

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

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NOTE.

The Sermon from Malachi iv. 2, 3 is appended to the Exposition of Philippians ii. 12-30. (See Vol. V. p. 2.) The pagination is continuous from Philippians and there is the simple heading,

A

SERMON

VPON MALACHIE.

G.

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings ; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked ; for they shall be as the dust in that day.—MALACHI IV. 2, 3.

IN the former chapter we may read of a sort of wicked men, yet those not of the worst, that had in their corrupt observation noted that God did seem to approve of those that were notorious idolaters ; therefore they contested with him, ' What profit is there,' say they, ' that we have kept his ordinances ?' ver. 14 and 15. This God could not endure, and therefore, verse 8th and 13th, he reproveth their boldness, telling them that they had robbed him, and had spoken stout and rebellious words against him, and from the laying open of their rebellious carriage, he proceeds to describe the carriage of some that were good, who spake often to one another ; whence we may observe by the way, that *in the worst times some take God's part*. Some are notoriously wicked, carrying sin with a high hand, and some are more civil, yet irreligious, murmuring and complaining as if Christ were not king, and as if true religion were not to be cared for ; and these are as hateful to God as the other. For this complaining proceeds either of anger, because things are not suitable to their humours, or from a murmuring at God's government, as if they were wiser to dispose of things than God ; and there are likewise some that recover themselves from such misapprehensions of God's dealings, and justify God : ' Just art thou, O Lord, and righteous ; and it is thy mercy we are not consumed,' Neh. ix. 33 ; and such look at those favours they have, though burdened with other calamities, and to these are these words spoken, ' But to you that fear my name,' &c.

In the former verse there is a terrible denunciation against the wicked, and therefore there is no ground that any should be offended at their prosperity. There is a day of vengeance, when they shall be burnt up, and there shall be left them neither root nor branch. This vengeance began to the Jews at the first coming of Christ, and was accomplished at the destruction of Jerusalem. They looked indeed for the Messiah, and the day of the Lord, but woe be to them, ' for it shall be a day of darkness,' Amos v. 8. The persons against whom this denunciation was threatened are said to be the proud men, such as sin against their own consciences, casting off God's

rule and laws. When he bids them not to swear, they will; when he commands them to attend the means of salvation, they will not, they will live by their own law. So as pride is an ingredient in every sin, as humility is in every virtue; for humility gives God place above ourselves, and above our lusts. But to the present purpose; those words are a gracious promise made to those that fear. *In the worst times God hath a number that do fear him*; for else it would follow, there should be an act without an object, that we should believe a church where none is, and that there should be war without enemies, that there should be God without glory. For what glory hath God from such as rebel and shake off all rule? No; it is the saints, that praise God: Ps. cxlv. 10, 'All thy works praise thee, and thy saints bless thee.' This should comfort us in that our posterity shall ever have some to stand for God in the worst times; nay, in the worst places, where Satan's throne is. In the next place we may observe, *that comfort belongs to such as are God's*; for here it is pronounced to those 'that fear.' The ground of which is in this, that Christ is given to them, and ministers should give 'such their portion,' and not grieve those that God grieves not; for such as do not thus are carnal in their disposition, and do steal the word from the people. But to proceed: good men are described here by this, that 'they fear the name of God;' that is, they fear lest by their infirmities there should be a divorce between God's outward favours and them, and fear lest they should offend so good a God, and so they fear his name; that is, fear him as he hath revealed himself in his word; for the devil will fear when God comes in his person. Therefore it is no thank for men to fear his presence; nay, those that fear God most when God declares his presence in his judgments, as when the wicked are smitten with horror and trembling, as Belshazzar was at the handwriting, they have the least true fear. And therefore to come to church at a set time with a composed carriage, and doing outward duties, is not enough to make a man such a one as fears God. Some solace themselves while they are in prosperity, Oh! they will repent when judgments come. The devil will do as much, he will tremble. Can there be any comfort in this fear? Can we think that a man who lives in all manner of notorious crimes till judgment overtake him, will heartily repent him of his faults, that he hath committed, out of love to God? No. It is the fear of wrath and judgment that terrifies him. If this be repentance, the damned in hell have it. How then shall this fear be discerned where it is? I answer, If we fear the name of God there will be a *jealousy over ourselves, and a special jealousy of our inward corruptions*, so as we fearing the traitor within us, will not give ear to everything, nor give our eyes liberty to look on temptations, but eat with fear, and converse with fear; for those that fear temptations are not secure, and fear not God.* Secondly, where this fear of [God] is, *it frees us from base fears*. We will fear no man when we are in a good cause. 'The man that feareth God shall not be afraid of evil tidings,' for his heart is fixed upon God, Ps. cxii. 7, and fears no creature further than as having a beam of God's glory. He fears not death itself, though the king of fears. God he fears as his king, father, husband, and master, and considers of him accordingly to stir up in him an awful reverence of so great a majesty. There is indeed a covenant between God and him, but so as it is with those that fear him.

