world over. "Alas!" will one say, with the eunuch, "I am a dry tree;" (Isai. lvi. 3;) "and no such fruit is to be expected from me." "And I," will another say, "am but a cipher, and make no figure in the world, as the phrase goes; and therefore I can signify nothing." But let me beseech all private Christians to take heed of shifting off from themselves any duty or service that Christ calls them to, or would employ them in; and to suspend their determination a little, until I have showed them, as Christ shall enable me, how and wherein private Christians may be helpful in this great and good work. And then, I hope, they will see that they may do much more therein than possibly they have hitherto apprehended.

II. The Second thing mentioned is *their duty and work*.—Which is, to be helpful in promoting the entertainment of the gospel.

III. And the Third thing is, *how or in what ways and by what means they may be most helpful in it*.

But, for dispatch-sake, I shall speak to both these conjunctly.

Now, that I may proceed herein the more clearly and profitably, I think it may be useful to place private Christians, according to their several circumstances and capacities, as to the matter now under consideration, in three ranks or orders.

(I.) *There are many private Christians who live very remote from such places and people as have not the gospel preached unto them, or at least have not hitherto entertained it.*

(II.) *There are some private Christians who may occasionally go into, or may providentially be cast into, such places.*

(III.) *There are some private Christians who live among such people, in a more fixed or constant residence.*—As in our factories abroad, or in our plantations in the Indies, or other Heathen places.

Now, though it be the duty of all private Christians to promote the entertainment of the gospel; yet all cannot take the same measures, nor be active in the same ways. And therefore it may be to very good purpose to let each of them to see wherein their proper work doth lie, that they may contribute their assistance accordingly.

(I.) *Most of the private Christians among us live very remote from those people who have not as yet entertained the gospel.*—And so they cannot be helpful unto them by personal instruction or counsel; neither can they attract them by the example of their holy conversation. And yet they may greatly contribute toward the promoting of the entertainment of the gospel among them. And that they may do several ways: For instance:

1. *They may, and ought to, pray in faith, that the gospel may be sent among them, that it may be received by them, and be blessed to the conversion and salvation of all that are ordained to eternal life among them.*—For, such prayers being according to the will of God, they may be confident that he heareth them. (1 John v. 14.) And that God requireth and expecteth such prayers from them, cannot be unknown to any who acquaint themselves with the scriptures.

For, (1.) Our Lord Jesus Christ recommendeth this matter to the prayers of private Christians: “Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” (Matt. ix. 37, 38.) Here we may take notice,

(i.) That by the metaphor or allegory of a harvest our Saviour would instruct us, that as, when the corn is ripe, men use to employ reapers to cut it down and gather it in; so there are some blessed seasons wherein God hath decreed to send the gospel among a people, and accordingly prepares and disposeth them for the reception of it, and raiseth in them a propensity and strong affection toward it. Thus it was when John the Baptist came and preached that “the kingdom of heaven” was “at hand;” (Matt. iii. 2;) and it follows, in verse 5, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.” And our Saviour sets a special remark upon that time: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matt. xi. 12.) When therefore ye hear that the day of the gospel begins to dawn in any of the dark corners of the earth, then lift up a prayer that the grace and power of the Spirit may accompany it, and make it successful.

(ii.) Our Saviour teacheth you to pray that the labourers may be increased proportionably to the work; as when he saith, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.” Pray then that God would employ such as are skilful and industrious; such as Paul describes, 2 Tim. ii. 15: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth:” and pray that God would employ such a number of them as is sufficient for the work. A reverend person among us hath for many years complained, that in many places where there is but one to labour in the ministerial work; there is enough for three or four, though all of them be very industrious. But it seems that men either cannot or will not make better provision.

(iii.) Private Christians, when they perceive how the case stands, should be importunate with God, that he would “send forth labourers

into his harvest;" "send them" by the efficacious word of his power; *ὅπως εκβαλη, ut ejiciat, vel extrudat*, "thrust them out" by his grace working in them, and his providence ordering of circumstances concerning them. It is no wonder if flesh and blood shrink from the employment of carrying the Lord's message to a barbarous people. Moses would fain have been excused from going into Egypt; and he multiplied evasions and pretensions till the Lord was angry with him. (Exod. iii. 10—14; iv. 1, 10, 13, 14.) When the Lord sent Paul to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, that he might hearten him for that difficult and dangerous work, he promised him protection: "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." (Acts xxvi. 17, 18.) They stand in need of a mighty presence of God with them *who* have just cause to fear, that those people will seek their death to whom they bring the word of life and salvation. I thought this scripture so apposite to the matter in hand, and so directive to private Christians, that it may plead my excuse for this enlargement upon it.

(2.) That private Christians may be sure to mind it, our Saviour hath put it into the rule of prayer: "Thy kingdom come." (Matt. vi. 10.) I have read, that it is one of the Jews' maxims, touching prayer, *Ista oratio, in quâ non est memoria regni Dei, non est oratio*; "That prayer in which there is no mention made of the kingdom of God, is no prayer at all." When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we beg that the gospel, which is the rod of Christ's power and the sceptre of his government, may spread all the world over. For where the gospel is believed and obeyed, there doth Christ reign over fallen man as Mediator.

(3.) The saints, under the Old Testament, prayed for the calling and conversion of the Gentiles under the gospel-dispensation: "That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee." (Psalm lxxvii. 2, 3.)

(4.) When, by the preaching of the gospel in any place, the people were wrought upon, and brought to believe in Christ, they were exhorted to pray that the word of the Lord might be carried to all other parts of the Gentile world: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you." (2 Thess. iii. 1.) And such prayers are not to be thought to be lost, or put up to God in vain. That prediction or promise, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," (Rom. xvi. 20,) did doubtless excite many a prayer; and that promise was eminently accomplished, and those prayers which were grounded upon it, and put up to God in faith, took effect, when the kingdom of Satan, administered in the idolatries of the Gentiles, was laid waste, and the Christian profession was advanced, by Constantine the Great. Having now so inviting an occasion offered to me, give me leave to present a request to you; and it shall be in the words of

the apostle: "Brethren, pray for us," (1 Thess. v. 25,) for those "who labour" among you "in the word and doctrine." (1 Tim. v. 17.) And I hope I may without vanity enforce this request by the same apostle's argument or motive: "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." (Heb. xiii. 18.) Many reflect upon us with disparagement; and we are very sensible of our own many and great infirmities. But help us with your prayers, that we may be better, live better, and preach better. It is no paradox, but a well-weighed truth, that a godly private Christian, upon his knees in his closet, may assist the minister in his study and in the pulpit. And that I may prevail in my request, I can assure you, that whatsoever gifts or graces ye obtain from God for your ministers by your prayers, they will come as blessings upon yourselves; like the vapours that rise from the earth, being concocted in the middle region, fall down upon it again in fruitful showers: "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." (1 Cor. xiii. 21, 22.) If any say, this is a digression from the case which I was to speak to, I would entreat them to consider what is the general scope and design of it, and they will find that it comports very well with it. Once I am sure,—that it is as much the duty and concernment of private Christians to pray for the success of the gospel, that it may be blessed to the conversion and salvation of souls in England, as that it may be preached, entertained, believed, and obeyed in the uttermost parts of the earth.

And so I will return to prosecute my discourse with two remarks:—

First. That, from what hath been said touching the prayers of private Christians for the spreading of the gospel, we may be assured, that *God hath determined to bestow those mercies for which he commands his people to pray.*—And more than that: He usually bestows them, in the disposal of his providence, upon the intervention of his people's prayers, as may be collected from Ezek. xxxvi. 25: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." (Verse 27.) "I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the Heathen;" (verse 30;) compared with verse 37: "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."

Secondly. *That no godly private Christian can object against his duty, in praying that the gospel may be carried to all nations, and be entertained by them, nor allege any excuse or pretence why they should be exempted from it.*—If any hesitate, let me expostulate the matter with their consciences. Have ye received the Spirit of Christ as the Spirit of grace and supplication? and can ye not pray? Do ye feel the love of Christ warming, stirring, and constraining your hearts? and will ye not pray? Ye dearly value the glory of God, and sincerely desire

that the "earth" may "be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;" (Isai. xi. 9;) and can ye refrain from praying, that this may be performed? Ye tenderly compassionate the miserable condition of poor, perishing souls; and will ye not afford them so much as your prayers, that they may be relieved? Are ye not greatly affected with the distinguishing grace of God, in bringing the gospel to you, and opening your hearts to receive it? How then can ye offer up your praises to God for so signal a mercy, without making some reflection on the deplorable state of those who have not as yet obtained the like favour, without lifting up a prayer for them, that they may be made partakers of the same grace?

Or will ye reply, *that you do pray, indeed, that God would visit the Heathen world with the gospel of salvation; but ye cannot think that your prayers will contribute much toward so great and good a work?*—Suffer me to debate this also a little with you. Why will you reproach the spirit and grace of prayer in saying it can avail little or nothing? when God himself saith, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James v. 16.) Those prayers which can mount as high as heaven, are able also to reach the ends of the earth. Why will ye by your disobedience, as much as in you lies, make void the commandments of Christ? Doth not he expressly charge you to "pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest?" and to pray that his "kingdom" may "come?" And will ye say, that the Lord Christ doth enjoin his servants to do that which is insignificant and impertinent? Why will you, by your unbelief, go about to make the promises of God of none effect? Whenas he himself hath assured us, that "he will fulfil the" regular "desires of them that fear him;" (Psalm cxlv. 19;) and that whatsoever "we ask according to his will, he heareth us." (1 John v. 14.) For ever, then, beware of entertaining that temptation which is formed and cherished in the hearts of the ungodly, who say unto God, "What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" (Job xxi. 15.) I shall close this, when I have added, that were the prayers of private godly Christians more frequent, intense, and importunate for the spreading of the gospel, it would be a hopeful indication, that the gospel is about, through the blessing of God, to find better entertainment in the world than it hath done of later years.

This may suffice to have been spoken touching the first way and means wherein private Christians, who live remote from those places where the gospel is not entertained, may be helpful to promote the spreading of it, that it may be brought to them; namely, by the prayers which they put up to God in faith for the propagation of it.

2. The second way and means whereby private Christians, who live remote from those places whither the gospel is not yet come, may promote the reception of it among them is, *by a ready, cheerful, and liberal contribution of supplies and encouragements to them who labour in that holy work.*—And here the different abilities and capacities of private Christians are to be considered. They who are rich may cast

in much into the Lord's treasury; and for the proportion, the apostle's rule and measure should be attended unto: "Every one, as God hath prospered him." (1 Cor. xvi. 2.) When the tabernacle was to be made, every one brought something. They who had gold, silver, and precious stones, offered them; they who could bring but rams' skins, and badgers' skins, were accepted. And those good women who had nothing to bring, did yet spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, and they also were accounted and recorded among the contributors. What private Christian is there who can afford nothing? They who subsist by the labour of their hands should spare something for works of piety and charity. (Eph. iv. 28.)

To excite and encourage you to comply with this direction, I shall lay before you several examples, which will show you how practical and acceptable a work this is.

(1.) Private Christians were helpful to our Lord Jesus Christ himself, in his preaching of the gospel, in the days of his flesh, upon earth. Though "all things were made by him," and he upholds them "by the word of his power," and so "the earth is his, and the fulness thereof;" "yet for our sakes he became poor," and was pleased to receive provisions for his subsistence from some godly women, "who ministered to him of their substance." (Luke viii. 1—3.)

(2.) The apostle Paul records it to the praise of the Philippians, that they were careful of him, and made provision for him, not only when he laboured among them, and when he was in bonds for preaching the gospel, (and I heartily wish, that all private Christians among us, yea, and such as glory in their profession, would keep pace with them so far,) but also when he was employed in the service of the Lord, among such as were then strangers to Christ and the gospel: "Now, ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." (Phil. iv. 15, 16.)

(3.) St. John, drawing up the fair character of Gaius, a private Christian, placeth this as a beautiful flower in his garland, that he was hospitable and liberal to those who, for Christ's "name's sake, went forth" preaching the gospel among the Gentiles, "taking nothing of them." (3 John 5—7.) Let private Christians take notice, that the name of Gaius and his charity are registered in the sacred scripture; and if their disposition and practice be like to his, theirs also shall be written in Christ's "book of remembrance:" "He that receiveth," and so he that encourageth, "a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." (Matt. x. 41, 42.)