'Shall the Sun of righteousness arise.' From the most glorious creature, 'the sun,' he expresseth the most glorious Creator, 'Christ Jesus,' taking

* That is, 'those that fear temptations and fear not God, are not secure.—G.

occasion to help our understandings in grace by natural things, and teaching us thereby to make a double use of the creatures, corporal and spiritual; out of the excellency of the creatures, raising up our minds to consider the excellency of the Creator, so as if these things have beauty and strength, and are comfortable; how much more he that endueth these things with these qualities. Thus, as the rivers lead to the sea, so these creatures should lead us to the glorious majesty of God. But the main observation is, *that Christ is the Sun of righteousness*, for as by nature there was no guile found in his lips, so is he habitually and actually righteous. He is wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption, 1 Cor. i. 30. He is compared to the sun, first, *because as all light was gathered into the body of the sun*, and from it derived* to us, so it pleased God that in him should the fulness of all excellency dwell, Col. i. 19; and therefore those that look for perfection out of Christ, do look for light without the sun. Secondly, *as there is but one sun*, so there is but one Sun of righteousness; and therefore what needeth two heads, or two husbands. One must needs be an adulterer. Christ doth all by his Spirit, which is his vicar. Other vicar needs not, though there were a thousand worlds more. Thirdly, *as the sun is above in the firmament*, so Christ is exalted up on high, to convey his graces and virtues to all his creatures here below; even as the sun conveys life, and quickens the earth, yea, all things thereon, though itself be but one. Fourthly, *as the sun works largely in all things here below*, so doth Christ. Fifthly, *as the sun is the fountain of light*, and the eye of the world, so Christ is the fountain of all spiritual light. 'I am the light of the world,' saith he of himself, John viii. 12. He was that light that enlightens the world, saith St John of him, John i. 9, and therefore Zacharias termeth him 'the day-spring from on high,' Luke i. 78. Sixthly, *as the sun directeth us whither to go, and which way*, so doth Christ teach us to go to heaven, and by what means; what duties to perform, what things to avoid, and what things to bear. Seventhly, *as the sun is pleasant*, Eccles. xi. 7, and darkness is terrible, so Christ is comfortable; for he makes all at peace where he comes, and sends his Spirit the Comforter. Now he is in heaven. Therefore as ignorance and error is expressed by darkness, so, contrarily, joy and honour and knowledge, which bringeth it, is expressed by light, Esther viii. 16; and Christ is our director, our supporter, and without him what are we? and what do we but glory in our shame? Eighthly, *By the beams of the sun is conveyed influence to make things grow, and to distinguish between times and seasons*. Thus Christ, by his power, makes all things cheerful, and therefore is called the 'quickening Spirit,' 1 Cor. xv. 45; for he quickens the dead and dark soul, which, till Christ shine on us, it is a dungeon of ignorance and unbelief; and as his Spirit blows on our spirits, so also it works a spring in growth of grace, or a summer in strength of zeal. Ninthly, *the sun works these effects not by coming down to us, but by influence*, and shall we, then, be so sottish as to imagine that Christ of necessity must come bodily in the sacrament to us, or that there is else no work of the Spirit by that ordinance. Can the sun be thus powerful in operation by nature, and shall not this Sun of righteousness be more powerful by the influence of his Spirit to comfort and quicken us, though he cometh not bodily down into a piece of bread? Tenthly, *As the sun doth work freely, drawing up vapours to dissolve them into rain upon the earth, to cherish it when it is dry, so doth Christ*. He freely came from heaven to us, and freely draws up our hearts to heaven, which cannot ascend thither but by

* That is, 'communicated.'—G.

his exhaling power. Christ is our loadstone, that draws these iron hard hearts of ours upward, causing us to contemn this base world, counting it 'dross and dung,' as the church is shadowed out in the Revelation treading the moon under our* feet. Eleventhly, *as the sun shines upon all, yet doth not heat all*, so Christ is offered to all. He shines on all where the gospel cometh, but all are not enlightened; and all that are enlightened do not burn in love to him; nay, some are more hardened by it, as it is the nature of the sun to harden some bodies. Twelfthly, and lastly, *as the sun quickens and puts life into dead creatures*, so shall Christ, by his power, quicken our dead bodies, and raise them up again when he shall come to judgment. And notwithstanding all these particulars, yet he is not everyway like it, for the sun shines upon all alike; but Christ doth not thus, for many are in eternal darkness, notwithstanding this light. He is mercy, yet many are in misery.

How, then, shall we know whether Christ be a sun to us or not?

I answer, *If we find that we feel the heat and comfort of a Christian*, it is a sign Christ hath effectually shined upon us. We know that a stone, being naturally cold, if it be hot, that either the sun hath shined on it, or it hath been near some fire. The papists ask us how we know faith to be faith. We may ask them how they know heat to be heat, or light to be light. Even so, by experience, do we find Christ his presence by enlightened hearts and holy affections. They, forsooth, will have the pope judge of these main things, and of the Scripture itself, and thus teach men to look for the sun by candle light.

Secondly, *He shall see his marvellous light*, and admire it, even as a man newly out of a dark prison, or a blind man restored to sight, how cheerful and joyous is he; or a cripple, when he is healed, oh how he skips and leaps; so a Christian he shews forth the joy of his own heart by telling how good God hath been to his soul. Carnal men wonder at fair buildings, precious jewels, and the like, but David crieth out, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon me, and then I shall rejoice,' Ps. iv. 6.

Thirdly, *If Christ have shined upon any effectually, they will walk comely as children of the light*; and therefore if they live in a course of sin against conscience, the light will tell them their conscience belies them, if they think the light hath shined on them. And indeed it is a wonder how a man should be thus sottish to think he is a child of the light, and yet live in such sins as indeed a man should be ashamed to name; yea, such as the heathen did condemn. This shall be their condemnation, even because they sin against the light; 'light is come into the world, and yet they love darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil,' John iii. 19.

But how shall we carry ourselves, that Christ may shine on us?

For answer thereunto; we should ever be under sanctified means. All the light is gathered into the Scriptures. Attend we, in humility and obedience to God's commandment, on them, and let Christ alone for the profiting of us. It is he that gives us to will and to do according to his good pleasure. Use the company of those that are good, for by conference God works strangely many times, as in the hearts of the two disciples that went to Emmaus, Luke xxiv. 13. Contrarily take we heed of filthy company. Christ will not shine on base houses, and company where all serves to fire temptations and strengthen our lusts.

Quest. But here may it be demanded what comfort was this to the Jews,

* Qu. 'her'?—G.

to whom this was spoken, whenas it was now near a hundred years after, before Christ came?

Ans. To which I answer, it was a comfort to them to be assured *that their seed and posterity should see this 'Sun of righteousness.'* Abraham rejoiced because the promise was made to him; the Jews rejoiced because of the conversion of the Gentiles which was to come; and where grace is, there will be joy for any good that ariseth to others that are led by the same Spirit, and one spiritual member is engaged in the good of another.

Secondly, *Christ was a son* before he was in the flesh.* He was 'a Lamb slain from the beginning of the world,' Rev. xiii. 8, in virtue and force, and also to the eye of faith, so as thereby those Jews saw this Sun of righteousness as present, and thus Abraham saw Christ's day and rejoiced; and thus is the second glorious coming of Christ present to every believer, and wraps up the soul in joy, as if it were in heaven; for faith regards no distance of time nor place, and therefore it sees Christ really present in the sacrament without the help of popish presence.

Now for use of this doctrine.