(4.) Take notice, that it stands as a blot in the escutcheon of the Corinthians, that they were altogether for *εὐαγγέλιον ἀδαπανον*, *gratuitum evangelium*, "a gospel that should cost them nothing." Corinth was the most convenient, and so the most frequented, port for trade in all Greece. The inhabitants are said to have been very wealthy, proud, and voluptuous. They had abundance to spend upon themselves, but could find nothing for Paul, while he resided among them, and preached the gospel to them. For this the apostle makes a very mild, but a very close, reflection upon them; enough to make their consciences to start, if they had any spiritual life and sense, and their faces to blush, if they retained any sparks of ingenuity in them: "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself." (2 Cor. xi. 8, 9.) It is a sad word, but too frequently experienced, that a faithful minister of Christ may labour, and yet live in want, in a wealthy city. And I think it cannot be rationally supposed, that such as suffer those to want who labour among them, will be very forward with their purses to assist them who preach the gospel to infidels, in the remote parts of the world.

Upon this head give me leave to say a little, as I did upon the former. London doth out-shine Corinth in trade. God grant that it may still flourish in wealth, and yet be preserved from those vices which are the usual attendants of it! May London ever have the Corinthians' advantages, and the Philippians' spirit! It will be, I hope, to the praise of God, and of many of London's citizens, to recollect what hath been done here to help-on the propagation of the gospel in New-England; and I hope also, that the care of that work is not extinct, but will revive as there may be a necessity and opportunity for it.

When I showed how private Christians might be helpful to promote the gospel by their prayers, I made a request to you, that ye would not fail to befriend those who preach it at home with your prayers, that they may receive grace and assistance from God, and be blessed with success. And now I shall take the liberty to present another to you, in the behalf of many who preach the gospel among us. Your contributions for Wales, and the collection made at Pinner's-Hall, for the encouragement of several poor ministers in the country, have afforded matter of rejoicing to many; and, I doubt not, have drawn forth many praises and prayers to God on your behalf; and let me beseech you, be not weary of well-doing, in this instance. The apostle found that professors are as likely to faint and tire in works of charity, (especially if they be frequent,) as in any Christian duty whatsoever; and therefore he fixeth his counsel and encouragement there: "And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Gal. vi. 9.) Bear with me, if, in special, I commend to your care those whom the providence of God hath disposed of in

good market-towns and corporations. Possibly some may think, that such are well enough provided for. But many find, that the Corinthian temper hath not left the world. Even in good towns, ministers may preach and want. I think I shall not speak beside the purpose, if I shut up this with, "If any provide not for his own, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. v. 8.)

This may suffice to have been spoken touching the second means whereby private Christians, who live remote from such places as have not entertained the gospel, may be helpful toward the bringing of it among them.

3. The third way wherein private Christians, who live far from those places where the gospel is not entertained, may be helpful to promote the admission of it among them, is *to use their interest in those who, on several occasions, may go to such places, by importunate persuasions and pertinent directions to excite them to carry a love and zeal for Christ in their own hearts, and from that principle to act, to the uttermost of their capacity, for the spreading of his gospel, and the enlargement of his kingdom.*—It was, I think, a good design of Hugo Grotius, who, as he tells us, wrote his book "Of the Verity of the Christian Religion" for the use of his countrymen who sail to the uttermost ends of the earth, to furnish them with proper arguments, which might leave a due impression thereof upon the hearts of the poor Heathen. Private Christians may also write to their friends who live abroad, to endeavour to convince the miserable captives of Satan, that their idols are vanities. This course did the prophet Jeremy take, to excite and direct the Jews who were in Babylon, how they should deal with those among whom the providence of God had cast them: "Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens." (Jer. x. 11.) It is observed by learned men, that this verse is written in the Chaldee tongue, though the rest of the book be written in Hebrew; whereby he doth, as it were, put the words into their mouths, that they might speak to them in their own language, so as to be understood by them; and by this he doth instruct us, that it is not sufficient for the worshippers of the true God to keep themselves from the pollutions of idols, but they must do more; for they must make profession of the true God and his worship. The like course may private Christians take, to promote the conversion of the ignorant, earthly, and profane at home, with whom they have no personal converse; and that is, to stir up others who have that advantage, to deal with them about the everlasting concerns of their souls.

Thus I have spoken something touching the case of such private Christians as come within the first circumstance; namely, such as live remote from the places where the gospel is not entertained; and in what ways they may be helpful in order to their reception of it.

(II.) I proceed to consider the case of such private Christians as occasionally or providentially are brought among those people who have not entertained the gospel; and to show how they may be helpful in

bringing them into acquaintance with the doctrine of salvation.—Let none pretend, that because this work doth specially belong to the ministers of Christ, thereupon private Christians are exempted or discharged from that which God hath made their duty. Let none think to excuse themselves by saying, they are not learned; for *they* are a reproach to Christianity, *who* have not learned the essentials of their religion; and the enforcing and inculcating of these, must lead the way in the conversion of infidels. Let none say, they have enough to do to mind their own business; for I doubt not but if they minded the interest of Christ more, their own would prosper the better. But if they drive on any design that is contrary to the faith or precepts of the gospel, it will be found their duty and safety to extricate themselves out of it as soon as they can. If they suggest, that it would be a vain thing for them to expect or attempt to do any good among infidels, that will be found to be only the sluggard's plea: "There is a lion in the way." (Prov. xxvi. 13.) He who hath no heart to an undertaking, will not fail to lay in his own way huge mountains of insuperable difficulties. But, to prevent or remove all evasions, it shall be proved, that among private Christians, if we may judge by circumstances or visible appearance, few or none, if they really be such as they profess themselves, do labour under such disadvantages or improbabilities of succeeding in their attempts of recommending Christ and his gospel, as many of those were under, whom yet the Lord made use of, and eventually blessed, in communicating the knowledge of Himself to such as were before strangers to him.

To manifest this, I shall produce four examples,—two out of the holy scriptures, and two out of ecclesiastical history. Out of the holy scriptures, one shall be out of the Old Testament, the other out of the New.