Use 1. Is Christ a Sun of righteousness? Then should *we pity their estate that are in darkness, and never had Christ to shine on them by his Spirit nor ordinances, as in many places of this kingdom.* It is a cruel bloody practice of those lay pastors, that for want of the ministry of the word do betray the souls of many poor people into the jaws of the devil.†

Use 2. Secondly, If Christ be the Sun of righteousness, we should, when we are cold and benumbed, *repair to him, and conceive of him as one having excellencies suitable to our wants.* Are we dark? He is light. Are we dull? He can heal us. Are we dying? He is life. And are we in discomfort? He is the fulness of love. He is therefore the Son,* that we should seek to him, and make him ours all in all; our Prophet, to direct us by his light; our Priest, to make atonement for us; our King, to help us overcome all our corruptions, and to make us more than conquerors.

'With healing in his wings.'

By wings are understood beams of the sun, for beams are spread from the lightsome body, as wings from the body; and thus Christ, though but one, can spread all his graces to all parts of the world; and by the beams are conveyed all that is in the sun, as light and power; and the like effects which grace works in us. Again, wings have a power to keep warm, and comfort the young ones; and therefore God is said to gather his children as a hen doth gather her chickens, Mat. xxiii. 37. In the beams there is a healing nature also. So as the meaning is evident, *that this Sun of righteousness shall be a healing sun.*

For naturally we are all sick and wounded. Some see and feel their diseases and pain, others do not; but those that do not are the most dangerously afflicted. We are all sick of a general spreading leprosy; and besides, we have every one of us our particular diseases. Some swell with pride, as men do with the dropsy; others that are covetous have ever a supposed hunger, crying ever 'Give, give;' some burn in wrath and anger, as men do in the hot ague; and as we are sick, so are we also wounded by terror of conscience, by Satan's temptations, and therefore have need of healing; and this is wrought by Christ, but after a wonderful manner, even from heaven he comes to invite us to come to him. 'Come to me, all ye that are weary,' Mat. xi. 28. Healing is ordinarily by natural medicines of drugs and the like; but Christ heals with a plaster of his own blood, even by

Qu. 'Sun'?—ED. † Cf. our Memoir of Sibbes, Vol. I. c. viii. p. lxxi.—G.

'his wounds and stripes are we healed,' Isa. liii. 5. He heals by his Spirit, enlightening our understandings, which by nature is dark, and soon led away to mistake light for darkness, and darkness for light. This he heals by his word breeding sound affections and judgments, whereby we esteem of things as they are, and accordingly do affect them. He heals our wounds of conscience that Satan makes by his darts and sharp temptations, whereby he would bear us in hand that we are reprobates, and that God is angry with us. Against these he strengthens our faith and trust in God, yea, though he kill us. These temptations, and many other, may gather together to cloud this Sun, but it will at length scatter them all. So as there is ever hope of comfort so long as we use good means. Indeed, amongst bodily diseases some there are that are called *opprobria medicorum*;* but in soul there is no disease but if it be felt it may be cured. The soul that hungers after comfort shall find it; for Christ is an universal healer, healing both bodies and souls of men, and healing them from all evil, both blindness and deafness of the heart; nay, the very dead heart he can restore to life. And this serves to reprove the carelessness of men. It is wonderful, if the head doth but ache, no cost nor labour is spared to redress it. The physician is sent for presently; but in the soul's sickness they are so far from sending for them as they hate them. Am not I your enemy because I tell you the truth? saith the apostle, Gal. iv. 16; and thus now-a-days none are greater enemies in the esteem of ordinary men than the minister that deals faithfully with them.

Again, this should teach us to take notice of our diseases in time, and go to the healing God, as he terms himself, Exod. xv. 26, and lay open our estates to him, and confess, as David did, Ps. xli. 4, 'Heal me, Lord, for I have sinned against thee.' And thus lay open our sores, as beggars use to do to move commiseration; for as there are beams of majesty in this Sun, so are there beams of mercy and bowels of compassion in him. And to this end we should claim his nature and truth in performance of his promises, and we should attend on the means; for there is a tree in the church of God, even 'the tree of life,' whose leaves are appointed 'to heal the nations,' Rev. xxii. 2, and this is the word of God. We should also take heed of despair. Though as yet Satan lulls us asleep, telling us that the sin we are tempted to is but a little one, and that God will dispense with it; that we may yet a while swear and commit adultery, and when we die we may repent. Believe him not, for when death approacheth he will alter his rhetoric. Oh! thou hast lived in sins against conscience a long while. Though thou hast been told of it often, thy sins are scandalous; thou hast resisted God, he will now resist thee; never hope for mercy, thou art mine. What comfort is there then for a poor miserable wretch, but to be well grounded in the knowledge of his Physician, and to be assured of his healing power that hath cured innumerable souls. We should furthermore take heed of ignorance; for many, when temptations come, have not the least knowledge of any healing power in Christ, and so they go on till death, and die like blocks. We should meditate of his commandments and promises; of his goodness and nature; of his encouragements given to us to come to him, 'Come to me, all ye that are weary,' Mat. xi. 28. We praise physicians that have peculiar sovereign medicines, that can work extraordinary cures. Now Christ he hath a medicine of his own able to cure any disease, though never so desperate, any person though never so sick; Mary Magdalene as well as Paul; Zaccheus as well