1. *Out of the Old Testament.*—It is surprising and astonishing to observe what a glorious work the Lord brought about, by the instrumentality of a little captive maid, whom the Syrians had brought out of the land of Israel. Read 2 Kings v. 2—19, the brief summary whereof is this: The poor little girl, waiting on her lady, dropped a few words: "Would God my lord were with the prophet in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Another takes up those words, and reports them to Naaman. Many such discourses are breathed and expire in the same moment. The more wonderful is the conduct of God's providence, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will. I may accommodate to this case what was spoken upon a very different account: "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James iii. 5.) For, by various steps, the conversion of Naaman was at last accomplished; and, considering his character and interest, we may probably conjecture, that his example and counsel might prevail with others also to turn from idols, and to serve the living and true God. We cannot well pass by this strange and remarkable instance, without staying so long as to observe,

(1.) That this little girl appears to have been seasoned with the knowledge of the true God, and to have been acted, in what she said,

by a principle of faith. This she showed by her confidence, that God would work a miracle by his own prophet and servant, Elisha ; for it was he whom she intended, as the sequel discovers. Samaria was then, like Athens, a “ city wholly given to idolatry ;” therein had Ahab built an altar and an house for Baal, and he had four hundred and fifty priests to attend his worship. The inhabitants may well be supposed to have been generally of the court-religion : only some few resorted to Elisha, and they, it is likely, in a more private way. We read of the good woman of Shunem, (2 Kings iv. 22, 23,) that was one of his disciples ; and this girl seems to have been of that way. Happy are those young ones upon whom the fear of God makes early impressions !

(2.) God opened the way to Naaman’s conversion by a little maid. The weaker the means, the more is God’s power glorified.

(3.) A few good words, dropped occasionally, may operate very successfully, especially when they are suitable and seasonable. (Prov. xv. 11.) Let private Christians mind this.

(4.) A poor little maid, carried into captivity, opened the way to the conversion of one of the greatest personages in the country. It is very lamentable to hear so frequently of men and women, boys and girls, carried away captives by Turks and Tartars. But who can tell whether God may not, in his own good time, by some or other of them, convey the knowledge of Christ to some perishing souls ? This may suffice touching the example produced out of the Old Testament.

2. *The example out of the New Testament shall be of those who were driven out of Jerusalem, in the persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen.*—Of whom ye may read, Acts viii. 4 : “ Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” in the strange countries whither Providence led them ; and a wonderful blessing went along with them, as ye may see, Acts xi. 19—21 : “ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them ; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” These were private Christians, for any thing that appears to the contrary. And what they did was no more than every private Christian regularly may, and in duty ought to, do, if the criticism of the late learned annotator be allowed, who saith, that “ though *ευαγγελιζεσθαι* and *κηρυσσειν* do materially signify the same thing, yet, perhaps, they differ in the manner. For *ευαγγελιζεσθαι* is a work that lies in common : any Christian may “ publish the glad tidings of the gospel,” and give a relation of our Lord Jesus Christ’s doctrine, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, &c., which was permitted to be done by women themselves. But *κηρυσσειν*, “ to proclaim the gospel as heralds” appointed and authorized thereunto by Jesus Christ ; this is proper to the ministers of the gospel, and belongs to their office.” Upon this, I shall leave one remark only,—that it were greatly to be wished, that

all such as for their adherence to the gospel are, by persecution, driven from their habitations and countries, were persons of the same spirit with those who were scattered abroad from Jerusalem, such as bring the grace and word of God with them whithersoever they come; so would they prove great blessings to all that receive them. This may suffice to have been spoken of the New-Testament instance.

To the examples taken out of the holy scriptures, I shall subjoin two also out of ecclesiastical history.

1. The one is related by Ruffinus, who gives this account of the conversion of the kingdom of the Iberians to the faith. "There was," saith he, "a certain poor woman, who had been taken captive, and lived among them. She was, at first, taken notice of for her sobriety and modesty; and then, for her spending so much time in prayer. These raised a great admiration of her in the minds of the barbarians. At last they brought to her a sick child, which, upon her prayers, was restored to health. This spread her fame abroad, so that the queen of the country was brought to her, and by her prayers recovered. Whereupon the king and kingdom were won over to Christ; and the king sent to Constantine the Great, for some to instruct them farther in the Christian religion."* The holy conversation and the ardent devotions of private Christians, are excellent means to recommend the gospel, and to represent it as most amiable and desirable.

2. The other is of Frumentius and Ædesius. These, being Christians, were left young in one of the kingdoms of the Inner India, and were, after some time, for their excellent parts and unspotted life, honoured and employed by the queen of the country, during the minority of her son. In process of time, some Roman merchants came to traffic among them. Then Frumentius, understanding that there were some Christians among them, invited them to reside with him, and provided a place for them where they might offer up their prayers to God, after the Christian manner; and himself, having obtained leave of the queen, went to Athanasius, in Alexandria, requesting him to send some bishop to that kingdom, to promote the farther entertainment of the gospel among them, to which they were well inclined, and disposed for the reception of it. Athanasius ordained Frumentius himself, who returned, and, by God's blessing, met with wonderful success.† If providence shall bring these lines to the view of Christian travellers, merchants, and mariners, who come among the poor Heathen, let the examples laid before them excite and encourage them to use their endeavours to bring them to the knowledge of Christ, and the entertainment of the gospel.

Thus much touching the case of those private Christians who occasionally or provisionally may come to, or be brought to, those places where the gospel is not entertained as yet.

(III.) *Such private Christians as live, in a more settled way, among the Indians and other heathen nations, and were placed in the third*

* RUFFINI *Hist. Eccl.* lib. i. cap. 10. † *Idem, ibid.* lib. i. cap. 9; SOCRATIS *Eccl. Hist.* lib. i. cap. 15; SOZOMENUS, lib. ii. cap. 23.

rank or order, come to have their case to be considered, *how they may be most helpful to promote the entertainment of the gospel.*

To assist those whose hearts the Lord shall bow over to mind this excellent work, I shall lay before them two directions :—

First. *They must carefully avoid all those things that have a proper tendency to alienate their minds and affections from the gospel, or to exasperate them against it.*

Secondly. *They must endeavour to use such means, and to take such courses, as have an aptitude to beget in them an esteem and veneration for the gospel, and so dispose them to embrace it.*

First. They who design and endeavour to win upon others, and to dispose them for the reception of the gospel, *must carefully avoid all such things as have an aptitude to alienate them from it.* I shall exemplify this direction in some instances ; as,