* That is, 'the shame of physicians' = incurable.—G

as Manasseh; all come whole from him; and therefore when Satan would tempt us to despair, we should call to mind that we have a merciful God that 'forgives all our sins, and heals all our infirmities,' Ps. ciii. 3.

Quest. But it will be asked, Why then are we not healed? What means this that we are subject to these infirmities of ours?

Ans. I answer, Some of Christ's works are all at one time perfected, but some by degrees, by little and little. Christ heals the soul of guiltiness presently, but there remains the corruption and the dregs of this disease for heavenly purposes. And thus he heals by not healing, and leaves infirmities to cure enormities. He suffers us to be abased and humbled by our infirmities, lest we should be exalted above measure, as he dealt with Paul, 2 Cor. xii. 7, even as the body of a man is cured of an appoplex* by an ague, *est utile quibusdam ut cadant*; Peter did more profitably displease himself when he fell, than please himself when he presumed; and therefore we should retort Satan's accusations when he tempteth us to despair because of our sins, and reason thus, because we have infirmities, therefore we will pray the more earnestly, 'forgive us our trespasses;' because we are sick, we will go to Christ that took our nature not to cure the whole but the weak; for we may be sure Christ will not perfectly cure our weaknesses, because he will have us live by faith, every day going to the throne of grace, and depending on his promise for the forgiveness of our sins, assuring ourselves that the spirit, like David's house, shall grow stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul weaker and weaker, 2 Sam. iii. 1; and this flesh beginning once to fall, shall surely fall.

'And ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.'

The most translations have it, 'you shall leap forth;' and the last translation is, 'you shall grow up.'† All is to one end, signifying a cheerful moving. The *terminus a quo* is sickness or bonds. Those that are sick are God's prisoners; but here it is taken for weakness of the spirit, and the promise is, that they should go forth in all good duties, and that they should walk with strength, so that Christ's benefits go together. Where there is forgiveness, there is also strength of grace promised; and where there is strength, there is promised increase thereof, even to fulness; for where Christ begins, he leaves not till his work be complete, in wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and therefore he comes both by water and blood also, for God is unchangeable; and that love that moves him to elect, moves him to justify, and sanctify, and glorify us; and all the promises do join these together, justification and sanctification: 'I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall not depart away from me,' Jer. xxxii. 40. Where forgiveness of sin is, there is also power against sin, and strong resolutions to labour against it; and where there is justification, it will shew itself in works of sanctification. This will convict many to be no Christians that boast of the forgiveness of sins.

But where is this healing power of Christ seen? In their conversations. He that is cured can rise and walk,—as the cripple did,—in good duties of a holy life; for the spirit of adoption is the spirit of sanctification, and we are sick in the bed of sin if we come not out. In the next place we may observe, that in every Christian there is a going out; for so it is promised here, and this hath many degrees. There is a going out of misery in this life, for at this present the church was in great misery, and

* That is, 'apoplexy'.—G.

† That is, the Authorised Version of 1611.—G.