1. *Private Christians must prevent or suppress all bitter contentions among themselves.*—It is sad to observe, that differences among brethren are usually managed with such mutual accusations and reproaches, as make the name of Christians despicable or odious, especially to those who are prejudiced against them. Contentions and animosities among Christians break out on two occasions :—

(1.) *There may quarrels arise about earthly things.*—What can Heathens think of them, when they see them to malign and worry one another, for such things as their own philosophy hath taught them to make little account of? Abraham was very apprehensive of the evil consequences that might have attended the strife between his and Lot's herdsmen, probably about their pasturage, or watering-places ; and therefore he would not insist upon such pleas as he might reasonably have alleged on his own side, but stifled the contention, and sought an amicable composure, because he dreaded the scandal which would have been given to the Heathen by their brabbles. This is suggested : "The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt in the land." (Gen. xiii. 7—9.) The contentions and wranglings of the Corinthians, about things that appertain to this life, and their going to law for them, especially the bringing of their suits before heathen tribunals, was to cast reproach on the Christian religion, as the apostle intimates. (1 Cor. vi. 1, 2.) How can Christians, without blushing, and confuting themselves, persuade others to embrace the gospel, which teacheth them to "set their affections on things above, and not on things on the earth?" (Col. iii. 2;) to have their hearts crucified toward the world ; and yet, for the sake thereof, to violate all the precepts, and to despise all the promises, of the gospel, and, like dogs that fight about a bone, to tear out one another's throats, in their rage and fury? We may, then, conclude, that men in whom a worldly spirit is predominant, are very unfit to recommend the gospel unto others.

(2.) *The cross sentiments which men espouse and vindicate in things wherein religion seems to be concerned, have begotten the widest breaches, and the most furious contentions, that were ever found among Christians.*—If we inquire, "What spark hath kindled this raging fire?" we shall often find, that this earnest contending is not for that "faith

which was once delivered to the saints ;” but a dispute “ who shall be greatest ;” (Jude 3 ; Mark ix. 34 ;) or, it may be, about something that is dark, doubtful, or unnecessary, or about some undetermined mode. Or, possibly, as in some great conflagrations, we see the fire preys upon and devours all, and yet we know not who kindled it, or how it began. This is and must be for a lamentation. Once I am sure,—the divisions among Christians, and the bitter zeal which manageth their controversies about religion, is a mighty impediment and obstruction, that stops the progress of the gospel. In the writings of the ancients we find that the Heathen fortified themselves in their infidelity, and resisted the arguments and persuasions of those who recommended the faith of the gospel to them, with this objection : “ Ye Christians are not agreed among yourselves. Ye are broken into many sects and factions. Ye confute and condemn one another : therefore it is more advisable for us to continue as we are, than to leave our present station, before we know where to fix with any assurance that we are in the right.” All that I am able to do at present, for the removal of this scandal, is to beseech private Christians in the bowels of Christ, to value, love, and “ follow after the things that make for peace.” (Rom. xiv. 19.) For I fear the gospel will hardly get ground in the world, until the Spirit of love, reigning, and acting the hearts of those that profess it, do open the way for it. In the first planting of it, the concord of believers did greatly contribute to its entertainment. (Acts ii. 42.) It became a proverbial speech touching Christians : *Ecce, quàm se diligunt invicem!* “ Behold, how they love one another !” This is a subject that cannot be too much insisted upon, nor too zealously enforced. I account them excellent and happy persons indeed, who have a right to bear that motto, *Beati pacifici* [“ Blessed are the peace-makers”].

This may suffice touching *the first obstruction* that hinders the entertainment of the gospel.

2. *It is apparent, that they do not promote but obstruct the entertainment of the gospel, who would obtrude on those whom they persuade to embrace it, such things to be believed, or practised, as a part of their religion, as are nowhere to be found in it ; much more, if they be directly contrary to it.*—For instance : the gospel doth expressly determine that God only is to be the object of religious worship. (Matt. iv. 10.) How then can *they* recommend the gospel, *who* tell their proselytes, that they may admit mere creatures to be sharers with God in that worship which is appropriated to him ? The gospel saith, that “ there is but one Lord, Mediator between God and man ;” (1 Cor. viii. 6 ; 1 Tim. ii. 5 ;) and yet, there are these, who pretend to win over men to the gospel, who tell them, they must conjoin angels and departed saints with Christ in his office and work of Mediator. The gospel severely chargeth all those who believe it, to “ flee from idolatry ;” (1 Cor. x. 14 ; 1 John v. 21 ;) which is the enforcement of the second commandment : “ Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image,” &c. (Exod. xx. 4.) What then can they whom they are to instruct think of it, when they see them, in profound

devotion, to creep to, fall down before, and worship, images? especially when, upon that very account, it is notorious, that Jews and Mahometans abhor the gospel, upon a supposition that the worship of images is either taught or allowed therein. If I may have leave to declare my apprehensions, I must say that the gospel, propounded in its own native purity and simplicity, as our Lord Jesus Christ delivered it, and as they who were divinely inspired have recorded it, without any additional supplements or foreign mixtures, is the most effectual way that God hath appointed, and promised to bless, for the subduing of the world to Jesus Christ. And I should beseech those who endeavour the conversion of Heathens, to press nothing upon them (except the pre-supposed light and law of nature, right reason and discipline, to cultivate, civilize, and prepare them) save the naked truths, ordinances, and rules of the gospel, in all plainness and simplicity.

So much for the *second obstruction*.

3. *To symbolize or comply with those whom we would persuade to embrace the gospel in their superstitious customs and observances, is not the way to promote the entertainment of it, but to obstruct it.*—Under the name of “customs,” I do not comprehend the using of the same diet, or wearing the same stuff or fashion in apparel; for possibly the temperature of the climate, and other considerations, may make them necessary. Nor do I mean merely political customs, which are subservient to public order, justice, and tranquillity. But I intend superstitious customs and observances, wherein somewhat of religion or sanctity is placed. There are some things which may pass in the rank of indifferent, in their own nature, which yet become superstitious, when men place religion or holiness in them. It is well known, that Tertullian wrote his book, *De Coronâ Militis*, to justify the practice of a Christian soldier, who refused to wear a crown or garland of leaves on his head, because the Gentiles were wont to go so adorned in their solemnities and processions, accounting it a religious rite. But, in regard that the Jesuits are reported to practise and applaud their method of compliance with their converts, as they call them, in India or China, and other places, so far as to allow them to retain their pa-gods, and to worship them, with some mental reservations, and the right direction of their intentions; it will be necessary to say something more of this, because I have mentioned it as an obstruction that hinders the entertainment of the gospel.