'a going out' was promised to them; for when a comfortable worldly estate is good for the church, it shall have it. Secondly, there is a going out of the bonds of sin, by little and little in this world; and because here we are in a warring estate, and our freedom here is but from the dominion of sin; there is another 'going out' at the last day, when we all shall go perfected out of the graves, body and soul being freed from sin; and then shall our joy be full. But in this world there is a going out to good duties, for true believers have hearts enlarged to 'go forth' in good duties. Their hearts are set at liberty, being freed from damnation, and free to walk in good courses; for where grace enables us to go, it enables us freely to go, so as *God's people are a free people*. In the building of the tabernacle and the temple, they did offer 'freely,' and David praised God for it, 1 Chron. xxix. 14, and Ezra likewise, Ezra ii. 4; and the reason is, because these have Christ's Spirit, which is a Spirit of liberty, 2 Cor. iii. 17; and it is a promise, Ps. cx. 3, that Christ's people shall be willing. God's people are all volunteers, doing holy duties freely; for they are freed from exaction and coaction. The Spirit that witnesseth the one worketh also the other, and setteth them at liberty. And as this is true, so it is also true that it is dearly bought. It cost Christ's blood, who redeemed us 'to serve him without fear,' Luke i. 74; and that we might be a holy people, zealous of all good works, Titus ii. 14; and therefore our lukewarm, cool carriage shews that we are not yet at liberty. And that is the reason we cannot spend an hour in good duties, but it is very irksome and tedious to us. It was otherwise with Zaccheus after his conversion; how free in charitable works! And with the jailor, how cheerful was he in feasting the apostle, whom a little before he had tormented! In the primitive church, how willingly did they endure persecutions, living together with one heart, one mind, and had all things common, Acts ii. 44. Thus is it in some measure in all Christians, when they are once heated by this Sun of righteousness. In the next place, God's people do not only go forth, but *grow up, and go on in a continued motion*; for it is promised that the soul shall grow strong in grace as well as the body in natural strength. And as nature doth enable the body, so doth grace enable the soul, giving ever a desire of liberty to grow up, and to grow in strength, thereby to overcome all weaknesses of the soul whatever, by those holy means appointed to that end. And this is necessary in regard of God, that he might have the more glory; for when we pray or do any good duty with strength, as when we can be resolute in the defence of a good cause, *God is honoured thereby*, and his truth honoured, and his wisdom justified. And it is likewise necessary *in regard of others*, that they may be won, and strengthened by our examples, they seeing that such things are possible to be done; and thus are they also won. When in our actions to one another we do them with all our might and cheerfulness, how grateful and lovely is it to them! And likewise *in regard of ourselves*; for the stronger we grow, the less burdensome will our profession be to us. For why are we so untoward and dead, that goodness comes from us as fire out of the flint, by force, but because we want this habit, that should grow upon us by practice? Therefore it is we are not grown yet; and therefore cannot pray privately, nor hear conscionably,* but with almost an insensible heart. And likewise this is necessary in regard of *oppositions*, which is such as must be gotten out of the fire, whatever good we labour for. We daily feel the strength of our own cor-

* That is, 'conscientiously.'—G.

ruptions of outward oppositions by indispositions of others and scandal of the times, and therefore we had need grow up.

Now, for means hereunto, we should first *purge and cleanse the soul of weakening matter*. Practise the duty of repentance daily; and though it be bitter, it is better to burn, to cut and lance here, than to die hereafter. It is better to renew our repentance daily, than to go on in security to desperation. And as it is in the body that is sick, the more it is nourished the greater is the strength that the humours do gather; or as it is in leaking ships, the longer we suffer the leak to open, the more danger the ship is in. The best of us daily gather ill humours, partly by reason of our own corruptions within us, partly by reason of the corruption in others with whom we converse; and these make us like sick men, either without stomachs, or with stomachs that can digest none but unwholesome meats; and these once purged out, makes us hunger after goodness, and stronger than before, and more intense in our love to Christ, as Peter was after his bitter tears.

In the next place, *we should come to good food*. When we have purged out the ill humours of our corruption, digest some comfortable truths, and that presently after we are humbled, lest Satan get advantages on us; therefore we should resort to the preaching of the word whiles we may. That study is accursed that takes up a man when he should be at God's ordinances; and the good that is gotten at home, when we may go to church on the Sabbath, is as the water of cursing, because it is gotten in contempt of God's ordinances.

And what though, as many poor Christians object, we forget immediately many times what we hear, yet for the present it will strengthen our souls to walk more strongly after it; as our meat doth when it is passed from us, yet the virtue thereof remaineth behind in us.

Thirdly, We should *use exercise of holy duties*. We see men that are given to daily labour, how strong they are to bear burdens, and what stomachs they have to their meat; and thus it is in those that are oft in prayer and meditation, how do they long after the word! and how sweet is it to them! and how do they treasure it up! Contrarily those that use no exercise, let them boast as they please, they are full, and care not for the word; and are graceless, however they may excel for civil* parts. If they come to church, or like of any of that breed,† it must be to their taste, or they will have none of it; gross meat their finer stomachs cannot digest. The preacher must be as a player upon a well-tuned instrument; and this sort of men are never good practitioners,‡ but commonly given to vanity.

But let us take heed we do not lightly esteem of God's ordinance, but in reverence use all means for the strengthening of our faith by the word, sacraments, and prayer. We have but a short time to work. Our wages are in heaven; and it should be a shame to us that we do no more work for so great a reward as we shall have. We should set no stay nor pitch in religion, but evermore pray and endeavour that God's kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Be not dejected by the length of the way, nor the fierce serpents of this world. Take heed of returning into Egypt in our thoughts, but go on from grace to grace, and from one degree to another, till God shall call us to rest.

Quest. But doth a Christian perpetually grow?

* That is, 'moral and intellectual.'—G. † That is, 'putters into practice.'—G
 † Qu. 'bread'? and for 'like' = take?—G.

Ans. In answer, Not at all times in all parts. Trees we know, in winter time, grow in the root. Christians grow not always in all graces, but only in some one radical grace, as in faith, or humility, or the like. If there be any stop, it is to further his speediness afterwards, as we see in those that stumble in their course, and as water stopped, breaks out more outrageously. Thus was it in the slips of David and Peter. And God's children, after such times, are as a broken bone: after it is set, it grows stronger in that part than in any other.

Obj. But a man may say, I perceive not this growth.

Ans. To which I answer, We perceive not the corn grow, nor the shadow to move, yet in continuance of time we perceive the corn hath grown, and the shadow hath moved. So, though we perceive it not, yet every act of repentance and faith doth strengthen us. There may be many *turbida intervalla*, cloudy times in every Christian's life. David, a man after God's own heart, had many infirmities; and this may cloud a man's eyes that he may think he is going quite backward. But yet these should not hinder our faith in God's love; for God calls not every slip in a man's life to reckoning. Any traveller may set his foot awry and may go out of his way, yet at length he gets home; and God judges not of us by single acts, but by the tenor of our lives.

How then shall we know whether we are grown or not?

1. I answer, Our growth may be discerned by these signs: first, *if we can taste and relish the food of our souls, the word of God*; for it is with the soul herein as with the body. If our meat be not loathsome to us, our stomach is good, and it is a sign of health; so if we can hear the word of God with delight, and if it be not tedious to us, it is a sign of our Christian growth.

2. Another sign is, *if we find ourselves able to bear great burdens of the infirmities of our brethren*; and thus did Christ long bear the infirmities of his weak disciples that followed him; and the apostle, Gal. vi. 1, counts it the office of those that are strong, to restore such as are fallen with the Spirit of meekness.

3. A third sign of our growth is, *if we find ourselves able*, like Samson, *to break the green cords of pleasure and profits*, that they cannot bind us, and to run lightly away with a heavy load of afflictions, as Samson did with the city gates of Gaza, counting them light and momentary, as the apostle calls them, 2 Cor. iv. 17.

4. Lastly, our growth of grace is seen *in our performance of duties*; if they be strongly, readily, and cheerfully performed; an example whereof we have in the apostle, Phil. iv. 12, who could abound and suffer want, yea, could do all things through Christ that strengthened him: and this is in all Christians more or less, to content themselves in the will of God, and to run the race of God's commandments with a large and cheerful heart.

Ver. 3, 'And ye shall tread down the wicked, and they shall be as dust.'