I shall therefore briefly set before you,

(1.) *What we may collect from the authority of the scripture touching the case we are upon.*

(2.) *What have been the sentiments of some in after-ages.*

(1.) *What the scripture hath determined touching the compliance of the people of God with the superstitious customs of the Heathen.*—Whether it be in the way of approbation or allowance of them, or of symbolizing and conforming to them, though under the pretence of taking that course to gain them over to the true religion. As an example: I suppose that none will deny, that it was the duty of the Jews, to endeavour to proselyte others to the faith and worship of the

true God. Let us then observe what God did prescribe in order thereunto. Did he allow them to imitate their rites or customs? No; but quite contrary: he severely chargeth, that in no wise they should symbolize with them, lest they should be entangled or corrupted with their manners. (Deut. xii. 30, 31.) Learned men have bestowed much study and diligence to find out the reasons of many injunctions and prescriptions which God appropriated to the Jews. In some of them, they have clearly discovered a typical use, that they prefigured Christ or his church. In others, they find virtue and morality to be instilled. In others, provision to be made for health, decency, &c. But for several of them, they have resolved that God imposed them on purpose to set them at a greater distance from idolaters; and to guard them from those evil impressions which the familiarizing of their customs might make upon them: as, they might not wear a garment of linen and woollen wrought together; (Deut. xxii. 11;) because, as is said, the Egyptians used such. So they were forbidden to "round the corners of their head," or to "mar the corners of their beard;" (Lev. xix. 27;) because idolaters, and particularly the Egyptians, were so trimmed. It seems also, that other nations, who offered up their hair to their demons, out of devotion, were polled after some such manner. It is undeniable, as might be argued from these and several other reasons, that it was utterly unlawful for the Jews to symbolize with the Heathen in their superstitious rites. Neither is there a greater latitude for Christians under the gospel. They are, certainly, obliged to fly as far from idolatry as the Jews were. Some, indeed, in the church of Corinth, took too great a liberty in their compliances with idolaters; for they went with their friends into the idols' temple, and feasted there with them on the remainders of the sacrifices which had been offered to the idols. And it is probable that they pretended, that by such a condescension in a thing indifferent, they designed to engage their friends' affections, the better to recommend the Christian religion to them. But the apostle doth severely censure such temporizing. (1 Cor. viii. 10, 11, with x. 20, 21.) Thus ye have had a short account of the scripture-authority resolving the case.

(2.) Let us now hear *what have been the sentiments of some in after-ages*.—They were of opinion, that, to adopt some heathenish observances into the Christian worship, was not only warrantable, but also commendable, provided that care should be first taken to deal with them as the Jews were to treat those captive heathen women whom they intended to marry; and that was, to shave their heads, and pare their nails. (Deut. xxi. 11, 12.) Thus they converted many heathenish rites into Christian ceremonies, when they had cleansed and varnished them, as by changing their object, end, or mode. For instance: a learned man of our own hath proved, that the invocation of departed saints was nothing else but the old doctrine of demons revived.* Let not any one surmise, that this is an undue reflection, or a false insinuation, seeing a very learned English prelate hath written a small tract, to show "that the ecclesiastical government

* Mr. JOSEPH MEDE'S "Apostasy of the latter Times."

observed by the British and ancient English Pagans, they being converted unto Christianity, many of the paganish ceremonies and usages, not contrary to the scripture, were still retained in their Christian policy. By means whereof, tranquillity and peace were preserved, and the alteration in the state less dangerous or sensible."* How far those reasons did influence some when we departed from Popery, I know not. But I suppose, some things were retained, which seem not to have been desirable upon any other account, than to make the change less sensible in itself, and less dangerous to the state. As for the thing itself, for some centuries before the Reformation, there was so much borrowed from Jews and Pagans, and lodged in the church, that at last the Christian religion became much like to that of the Samaritans, a compound of the worship of the true God and of idols blended together; (2 Kings xvii. 24—41;) so that the church of God groaned for a reformation. Much was done at first by our worthies, possibly as much as the times could then bear. What they could not do, they left to be completed by their successors. And what little reason we have now to think to ingratiate ourselves with the Pagan-Christians, as some think they have ground enough to style the Papists, I would rather ye should hear from a learned doctor than from me, who delivers this among his "documents" as he calls them: "Seeing we are so well assured, that the Papacy is the kingdom of antichrist, or that city of Babylon wherein the people of God were held captive, we should leave no string or tassel of our ancient captivity upon us; such, I mean, as whereby they may take hold on us, and pull us back again into our former bondage; but look upon ourselves as absolutely free from any tie to them, more than in endeavouring their conversion and salvation. Which we knowing so experimentally not to be compassed by needless symbolizings with them in any thing, I conceive our best policy is, studiously to imitate them in nothing; but, for all indifferent things, to think rather the worse of them for their using them; as no person of honour would willingly go in the known garb of any lewd and infamous persons. Whatsoever we court them in, they do but turn it to our scorn and contempt, and are the more hardened in their own wickedness."† How easily soever Pagan rites were admitted into the Christian church, I am sure many of them have taken such deep root, that it is very difficult to eradicate and purge them out.

So much for *the third obstruction*.

4. *They who desire to be helpful in promoting the entertainment of the gospel, must not unnecessarily provoke and exasperate those whom they would win over to it.*—Moses refused to permit the Israelites to sacrifice to the Lord before the faces of the Egyptians, lest they should be enraged thereupon, and stone them. (Exod. viii. 25, 26.) They must not indeed forbear to do that which, under all due circumstances, God hath made to be their present duty; yet even in such cases they should remember my text: "Walk in wisdom toward them

* BISHOP ANDREWS'S learned "Discourse of Ceremonies retained and used in the Christian Churches." † DR. HENRY MORR'S "Divine Dialogues," part ii. page 398.

that are without ;” and “learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Matt. ix. 13.) They must declare against their idolatry, and endeavour to convert them to the true God, as Paul did: “We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God.” (Acts xiv. 15.) And his success therein was wonderful, as Demetrius testifies : “Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods which are made with hands.” (Acts xix. 26.) But this must not be done with revilings, reproaches, and insultations ; but with judgment, tenderness, and meekness : “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” (2 Tim. ii. 25.) We may conclude then, that it is none of God’s way, from whomsoever men have learned it, to convert Heathens by robbing them of their goods and estates, and butchering their persons, which was the method that the Spaniards took to gospelize the Indians ; or to send dragoons as missionaries, to torment those whom they call “heretics,” thereby to reduce them to their Catholic church.