This is another promise made to the church, and in it to every member thereof, of victory over their enemies. God's children and the wicked are like scales, when the one is up, the other is down. Therefore, as this is a promise to the children of God, so is it a threatening to the wicked; for it is the happiness of the church 'to tread down the wicked,' which words must have a large interpretation; for the wicked generally seem to tread down the godly, and therefore we must know that these words were spoken to the Jews, and in them to all other Christians analogically; and it was fulfilled, first, when the good Jews saw the confusion of all the rebellious

Jews under Vespasian, when the temple and the city was destroyed, and they made a by-word unto the nations. Secondly, the words may have reference to the conversion of the Jews, whenas all the enemies of their glorious conversion shall be trodden down, as it is in Micah iv. 13, 'Arise, O Zion: thou shalt beat in pieces many people;' for undoubtedly there is a glorious conversion of the Jews to come, in what manner and at what time we hope ere long to know; for ever since this prophecy their estate and condition hath been very low and mean, and there must come a time of restoring. In the next place, these words may be intended as a promise to all God's church; for while they gloriously and powerfully profess the truth, they are the head and not the tail, ruling and not ruled, as appeareth by the Jews' example.

1. First, While they obeyed God, *they were a terror to the whole earth*, but once fallen from God, they were and remain a scorn to all people; and thus is it now where the white horse goes before, the red horse follows after, as it is in the Revelation, Rev. vi. 4. So long as the church keeps good terms with God, none so terrible as they, and their enemies knoweth this full well: 'Let us take him, God hath forsaken him, and he shall fall into our net,' Ps. lxxi. 11.

2. Secondly, The church treadeth down its enemies in regard of *true judgment and discerning of their estates*; for they do think and account of the wicked as a vile and abominable thing, and as of an object of pity; and this the wicked do know, and this makes them hate God's children.

3. Thirdly, The church of God tramples *on all things that rule wicked men*, as riches, honours, and the like; and therefore, in the Apocalypse, it is said to 'tread on the moon,' Rev. xii. 1; that is, putting all earthly, worldly things under it; and thus did Moses, Daniel, and Paul. All is dross and dung in comparison of Christ; and thus is the church and child of God a spiritual king.

4. Fourthly, The church and children of God tread down the wicked in regard of *their example, for by it and by the word they subdue the spirits of the world*, and bind kings in chains, bringing down their mighty strong corruptions and hard hearts to obedience, and if not, yet by making them inexcusable, we fasten a censure and a sentence of condemnation which hereafter is executed on them; and thus the saints in old time were said to condemn the world, and the white horse to go forth conquering; and there is no man but he must either yield or he is condemned already; and the arrows of God stick fast in him even here, and the liberty they seem to have is no other but as the liberty of the Tower.*

5. But lastly, this promise *is accomplished at the last day of judgment*, when we shall sit with Christ as kings, ruling with him, and as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel, judges of the world. We are here conquerors of the world, flesh, and devil; but then all things shall be put under our feet. And this should comfort us in our sufferings under wicked men; for at that time those that now triumph over us shall be trodden down as dust. And again, we should learn not to fret to see the prosperity of the wicked, Ps. xxxvii. 1. They are but flowers of a day's continuance. Who envies the estate or happiness of a base person that in a play acts the person of a king? This world is no other than a stage play. Let the wicked be in never so great a place, he must return to his rags; and the good man, though he acts the part of a beggar here for a while, he shall be a king

* That, is of 'the Tower of London,' within which State prisoners were confined.

hereafter for ever, and in the mean time God considers of him as his dear son, and it is no matter how high or low he is in the subsidy* book.

If we see ill men therefore advanced, and scandalous men insult, let us enter into the sanctuary, and then we shall see their end to be cursing; and feed we ourselves with meditations, by faith seeing ourselves sitting in judgment on these wicked men. For God's truth and justice will not always suffer these men to ruffle,† for then the devil would be a better master than Christ. And for the present times, do we see that wicked men prevails and increases, take no scandal at it. We know we have as great promises as the Jews ever had; though by these trials God doth purge and quicken his church, it will not always be thus. The beast is going to destruction. They may serve for a while as scouring stuff to purge the church, or as horse-leeches to suck the corrupt blood of the church, and when this work is done, they shall be thrown on the dunghill. It will be thus ere long. 'Babylon is fallen;' and as Christ out of his deep and basest abasement under death did rise to the highest pitch of glory, so his enemy antichrist contrarily, when he is most high and lifted up, shall suddenly and irrecoverably come tumbling down, and at the judgment day shall be more despicable and confounded. He shall be cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, Rev. xix. 20. Amen!

* That is, 'the tax-book,' = how great or how small his income is.—G.

† See our Glossary, *sub voce*.—G.