That is the fourth obstruction.

5. *They must religiously avoid that which is the greatest obstruction of all, the profligate and flagitious lives of some that call themselves Christians.*—If men were prompted and employed by the devil himself, they could not take a more effectual course to make the gospel to be abhorred, than by living as some Christians do. How can it be expected, that the poor, ignorant Heathen should have any reverence for the great and sacred name of God, when they hear those who pretend that they have a deep veneration for him, to reproach and blaspheme it ? They will conclude, that men do but prevaricate, when they tell them that Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” (Titus ii. 14,) and yet live so, as if Christ died only to procure for them a licence to continue in sin, or to purchase impunity for them that do so. Will they believe those that tell them, “The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil,” (1 John iii. 8,) and that they act under him as the Captain of their salvation, (Heb. ii. 10,) while they employ all their time, parts, and power to establish and defend Satan’s kingdom ? Can ye persuade men that ye believe there is a hell and eternal flames prepared for the ungodly and impenitent, and that the wicked shall be cast into it, when they observe those that say they believe this, to run posting, sporting, and laughing unto it ? They will never apprehend, that the heaven which, they are told, the gospel promiseth to the faithful and holy, is any other than a poetical Elysiuim, or a Mahometan Paradise, while they perceive that such as call themselves Christians do prefer the world and sensual pleasures before it. Can any man convince them, that the saints are such excellent creatures, when they see those who call themselves so to live like brutes or devils ? It is a vain attempt to persuade others to believe and obey the gospel, until they who profess it have learned better what it teacheth them,

to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts," and to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." (Titus ii. 11, 12.)

These are some of the stumbling-blocks which are to be removed out of the way, before any successful persuasions, motives, inducements, or other means will prevail, to dispose and incline those who have not received the gospel to embrace it.

Secondly. But, these obstructions being removed, *what ways are to be taken, to help-on the entertainment of the gospel?*—To answer that question, I shall recommend unto you some few, among many, which I conceive to be most obvious, practicable, and effectual. For instance:—

1. *Private Christians should endeavour to oblige those whom they would persuade, by civilities, kindness, and doing good offices for them, that they may be assured that they love them, and seek their real and eternal good.*—Our blessed Saviour, who best understood what attractives were most proper and powerful to draw men to receive him and his gospel, took this method: he "went about doing good." (Acts x. 38.) He did good to men's bodies, that he might do good to their souls. The miracles which he wrought were generally of beneficence and obligations; as, to heal the sick, to give sight to the blind, &c. It is true, he had a superior aim and end in working miracles, which was, to show forth his glory, to confirm his doctrine, to strengthen the faith of his disciples, &c.; (John ii. 11; xx. 31;) yet, secondarily, it was to testify his kindness and compassion toward those whom he designed to persuade to believe on him: "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue now with me three days, and have nothing to eat;" and thereupon he wrought a miracle for their refreshment, feeding four thousand men, beside women and children, with seven loaves, and a few little fishes. (Matt. xv. 32—38.) And to this we may add the apostle's advice: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men;" even to such as are not of "the household of faith," (Gal. vi. 10,) that is, though they be infidels. Very pertinent hereto is that remarkable passage in Eusebius, who acquaints us, that the Christian religion gained a very high esteem among the infidels upon this occasion: when famine and pestilence raged extremely, in the reign of Maximinus, the Christians showed a tender compassion to the Pagans, when they were neglected by those of their own superstition; for they buried their dead, attended and ministered unto their sick, and every day distributed bread to those who were ready to perish; and so, by their works, declared themselves to be the true worshippers of God, through Jesus Christ.*

2. *Private Christians must be very just and punctual in their negotiations and traffic with those whom they would persuade to embrace the gospel.*—They must inviolably keep their word and promise with them, and take no advantage of their want of skill or experience, thereby to over-reach and defraud them. Mr. Terry, that was chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe, as I remember, ambassador at the court of the Great Mogul, and hath written of those countries, hath

* EUSEBIUS *Hist. Eccl.* lib. ix. cap. 8.

this passage, which cuts to the quick, that when the Indians offered a commodity in sale to a Christian, and he bade very disproportionably to the price demanded, they would usually reply, "Do you think that I am a Christian?" intimating thereby, that they made no conscience in buying and selling, but thought all gain lawful; which they stuck not to purchase by flattery, lying, and unrighteousness. If then they should measure the rules of the gospel by the practice of such as profess it, which is very ordinary, they would despise it, as falling short of their own philosophy or morality, which were greatly refined about matters of common right and justice.

3. *Private Christians should abound in the exercise of those amiable graces, the evidences and effects whereof fall under the notice and observation of others.*—Such as are mentioned, Gal. v. 22, 23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." They who are strangers to the gospel understand not the sublime mysteries of faith; but they can judge of things that fall under the perception of sense and reason. They understand not what a man's notions may be in speculation; but they can tell when a man is just, sober, humble, courteous, &c.; and when those excellent qualities do show themselves, they may be brought to inquire into, and to admire, those hidden causes that produce such rare and desirable effects.

4. *Private Christians should labour to maintain and discover an even and undisturbed frame of spirit, under various revolutions of providence; neither over-joying their comforts, nor over-grieving their crosses.*—"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it." (1 Cor. vii. 29—31.) What a convincing argument must this needs be, to one who is acted by no higher a principle than flesh or nature, to behold a Christian to live above the gaieties of the world, as having more pure, spiritual, and heavenly enjoyments to entertain his soul withal! and to observe, that crosses and afflictions do not abate his love to God, his reverence which he hath for God, or his joy in him!

5. *Private Christians should make themselves remarkable and considerable in the faithful discharge of relative duties.*—With these they are frequently and earnestly charged; and that upon this particular account, because the honour and interest of the gospel is so much concerned in them: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." (1 Tim. vi. 1.) It is evident, that heathen morality was greatly defective in the regulating of domestic offices; and therefore, the rules and directions given in the gospel concerning them must highly advance it in the esteem and judgment of all considering persons.

6. *Private Christians should order the whole course of their lives and conversations so "as it becometh the gospel of Christ,"* (Phil.

i. 27,) “*that thereby they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*” (Titus ii. 10.)—When men see such glorious rays of holiness sparkling and shining in the whole tenor of a Christian’s conversation, they must needs be convinced that the gospel doth furnish them with those principles of light and grace, that infinitely transcend those obscure and broken notices of good and evil that are found in lapsed but unrenewed nature.

These instances, among several others that might be mentioned, may direct private Christians how they may be helpful to promote the entertainment of the gospel: which was the inquiry at first propounded to be answered.

APPLICATION.

And now, after that all this hath been spoken, it is likely that some private Christians, who mean well, may think this whole discourse very remote from their concerns, and that it tends but little to their edification; and thereupon infer, that the subject was ill chosen, and that something more profitable might have been pitched upon. But I would entreat those who have entertained any such prejudices, before they pass their censure, maturely to consider what it is that hath been insisted upon; and then I hope that they who are sincerely godly and prudent, will not think themselves unconcerned in that which so nearly relates to the glory of God, the sanctifying of his name, and the enlargement and prosperity of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such prejudices being removed, there are two things that I would earnestly recommend to godly private Christians:—

First. *Charge your consciences with this, as a necessary, excellent, honourable, and comfortable duty,—that ye stand obliged, in all ways prescribed by God, according to your circumstances, to be helpful toward the promoting of the entertainment of the gospel.*—Look upon your former failings as sinful, and to be repented of; and, for the future, apply yourselves more vigorously and cheerfully to this blessed work. To move and encourage you hereunto,

1. *Excite your faith to receive and realize those many glorious promises which are made to Christ as Mediator, touching the establishment and enlargement of his kingdom in the world.*—As, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession;” (Psalm ii. 8;) with abundance more of the same import.

2. *Consider that the preaching of the gospel is the ordinary means whereby subjects are gained to Christ, and brought under his government.*—“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. x. 14, 15, 17.) If ye then

promote the spreading of the gospel, ye enlarge the kingdom of Christ.

3. *Tenderly pity and compassionate the many millions of the sons and daughters of Adam, who were hewn out of the same rock, and digged out of the same hole of the pit, with yourselves, who, as yet, lie in thralldom under Satan, and are members of his visible kingdom.*—It would, doubtless, be very grateful to you, if your assistance might contribute any thing toward their deliverance out of that miserable bondage; and the means to procure it, is to help on, as far as ye may, the bringing of the gospel among them; for that is God's appointed way to effect it. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke iv. 18—20.) "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." (Acts xxvi. 16—18.)

4. *Remember, that grace, when it hath its freedom of exercise, will draw you off from centring in self, and raise in you a spirit of freedom and nobleness to seek the good of others, especially to advance the glory of God in the salvation of souls.*—Take heed that ye be not found in the number of those of whom the apostle speaks: "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." (Phil. ii. 21.)

5. *I hope ye do not desire to be excused or excluded from bearing any part in that honourable and glorious work, of being employed by Christ (in your stations, and according to your capacities) in the affairs of his kingdom.*—But that it would grieve you at the very heart, to be laid aside as a despised, broken idol. When all this is recollected and maturely pondered, where is that godly private Christian that will deliberately say?—"I am not concerned to be helpful, in such ways as are proper for me, in promoting the entertainment of the gospel."

Secondly. As for those godly private Christians whose hearts are sincerely willing to be serviceable to the Lord Jesus Christ, and would exceedingly rejoice to contribute all the assistance that they are able to afford, for the conversion and salvation of perishing souls; but complain, *that the work in which this discourse would engage them lies a great way off, and is out of their reach; but, could they be employed about any thing of that nature within the compass of their sphere of activity, they would most gladly embrace it, and vigorously bestir themselves in it.*—If that be really the case of any, then I say to such, Up, and be doing, and the Lord be with you, to direct, help,

and succeed you; for ye will find enough to do at your own doors, and probably in your own houses.

Briefly and plainly, then, the matter stands thus: there are many who have entertained the gospel as far as a general, ignorant, customary profession will go; but are so far from admitting the spirit, life, and power of it into their hearts, that they are not only utter strangers to it, but are full of bitter enmity against it. Will ye be helpful now to prevail with them to receive it with faith, love, and obedience? It will be as acceptable (and, I fear, ye will find it as difficult) a work to bring a wicked, hard-hearted Christian to believe in Christ to the salvation of his soul, as an open infidel to make profession of the gospel. Ye will find many as ignorant of the very essentials of Christianity as the very Pagans; as froward, perverse, and opposite to all means of instruction, as Indians; many that love their lusts, and hold them as fast as any in the world. The barbarians are prejudiced against our religion, because they understand it not, or have had it misrepresented to them; but the more plainly and truly it is set forth before profane ones at home, the more bitterly do they hate it, and discover the greater aversion to it.

So ye see, that though the scene of the question seemed to be laid afar off, yet the purport and design of it reach us at home. And, I believe, no godly private Christian will say, that he is not concerned to seek the conversion and salvation of the ignorant, sensual, profane, and ungodly ones among whom they live.

If ye ask me then, "How may we be helpful thereunto?" I answer, that, generally, the same methods are to be made use of that have already been insisted upon: as, to endeavour, in our several stations and capacities, that such may be employed and encouraged to preach the gospel as are themselves seasoned with the spirit and grace of it, and zealously seek the conversion and salvation of souls; to pray more fervently for the pouring out of the Spirit, to make the preaching of the word successful; to remove all impediments and obstructions, as far as we can, out of their way; to assist them with what help we can, by obliging, instructing, and persuading, and walking exemplarily before them.

But I shall not proceed farther in this, because it would draw out the discourse to too great a length: and I think it would be for your edification to review over again what hath been already insisted upon; and then, upon second thoughts, ye may discover more than fell under your notice in the first cursory reading.

I shall conclude all with, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." (James v. 19, 20.)